

Quiet the Mind, Open the Heart:

A Phenomenological Approach to Reading Indigenous Literatures for Non-Indigenous Readers

R. Allana Bartlett

Inter-University PhD in Educational Studies

Mount Saint Vincent University

September 4, 2025

Copyright 2025 R. Allana Bartlett

### Abstract

In Canada, a growing body of Indigenous Literatures is weaving narrative threads of Indigenous worldviews into settler consciousness adding complexity and clarity, vibrancy and depth, to our collective tapestry. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada urged all to think and act in new ways to establish and maintain mutually respectful relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples. To think and act in new ways is, in essence, to transform. Given the power of story to tell, teach, and transform, Indigenous Literatures may be an accessible and pragmatic means for people of settler ancestry to initiate engagement in reconciliation, decolonization, and treaty relations. This was the impetus for a phenomenological exploration of transformative learning in settler readers of *Celia's Song* by Sto:lo author Lee Maracle (2014), first as a solitary reader and then as a member of an established book club. Hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry extends beyond descriptive understanding to interpret aspects of experience that are externally observable, as well as aspects of experience revealed only through the narrative an individual composes as the product of the phenomenon and their lifeworld. Seven adult readers of settler ancestry provided four points of access to the lived experience: 1) one-on-one interviews to explore the reading lifeworld of each participant as the context in and through which they live and subjectively structure their reading experiences; 2) reading journals to document the intellectual, emotional, and embodied experience of reading; 3) observations and audio recording of the book club discussion to capture the relational reading experience; and, 4) one-on-one interviews to explore the overall experience as reflected on by each participant. All gathered materials were transcribed to text and underwent iterative cycles of reading, reflecting, and writing to dwell in the individual and collective experience of reading *Celia's Song*. The research process revealed engagement with *Celia's Song* as one of reading as reckoning rather than reconciliation for most of the reader-participants. One reader, however, formed an intention to approach the story and the storytelling by quieting her settler-colonial mind and being open to the content and the

broader social and cultural context of the text. The reading approach mirrored the phenomenological research approach used in the study and suggests a framework for settler readers to engage with Indigenous Literatures as reader-witnesses.

### Dedication

*This story deserves to be told; all stories do. Even the waves of the sea tell a story that deserves to be read. The stories that really need to be told are those that shake the very soul of you.*

– Lee Maracle, 2014, p. 7

I dedicate this work to the storytellers.

## Contents

Abstract.....	2
Dedication .....	4
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	9
Research Question .....	15
Definition of Terms.....	16
<i>Indigenous Peoples</i> .....	16
<i>Indigenous Voice</i> .....	17
<i>Reconciliation</i> .....	17
<i>Reading for Reconciliation</i> .....	18
<i>Settler</i> .....	18
<i>Engagement</i> .....	19
<i>Shared Reading</i> .....	19
Researcher Reflexivity .....	19
<i>Ontological Stance</i> .....	21
<i>Epistemological Approach</i> .....	22
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework .....	24
Reconciliation .....	25
Indigenous Literatures.....	30
Empathy as Relational Experiencing.....	33
Reader Response Theory and the Experience of Reading for Pleasure .....	37
Reading as a Social Activity.....	41
Transformative Learning Theory .....	46
Critical Theory and Transformative Learning .....	54
Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods.....	57
Phenomenology.....	57
Research as Praxis .....	64
Materials and Methods .....	65
<i>Participants</i> .....	68
<i>Chosen Text</i> .....	70
<i>Phenomenological Material</i> .....	75
<i>Transcription</i> .....	84
<i>Analysis</i> .....	88

<i>Presentation of Findings</i> .....	93
<b>Ethics</b> .....	<b>95</b>
<i>Reciprocity</i> .....	98
<i>Validity</i> .....	100
<i>Ongoing Researcher Reflexivity and Debriefing</i> .....	103
<b>Chapter 4: Findings</b> .....	<b>106</b>
<b>Chapter 4(a): Abbie</b> .....	<b>108</b>
<b>Initial Interview</b> .....	<b>108</b>
<i>Interview Scenario.</i> .....	108
<b>Reading Lifeworld</b> .....	<b>108</b>
<i>Early Reading Life.</i> .....	108
<i>Significant Reading Experience.</i> .....	110
<i>Recent Reading Experience.</i> .....	110
<i>Shared-Reading Experience.</i> .....	112
<i>Reconciliation as Reading Context.</i> .....	114
<b>Reading Journal</b> .....	<b>117</b>
<i>Methodological Note.</i> .....	117
<b>Book Club Discussion</b> .....	<b>121</b>
<i>Methodological Note.</i> .....	121
<i>Book Club Scenario.</i> .....	121
<i>Approach to Book.</i> .....	122
<i>Experience of Book.</i> .....	124
<i>Individual Speaking Patterns.</i> .....	133
<b>Final Interview</b> .....	<b>133</b>
<i>Interview Scenario.</i> .....	133
<b>Chapter 4(b): Hazel</b> .....	<b>141</b>
<b>Initial Interview</b> .....	<b>141</b>
<i>Interview Scenario.</i> .....	141
<b>Reading Lifeworld</b> .....	<b>141</b>
<i>Early Reading Experience.</i> .....	141
<i>Significant Reading Experience.</i> .....	142
<i>Recent Reading Experience.</i> .....	143
<i>Shared-Reading Experience.</i> .....	145

<i>Reconciliation as Reading Context.</i> .....	147
<b>Reading Journal</b> .....	<b>148</b>
<i>Methodological Note.</i> .....	148
<b>Book Club Discussion</b> .....	<b>156</b>
<i>Approach to Book.</i> .....	156
<i>Experience of Book.</i> .....	157
<i>Individual Speaking Patterns.</i> .....	164
<i>Interview Scenario.</i> .....	165
<b>Chapter 4(c): Letitia</b> .....	<b>176</b>
<b>Initial Interview</b> .....	<b>176</b>
<i>Interview Scenario.</i> .....	176
<b>Reading Lifeworld</b> .....	<b>176</b>
<i>Early Reading Life.</i> .....	176
<i>Significant Reading Experience.</i> .....	177
<i>Recent Reading Experience.</i> .....	177
<i>Shared Reading Experience.</i> .....	179
<i>Reconciliation as Reading Context.</i> .....	181
<b>Reading Journal</b> .....	<b>184</b>
<i>Methodological Note.</i> .....	184
<b>Book Club Discussion</b> .....	<b>195</b>
<i>Approach to Book.</i> .....	195
<i>Experience of Book.</i> .....	196
<i>Individual Speaking Patterns.</i> .....	205
<b>Final Interview</b> .....	<b>207</b>
<i>Interview Scenario.</i> .....	207
<b>Chapter 4(d): Rose</b> .....	<b>214</b>
<b>Initial Interview</b> .....	<b>214</b>
<i>Interview Scenario.</i> .....	214
<b>Reading Lifeworld</b> .....	<b>214</b>
<i>Early Reading Experience.</i> .....	214
<i>Significant Reading Experience.</i> .....	214
<i>Recent Reading Experience.</i> .....	216
<i>Shared Reading Experience.</i> .....	218

<i>Reconciliation as Reading Context</i> .....	219
<b>Reading Journal</b> .....	<b>222</b>
<i>Methodological Note</i> .....	222
<b>Book Club Discussion</b> .....	<b>244</b>
<i>Approach to Book</i> .....	244
<i>Experience of Book</i> .....	247
<i>Individual Speaking Patterns</i> .....	254
<b>Final Interview</b> .....	<b>257</b>
<i>Interview Scenario</i> .....	257
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion</b> .....	<b>264</b>
<b>Reading Celia’s Song</b> .....	<b>264</b>
<i>Reading Lifeworld</i> .....	265
<i>Influence of Study</i> .....	266
<i>Reconciliation as Reading Context</i> .....	268
<i>Reader Confusion</i> .....	270
<i>Admissions of Ignorance</i> .....	272
<i>Sense-Making and Meaning-Making</i> .....	274
<i>Emotional Experiencing</i> .....	276
<i>Embodied Experiencing</i> .....	281
<i>Reciprocal Reading Engagement</i> .....	282
<b>Phenomenology as Reading Approach</b> .....	<b>284</b>
<b>Transformation as Growth</b> .....	<b>294</b>
<i>Interruptions</i> .....	298
<i>Silence</i> .....	301
<i>Humour</i> .....	302
<b>Chapter 6: Outro</b> .....	<b>305</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>324</b>
<b>Appendix A</b> .....	<b>339</b>
<b>Appendix B</b> .....	<b>340</b>
<b>Appendix D</b> .....	<b>344</b>
<b>Appendix E</b> .....	<b>345</b>

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*Most Canadians think it is enough to know something, but this is not enough—you must commit to the continued growth and transformation of whatever you claim to know.*

– Lee Maracle, 2017, p. 78

A growing body of Indigenous Literatures is weaving narrative threads of Indigenous worldviews into settler consciousness adding complexity and clarity, vibrancy and depth, to our collective tapestry. These texts, and the reading of them, are often promoted by publishers, retailers, and critics as acts of decolonization. The federal government, on behalf of all Canadians, committed to renew relationships with Indigenous Peoples by fully implementing the 94 Calls to Action tabled in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) in December 2015. The essence of this commitment is to think and act in new ways to establish and maintain mutually respectful relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Reconciliation, 2015). In this post-TRC era of reconciliation, many individuals, communities, organizations, and institutions have responded to the Calls to Action as a launch point in a complex, emergent process intent on evoking new attitudes and actions as decolonizing praxis.

I believe in the power of story to tell, teach, and transform (see also Abbott, 2008; DeSalvo, 1999; Episkew, 2009; Gilbert, 2002; Hoggan & Cranton, 2015; Jarvis, 2006, 2012; Johnson, 2012, 2013; Justice, 2018; Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009; Wagamese, 2016; Younging, 2018), and propose reading Indigenous Literatures as a pragmatic and accessible means to initiate engagement in reconciliation, decolonization, and treaty relations. “We are all Treaty people who share responsibility for taking action on reconciliation” (Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 12). The intent of this phenomenological inquiry was to gain meaningful, substantive understanding and insight into the phenomenon of transformative learning experienced by settler readers of Indigenous Literatures for use by adult

educators, librarians, shared-reading event organizers, reading groups, and readers. I consider reading and shared-reading to be prompts, provocations, and potential catalysts to take up very challenging, complex, emergent, and dynamic social processes. The premise, promise, and processes of reconciliation and decolonization extend far beyond the pages of a fiction novel. They extend to the land and to the water. They extend to systems of knowledge, justice, health, and governance. They require individual and relational commitments to engage person to person, within, and between communities. Edmund O'Sullivan (2012) contends that there are many paths to the same destination, and advocates for us to begin wherever we are and however we can. For some settlers, Indigenous Literatures may offer the place and means to begin.

The failure of governments and settler society to recognize and honour treaty obligations, even as upheld in Supreme Court of Canada decisions, is identified as the basis for the persistent economic, political, and social turmoil (McMillan, 2019; Pictou, 2019). Sherry Pictou (2019) clearly articulates the ways in which settler legal and political systems frame knowledge and understanding of treaties and thus confine implementation processes to neoliberal interpretations that exclude Indigenous knowledges and perspectives. She points to dominant colonial narratives that regard water and land as resource commodities and identifies a need to center Indigenous worldviews as a decolonizing approach to counter the "erasure of Indigenous presence and relationship to the natural world" (p. 48). Eurocentric assumptions and attitudes are deeply rooted and continue to legitimize discrimination and racism in both individual and institutional spheres (Battiste, 2013). For Marie Battiste (2013), decolonization is about "creating a new space where Indigenous peoples' knowledge, identity, and future is calculated into the global and contemporary equation" (p. 11). The onus, then, lies with settler society to recognize, acknowledge, and disrupt persistent and pervasive settler-colonial ideologies that shape thought and deed. To respond to instances of discrimination and racism that dismiss, diminish, and devalue is not

enough. The inclination to think and act in ways that are rooted in perspectives that pivot on separation, superiority, and paternalism must also be addressed.

Battiste (2013) maintains that Eurocentric knowledge is universally accepted as the definitive standard by which Indigenous lifeways are judged to be deficient and subsequently diminished, marginalized, and excluded. Colonization disrupted, dismantled, and re-defined Indigenous societies (Maracle, 2017; McMillan, 2019). Jane McMillan (2019) describes the encroaching nature of colonization:

In the courses of colonization, accumulating federal and provincial powers resulted in an increasingly complex bureaucratization that furthered the erosion of Indigenous people's control over their lives, leading to the destabilization of customary governance, survival strategies, and law ways that had enabled sustained community survival for thousands of years. In short order, paternalistic policies of containment, surveillance, and the criminalization of Indigenous activities undermined the values, principles, and positions constitutive of Indigenous identities, laws, and livelihoods. (p. 65)

McMillan (2019) further describes the pervasive ramifications of colonialism as evidenced by "ongoing assimilation strategies and policies [that] contribute in varying degrees to current economic, political, and social conditions, such as disrupted kinship, gender, and generational roles; severe class stratification; poverty; poor health; the normalization of violence tolerance; and community erosion" (p. 65).

As active agents in economic, political, and cultural spheres of Canadian society, settlers play a role in the perpetuation of these issues whether consciously or unconsciously, through complicity or complacency. McMillan (2019) asserts that "[c]ontemporary injustices flow out of historical injustices and are manifested in systemic institutional and social discrimination" (p. 73). The use of words like *historical*, *systemic*, and *social* to qualify persistent forms of injustice may in fact dissociate people from

the present responsibility, power, and agency to affect the changes that are urgently needed. Roy Bhaskar (2002), however, places the onus squarely on individuals by stating unequivocally that each of us is always actively engaged in the process of constructing the society in which we live either by way of repetition and reproduction, or through transformation and change (p. 307, as cited in Budd, 2012). Kathy Charmaz (2005) contends concepts of justice and injustice are “*enacted processes* made real through actions performed again and again” (p. 508, emphasis in original). Charmaz (2005) delineates a role for researchers in the investigation and analysis of the “conditions under which injustice or justice develops, changes, or continues” (p. 508). In that vein, this research endeavoured to explore reading as a way to center the Indigenous Voice and shared-reading practices as decolonizing praxis.

Margaret Kovach (2009) asserts that “[w]e know what we know from where we stand” (p. 7). I approached this research as a settler engaged in a process of transformative learning and growth. It is my fervent intent to not minimize, replicate, or perpetuate the hurt and harm of colonial ideology. Ongoing researcher reflection and reflexivity is critical to frame my positionality and how it shaped this research endeavour in order to convey credibility and transparency to those who use it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hart, 2018; Kovach, 2009; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). As a researcher, I aspire to illuminate and elucidate the complexity of participant experience lived in, through, and of their lifeworld. I appreciate the pluralistic and relational nature of reality as it is situated in time and in place. I am pragmatic, value fairness and integrity, and view empathy as a catalytic force. I believe humans make sense of their lived experience through story and in relation to one another. As a settler, I feel a sense of humility and gratitude for the thousands of people who shared their stories through the TRC and see it as an act of courage to relay their lived experience of residential schools. I recognize the universality of story as a powerful tool to share knowledge, to comprehend experience, and to create meaning (Abbott, 2008; Gilbert, 2002). As an avid reader, I experience fiction as a portal to new perspectives and expanded understanding of our shared human existence.

Learning as transformation pervades the extant literature on education theory and practice (see, for example, Brookfield, 2000, 2012; Dewey, 1938/2015; Freire, 1970/2018; hooks, 1994; Mezirow, 1991, 1997, 2000, 2011, 2012; O'Sullivan, 2002, 2012). Transformative learning is theorized as a significant shift in subjective perspectives leading to more inclusive and justifiable beliefs, values, and behaviours (Mezirow, 1991). Education theorists and practitioners approach transformation on an individual level (Mezirow, 1991, 1997, 2000, 2011, 2012), and on a collective level (Brookfield, 2000, 2012; Freire, 1970/2018; O'Sullivan, 2002, 2012). At this moment in Canada, transformation is required in both strata. Testimony at the TRC hearings laid bare the historical trauma perpetrated within the Indian Residential School System, and the generational consequences that persist for individuals, families, and communities. The negative repercussions of the colonial ideology that led to the establishment of residential schools persist today in systems of child welfare, justice, education, and health care. Effectively, the TRC positioned settlers to witness the reality of Indigenous life experience (Nagy, 2020). Paulo Freire (1970/2018) defines witness as an action, "a confrontation with the world and with people," and as such, "it is a dynamic element which becomes part of the societal context in which it occurred; from that moment, it does not cease to affect that context" (p. 177).

Freire (1970/2018) posits that abstractions enable an unveiling of reality, create space for new perceptions to emerge, and ultimately forge the wit and the will to intervene. He states that "[i]n the event ... that human beings perceive reality as dense, impenetrable, and enveloping, it is indispensable to proceed with the investigation by means of abstraction" (p. 105). Art presents, re-presents, and represents reality in abstract form and Indigenous-authored fiction is a specific abstract form that offers an unveiling of reality to settler readers. Reading is described as a process of decoding, and Freire (1970/2018) uses this language to depict the process of moving back and forth between the concrete and the abstract to perceive reality. He contends that "[b]y stimulating 'perception of the previous

perception' and 'knowledge of the previous knowledge,' decoding stimulates the appearance of a new perception and the development of new knowledge" (p. 115).

Louise DeSalvo (1999) concurs and asserts that "[w]orks of art make the act of listening possible" (p. 205). As an art form, fictional literature has the capacity to initiate an unveiling of the world as perceived and experienced by another, and to provoke reflection *and* action that together culminate as praxis. Indigenous Literatures provide settler readers space in a private sphere to encounter, re-encounter, consider, and re-consider life from an Indigenous perspective through fictional narratives created and presented by Indigenous authors. Deena Rymhs (2016) explains that "[f]or Indigenous communities, literature has been an important forum for testifying to past and present injustices and for setting the interpretive framework of such articulations" (p. 327). Aubrey Hanson (2017) positions Indigenous Literatures as a literary vehicle to story the reclamation, regeneration, and resurgence of Indigenous Peoples. "Indigenous literatures can enable healing, carry forward histories, embody ways of knowing and ways of being, envision better worlds, facilitate memory, inspire social change, foster empathy, and encourage relational understandings" (p. 75). These literary works of art create a path to "important inter-cultural dialogue" (Rymhs, 2016, p. 337). Elizabeth Long (1986) contends that books hold the potential to both signal the need for, and mediate change. These assertions provided the impetus to investigate the experience of reading Indigenous Literatures, individually and collectively, within a lifeworld context that includes reconciliation, decolonization, and treaty relations as active social, cultural, and political forces.

This research embraced an engagement with theory as "a form of theoretical practice" (Corbett & Green, 2018, p. 275). I approach writing as researcher and research in the process of becoming (p. 277). This stance allowed for knowledge as convergent and emergent, and research marked by creativity and insight. It fostered a sense of discovery, excitement, and hope through research on transformative learning in the context of reconciliation and decolonization as an act of social justice. The study renders a

rich description and insightful interpretation of the phenomenon of settler readers engaging with an Indigenous-authored novel and sharing their experience of the text with other readers, all within the context of their lifeworlds. The intent was to extend beyond offering a picture of this lived experience to rendering “an account of research as an *intervention* in social life that is immersed in the situation” (Corbett & Green, 2018, p. 277).

The following dissertation articulates and explicates my research question, positionality and situatedness, conceptual and theoretical framework, methodology, methods, and ethical stance, before re-presenting the experience as lived by four reader-participants. The findings are then discussed and conclusions are presented in the Outro to bookend this Intro[duction] and complete the dissertation in and as form. The structure of this dissertation belies an evolving, emergent, non-linear process confined, refined, and defined by the language employed in its conveyance. The discrete headings serve simply to organize and present my engagement with what is known and unknown relevant to the phenomenon at the heart of the study.

### Research Question

**RQ:** What is the transformative learning experience like for adults of settler ancestry who engage with Lee Maracle’s fiction novel *Celia’s Song* first as a solitary reader and then as a participant in the same shared-reading group?

This research pivoted on individual and shared reading experiences as experientially recognizable and accessible human phenomena. The research question was narrow in scope and purposefully established a foundation for phenomenological reflection, interpretation, and writing to gain deeper, more nuanced understanding and insight into the lived-through experience of individually and relationally engaging with an Indigenous-authored fiction novel. The narrow scope of the research allowed for deep insight into the lived experience of adult fiction readers who are active participants in the same discursive, social group centred on books. Specifically, I focussed on the experience of readers

who are of settler ancestry, that is, people who identify as non-Indigenous. The objective was to explore, through phenomenological description and interpretation, the conscious experience as perceived and revealed by each participant, as well as participant experience observed by the researcher as individual and relational discursive, performative, cognitive, affective, and embodied expressions of the experience (see Creely, 2018). In other words, experience on an individual reflective and reflexive level, as well as on a relational dialogic level. The intent of this approach was to add vivid detail, nuance, and texture to our understanding of the lived experience of transformative learning imbued in the act of fiction reading. It is not intended to explicate transformative learning processes but rather to compliment other educational research inquiries (for example, Lawrence & Cranton, 2015; Mälkki, 2010; Mälkki & Green, 2014). This was research designed to reveal and reflect on lived experience “from within the whole life of a learner” (Creely, 2018, p. 105), and positioned concepts of reconciliation, decolonization, and treaty relations as aspects of the lifeworld context of the study participants *and* the researcher. I acknowledge that my access to lived experience was limited to what a participant was willing to share and able to articulate, and that interview discourse, questions, and prompts centred on reading and reading group experience as aspects of participant lifeworlds that fell within the scope of the research.

### Definition of Terms

#### *Indigenous Peoples*

I use the term *Indigenous* to refer to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples, drawing on terminology defined on the University of British Columbia web site to refer to the first inhabitants of the land known now as Canada. The United Nations uses the term *Indigenous* in a global context “to refer broadly to peoples of long settlement and connection to specific lands” (Indigenous Foundations, n.d., para. 13). Daniel Heath Justice (2018) stipulates that the term *Indigenous*, as a proper noun, “affirms the status of a subject with agency, not an object with a particular quality” (p. 6). Pictou (2019) emphasizes that the term signifies Indigenous life experience as viewed on a full spectrum ranging from negative

experiences of colonialism to positive resilience and relational experiences with the land, natural resources, and other people (p. 48, attributed to Kenrick & Lewis, 2004). I capitalize the term in this dissertation to denote respect for the original peoples. The plural form of people is also used to convey acknowledgement that the Indigenous population is comprised of more than one distinct group (Indigenous Foundations, n.d., para. 17).

### *Indigenous Voice*

The Indigenous Voice is “a process alive with connection and transformation” (Younging, 2018, p. 11). It arises along the continuum of Oral Traditions and Traditional Stories told for millennia and “spiritually connected to the land, ancestors, and the particular Indigenous Nation they come from” (p. 12). Gregory Younging (2018) defines the Indigenous Voice broadly as a “unique mode of cultural expression that draws from a blend of traditional and contemporary sources such as Oral Traditions; techniques of Traditional Storytelling; film; inanimate, animal, and spirit characters from Traditional Stories; Indigenous historical perspectives; and contemporary Indigenous existence” (p. 11).

### *Reconciliation*

Throughout the dissertation, I rely on the TRC definition of *reconciliation* as thinking and acting in new ways to establish and maintain mutually respectful relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Reconciliation, 2015). I understand the term as a process, not as an outcome or destination. Therefore, as the discourse on reconciliation evolves in this post-TRC era, so do the definitions and conceptualizations of the term itself. Notions of what it is to reconcile, decolonize, and participate in treaty relations are continuously defined and re-defined and at each juncture we occupy a new space that creates awareness of the attitudes and actions needed to take the next steps.

### *Reading for Reconciliation*

For the purpose of the dissertation, I conceptualize the act of *reading for reconciliation* as purposeful engagement with Indigenous Literatures to: 1) create and expand awareness of the historical and generational trauma, and contemporary consequences resulting from the Indian Residential School System; 2) foster and facilitate a culture of learning with respect to Indigenous histories, traditions, cultures, knowledges and ways of being in and beyond fictional narratives; and, 3) stimulate dialogue leading to action on reconciliation as it relates to equity, justice, land, treaties, and the centring of Indigenous interests.

### *Settler*

Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth St. Pierre (2005) deem language a “constitutive force, creating a particular view of reality and of the Self” (p. 960). In the same vein, Emma Lowman and Adam Barker (2015) call attention to the “words we use to name ourselves” (p. 1), and unpack the need for the term *settler*:

We need a name that can help us see ourselves for who we are, not just who we claim to be. For that we need a term that shifts the frame of reference away from our nation, our claimed territory, and onto our relationships with systems of power, land, and the peoples on whose territory our country exists. (p. 1)

Lowman and Barker (2015) suggest the term prompts a confrontation with both past and present, and is potentially a tool to disrupt and destabilize systems that dispossess and violate Indigenous Peoples. Whether claimed or denied, I agree that it is a term “we [settlers] inevitably live and embody. It is who we are, as a people, on these lands” (p. 2). Rosemary Nagy (2020) insists that “without accepting the term ‘settler’ (i.e., on this Indigenous land that we call Canada), it is difficult to get to the issue of land dispossession and restitution” (pp. 235–236).

### *Engagement*

The notion of settler reader *engagement* with Indigenous Literatures reflects the concept of aesthetic experience. From an educational perspective, Boyd White and Amélie Lemieux (2017) list aesthetic experience, aesthetic encounter, and aesthetic engagement as interchangeable terms to reference experience that “involves the whole person—body, mind, and spirit” (p. xiv). Aesthetic engagements encompass embodied, sensory perceptions, affective responses, as well as a sense of connectedness grounded in prior experiences, previously acquired knowledge, and metaphysical, or spiritual experiences (p. xiv). I consider the terms *affect* and *emotion* to be synonymous and use the words interchangeably throughout the dissertation.

### *Shared Reading*

As used in this dissertation, the terms shared-reading group, reading group, book group, and book club are synonymous and denote a social group in which members meet on a regular basis to repeat and reconceive their individual reading experience by listening to and engaging with the emotional and cognitive reading experience of others (Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2014).

### *Researcher Reflexivity*

Researcher reflexivity is a tenet of qualitative research broadly (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; May, 2011), and of phenomenology specifically (Nicholls, 2019; Vagle, 2018, van Manen, 2014). David Kember (2018) argues it is highly relevant and appropriate for doctoral students to articulate the personal experiences and insights that have culminated in the research endeavour being undertaken. Research questions arise out of a situated, individual perspective that must be stated clearly and early on to transparently demonstrate how it resonates with each aspect of the research project including the methods, analysis, and interpretations. Following the advice of Kember (2018), I situate myself in this study as a Nova Scotian of settler ancestry. I enjoy a rich relational existence as a wife, mother, daughter, sister, and aunt within a large extended family. As I experience mid-life, I have found myself with the

credentials and the resources to pursue academic research as a primary focus since 2015. As a result of the work of the TRC, I am keenly aware of the need to think and act in new ways with respect to relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples.

Thousands of people storied their experiences of residential school at the TRC hearings, and the consequential impact on mind, body, and spirit, then and now. To tell a story is to relive it, and I was humbled by the courage displayed by those who told the harrowing truth for us all to learn from. As a result of their strength and determination, Canada's political leaders have committed the nation to a reconciliation process intended to redress the relationship between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples. Soon after the TRC tabled its final report and Calls to Action, I read about Jo-Ann Episkenew, a Métis scholar, educator, and researcher, in the "Lives Lived" section of the *Globe and Mail* (Robertson, 2016). I related to her life story through our shared experiences as women, mothers, and mature students. It was the challenges of violence, addiction, and poverty she faced in her life, however, that awakened me to colonialism as systemic ideology that demeans and marginalizes some, while it favours and rewards others. Until then, I had assumed my success in life was based solely on my work ethic and ability. I had never challenged the narrative of Canada as a place where everyone has access to education, health care, and opportunity. As a student, and then as an academic, teacher, and researcher, Episkenew (2009) sought to address and redress the disparities she saw all around her. Her work is an inspirational legacy. I believe awareness, empathy, and new perspectives, on the part of settler Canadians, are required as a catalyst to think and act in new ways, and to underpin the respect necessary for reconciliation, decolonization, and the honouring of treaty obligations.

Given my commitment to reconciliation, this study stands as both a personal journey and an academic expedition to explore settler experiences of transformative learning provoked by engagement with Indigenous Literatures. As a result, I present the research findings using an active voice, largely written in the first person. Researcher reflexivity is a process that acts while it is acted upon. It is

iterative, convergent, evolving, and emergent. The act of articulating and documenting a particular worldview fixes it to the time of writing and confines it to the space of a page or screen. I have related the experiences that sparked the impetus for this inquiry, and the perspectives that shaped its execution, as well as the insights that arose, predicated on recognition and acknowledgement of this fact.

### *Ontological Stance*

Qualitative texts define research paradigms according to the philosophical, ontological, epistemological, and methodological beliefs that scaffold them. Definitions imply fixed boundaries and commitments to hegemonic axioms that can, in effect, refine and confine research practice. I view these boundaries as permeable with blurred dividing lines as elements of paradigmatic thought overlap, interrelate, and converge. Having said that, I feel the need to check the box and declare constructivism as the research stance that resonates and aligns most closely with the ontology, epistemology, and methodology of this study. From an ontological stance, I am interested in situated, constructed, and co-constructed experiencing as it arises and signifies a state of *being* both in and of the world.

I centre my research on a desire to explore, examine, describe and understand the complexity of lived experience, and position this interpretivist sensibility within a constructivist worldview. I understand reality as pluralistic, relational, and situated in time and place. I am pragmatic and value fairness enacted as equity and justice. I view relationship and empathy as catalytic forces. I believe humans make sense of experience through story and in relation to others. I recognize the power of story to provide an alternate lens through which to view the world, structure new frames of reference, and foster change. My passion for reading means I am fully engaged in the topic of study. Reading fiction is a familiar and pragmatic means to stretch understanding and to provide time in a private sphere to contemplate new perspectives that extend beyond our own life experiences. Books can both signal the need for change, and mediate change (Long, 1986, 1993, 2003). I view book clubs as sites of significant cultural work (Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2014; Long, 1986, 1993, 2003; Rehberg Sedo, 2011), as relational

spaces for intentional attention and reflection, as well as for testing and validating reconceived perspectives, beliefs, values, and behaviours. I believe this is one means to learn to think and act in new ways.

I see life as a self- and co-created reality and, as such, recognize and acknowledge the existence of multiple realities that are individual-specific and determined. Furthermore, knowledge is socially constructed experientially, is relational, and is context dependent. Hence, I recognize the significance of my positionality to all facets and phases of this research study. I have practiced ongoing reflexivity throughout, and strove maintain transparency regarding my perspectives, attitudes, beliefs, values, and actions. The intent of this approach was and is rooted in a desire to enhance trustworthiness, authenticity, and credibility of the findings and the phenomenological approach I posit for settler readers of Indigenous Literatures.

### *Epistemological Approach*

In alignment with constructivist epistemology, I consider the lived experience of humans in the process of becoming through a state of *being* both in and of the world to be a valid and meaningful source of data to explore, examine, describe, and interpret the subjective experience of a phenomenon, and the meanings ascribed to it. Research is an interactive process between the researcher and the researched. Here the boundaries between critical theory and constructivism blur as the findings of the study may be presented as value laden. This possibility arises out of the fact that the lifeworld contexts for participants *and* researcher encompass complexities inherent in concepts of reconciliation, decolonization, and treaty relations as we learn to think and act in new ways. It is linked to my view of reconciliation as an imperative for settlers in this country, both individually and collectively, on social, cultural, and political levels. This study encompasses and acknowledges postcolonial aspirations enmeshed in the intent to explore transformative learning in the context of reconciliation. The reader-participants, as an outcome of taking part in the research process, underwent learning that: 1)

challenged the hegemonic historical and contemporary narrative of Canada; 2) created awareness of Coast Salish ways of knowing and being; and, 3) highlighted gaps in knowledge regarding settler-colonial history and Indigenous histories, traditions, cultures, knowledges and knowing. In this respect, critical and constructivist research paradigms can be viewed as commensurable, interwoven into the study in a way that enhances the value and significance of the research while broadening and deepening the potential impact (Charmaz, 2005).

In the following chapter, I explore the theory and extant research literature relevant to the research question including reconciliation, Indigenous Literatures, empathy as relational experiencing, reader response theory, reading as a social activity, transformative learning and critical theory as it relates to transformation. This is a purposeful wander through what is known as a reflection of the complexities inherent in our individual and collective lifeworld contexts. I shift focus in Chapter 3 to the wonder of human experiencing and explore phenomenology as an access point to the yet-to-be known—what the experience of transformative learning is like for settler readers of an Indigenous-authored text as it arises in consciousness. I also establish a working concept of research as praxis using Indigenous perspectives and knowing, education philosophy, and constructivist and post-qualitative research understandings. I then detail the research methods undertaken for the study and the ethical approach that underpinned all aspects of the research endeavour. Chapter 4 presents the findings through description, interpretation, and re-presentation of the individual and relational reading experience of four participants. In Chapter 5, I weave the experiential understanding and insight garnered from the reader-participants in and through the extant literature presented in Chapter 2. The Outro chapter that ends the dissertation in and as form is offered as another loop through learning perceived as a “continuous spiral” (Dewey, 1938/2015, p. 79).

It is in the final chapter that I give substance to the title of the dissertation—*Quiet the Mind, Open the Heart*. I came to these words through the study and practice of phenomenology and by

dwelling in the lived experience of the reader-participants. I acknowledge that the guidance to quiet the mind and open the heart has deep roots in spiritual and contemplative practices. Contemporary spiritual leaders like Ram Das and mindfulness teachers like Jack Kornfield employ these same words. Many other spiritual and contemplative practitioners use similar words that point to the essence of this teaching. I have come to understand that whether the context is spiritual, contemplative, philosophical, or academic, these words illuminate a sense of stillness and compassion to navigate our being-ness as humans in and of the world.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Paulo Freire (1970/2018) advocates for education that transforms and insists our only vocation as human beings is to become more fully human (see, for example, pp. 55, 66, 74, 75, 84, 167). He states that “[k]nowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (p. 72). This sense of perpetual seeking that is full of hope, while at the same time restless and impatient, underscores knowing as a living, evolving, and convergent force within, between, and of beings, and that undulates as confining, defining, and refining. The theoretical framework for this research was built on a conceptualization of knowing as a process of being and becoming and was structured using transformative learning theory and reader response theory within a context of reconciliation as enacted through decolonization and treaty relations. The intent of a theoretical framework is to clarify the *why* and the *how* of a study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017), to order (May, 2011), and to orient (Creswell, 2014; Taylor & Snyder, 2012) our thinking. In this chapter, I explore the extant literature on reconciliation, Indigenous Literatures, empathy as relational experiencing, reader response theory and the experience of reading for pleasure, reading as a social activity, transformative learning theory, and critical theory and transformative learning. The intricate weave of theory that follows reflects the complexity inherent

in individual and collective lifeworlds in this moment of *being* when we are called to transform as a social and cultural imperative to *become* more.

### Reconciliation

*We are all Treaty people who share responsibility for taking action on reconciliation.*

– Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 12

Knowledge and understanding of past, present, and idealized relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples in Canada is vital to contextualize the act of reading for reconciliation. The work of the TRC culminated in 94 Calls to Action urging all Canadians to think and act in new ways. Many social, political, institutional, and community leaders have committed to work toward renewing relationships by fully implementing the recommendations. Reconciliation is defined as a process to create and sustain mutually respectful relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples (Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation, 2015), and is described as a complex, ongoing process (Datta, 2020; Kearns et al., 2018; Michell, 2017). I characterize reconciliation as a process buttressed by story.

As a nation, Canada's story of democracy, inclusion, and tolerance is true for some, but not all of those who live within its geographical borders (Brydon, 2003; Episknew, 2009; Nagy, 2020). Diana Brydon (2003) contends that this country:

has been a convenient structure for enabling a certain way of life for many people, but along with its rhetoric of peace, order, and good government, Canada carries an unsavoury colonial history of theft and oppression, a history whose consequences remain to be addressed and redressed today. (pp. 49–50)

The contemporary consequences of colonization are being revealed through the stories of Indigenous Peoples. Herman Michell (2017) tells of the voices that resound in the TRC report, and notes each as

evidence of the “endurance and persistence” (p. 49) it required “to be heard and acknowledged” (p. 49). Michell (2017) invites settler readers to awaken to a connected, relational, and holistic vision of reconciliation. He weaves the intricate pattern of northern Cree connections to the land, to self, family, community, and society to instill an understanding of the complex, fundamental, and sacred nature of these relationships. Michell (2017) privileges the relational aspect of reconciliation, and his words point to the potential of reading Indigenous Literatures as a way to see the world through another’s eyes (Baron, 2015).

Michell (2017) positions reconciliation as an ongoing journey that is uncertain yet cyclical in its refinement. His conceptualization of reconciliation as cycles of revision speaks to the hermeneutic cycle “which involves a continual process towards a deeper and richer understanding” (Young, 2009, p. 213), and the notion of learning as a “continuous spiral” (Dewey, 1938/2015, p. 79). “Re-weaving the Canadian landscape in the aftermath [of residential schools and the TRC report] will take serious commitment and action at all levels of the social apparatus” (Michell, 2017, p. 3). Michell (2017, pp. 4–5) cites Angel (2012, p. 202) who speaks to the assumption that incorporating the narratives of Indigenous Peoples “into the national imaginary can transform the nation’s political landscape.”

Recognition of the power of story to transform supports incorporating Indigenous Literatures into the imaginary of individual settler readers to ignite the potential to transform. Nancy Peters (2015) identifies action on an interpersonal level to shift the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours of settler Canadians as underpinning all other reconciliation efforts. She provides a detailed account of social and political events that have shaped the relationship between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples in Canada leading up to, and including, the early work of the TRC. Peters (2015) focuses on a concept of reconciliation forged in equity, justice, and mutual respect. Her research leads her to characterize reconciliation in Canada as elusive, slow, and challenging.

Peters (2016) situates herself as a Canadian of settler ancestry residing in Nova Scotia to examine the stories that have had a divisive influence on the relationship between settlers and Mi'kmaq in this province. She points to the need to engage in the narratives of Indigenous Peoples. On a broader perspective, Marie Battiste (2016) approaches story as presented by both Eurocentric and Indigenous humanities and urges us to unpack, reframe, and merge knowledge systems "through the respectful re-encounter of the original peoples of Canada" (p. 1). This has the potential to shift the hegemonic and normative discourse that perpetuates the dehumanization of Indigenous Peoples (Battiste, 2016). Battiste (2016) envisions the potential for settlers and Indigenous Peoples to create a "space for learning to think together and eventually to act together" (p. 7), within a knowledge system that recognizes and honours "Mi'kmaq consciousness and experience" (p. 7).

Jo-Ann Episkenew (2002) reminds us "colonization is not only militaristic, economic, and political; it is also psychological, social, and spiritual" (p. 56). It follows that reconciliation must address and redress the impact of colonization in all spheres of influence. Thus, to think and act in new ways requires non-Indigenous Canadians to engage in a form of re-education regarding our shared colonial past and the contemporary social, cultural, and political structures that function as a hinderance to the establishment of new relationships (Battiste, 2016; Michell, 2017; Peters, 2015, 2016). Renate Eigenbrod and Episkenew (2002) point to the important function of Indigenous Literatures as a "powerful 'tool'" (p. 16) to restructure and reshape relations to be more honourable, just, and inclusive. Episkenew (2009) contends Indigenous Literatures serve a socio-pedagogical function with "the potential to create a groundswell of support" (p. 191) for Indigenous Peoples.

Deena Rymhs (2016) is not so optimistic. She identifies forgiveness and reconciliation as the lexicon of international discourse in recent decades and finds the public process of reconciliation offers a venue for individuals and communities to give voice to injustices. Rymhs (2016) also points to the fact that to ask for forgiveness does not necessarily mean it will be granted. She contends that "[t]he success

always implied by the act of reconciliation dissolves the wronged subjects' agency as the public, the government, and its institutions forgive themselves" (p. 327). Rymhs (2016) presents reconciliation as a way to maintain the status quo under the guise of renewed relationships that will continue to benefit some, but not all. She provides important insight to approach reconciliation as an ongoing, emergent, and evolving process, necessitating active engagement in decolonization and treaty relations on individual, community, and political levels. I suggest reading Indigenous Literatures has the potential to prompt and provoke reflection on an individual level and may serve as a catalyst to the critical self-reflection and dialogue necessary to transform beliefs, attitudes, and values as the foundation for socially just action shaped by respect and understanding (Brookfield, 2000; Freire, 1970/2018).

The legacy of colonization is reflected in many aspects of contemporary Canadian politics, culture, and society, and is discussed and debated under the labels of colonialism, anti-colonialism, decolonization, indigenization, and postcolonialism. Laura Moss (2012) holds to the definition of postcolonialism as an ongoing process set in motion at the moment of first contact between colonists and Indigenous Peoples. According to Moss (2012), this process is characterized by both resistance and reconstruction, and "emphasizes the role of the writer/artist and deemphasizes the role of the theorist in instituting change" (p. 61). Challenges to hegemonic social structures, ideological histories, and normative attitudes prompt change. Brydon (2003) contends that "[t]he 'post' [in postcolonialism] does not refer to the end of colonialism, but rather to what was formed under colonialism and remains after official colonialism is abandoned and colonialism begins to be recognized as a major component of modernity" (p. 56). She proposes that "healing will be accomplished through exchange and negotiation, both processes that require respect, equality, open-mindedness and compromise" (p. 53). Events such as the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement in 2006, the United Nations adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 (endorsed by Canada in 2016), work by the TRC,

and establishment of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation mark important milestones to address and redress the consequences of colonialism.

Ranjan Datta (2020) asserts that “[a]ny narrow, static definition of reconciliation is problematic” (p. 5), and positions reconciliation as a complex process enacted broadly through situated, relational, and context-driven means. In effect, the words we use to signify a concept can define, confine, and refine it in unexpected and unintentional ways. Sherry Pictou (2019) includes the word *reconciliation* among a list of terms that are “often co-opted in meaning and transformed into state- and corporation-driven interpretations that set the pretext for state-Indigenous relations” (p. 47), pointing to the use of language to exclude Indigenous perspectives and negate the autonomy of Indigenous Peoples. Privileging Indigenous worldviews is a decolonizing approach that is inclusive, values Indigenous presence and relationship to the natural world, and centers important relational concepts that underpin treaties (Pictou, 2019). Rather than applying fixed definitions, terms such as reconciliation might better be imagined as relational and emergent to allow for insight and creativity enacted through multiple approaches to reconciling and decolonizing. Engaging in literatures that centre the voices, perspectives, and experiences of Indigenous Peoples then becomes one point of praxis among a constellation of possibilities.

Michell (2017) confirms that “[w]ays of knowing are located in multiple domains” (p. 15) with regard to northern Cree epistemology, methodologies, and pedagogical practices. This concept is applicable to an understanding of Indigenous Literatures as a potential domain for settler readers to explore their role and responsibility in reconciliation. Episkenew (2009) positions Indigenous-authored literature as an aid to heal trauma experienced by Indigenous Peoples and to bridge social and cultural divides. Aubrey Hanson (2017) cautions that, “while the literary arts may be inspiring and reflecting Indigenous communities’ resurgence, a great deal of learning is required by the rest of Canada to develop responsive relationships with this work” (pp. 69–70). Indigenous Literatures offer settler

readers an opportunity to witness the lived experience of Indigenous Peoples (Episknew, 2009; Hanson, 2017; Rymhs, 2016). The opportunity to read for reconciliation is full of potential and possibility. That transformative learning occurs, however, is anything but certain. Rymhs (2016) characterizes reconciliation as “performative” (p. 337), prompting responses centered on affect rather than action. She contends that “[c]asting Indigenous people[s] in a state of victimization, yet simultaneously calling on Indigenous communities to ‘heal’ despite continued poverty, differences in education, and a hostile criminal justice system, means that reconciliation’s successes have been more illusory than real” (p. 337). Hanson (2017) argues that, in actuality, reconciliation “has the potential, if not carefully theorized, to be mobilized by official discourses in order to reinscribe Indigenous expression within the norms of the settler state” (p. 70).

Rymhs (2016) and Hanson (2017) clearly articulate the disquieting reality of the path of reconciliation, and the difficult journey ahead. Reading and discussing Indigenous-authored fiction is one point of engagement and action in a host of necessary points of engagement and action on reconciliation, decolonization, and treaty relations. I acknowledge my positioning as a person of settler ancestry when I express optimism that the tide will turn as one person after another begins to think and act in new ways. For some settler readers that shift from ebb to flow may begin between the pages of a book. Many researchers, theorists, and scholars point to the need for further investigation (see Boler, 1997; Davis, 2008; Episknew, 2009; Hanson, 2017; Lawrence & Cranton, 2015; Rymhs, 2016). This research stands as an attempt to add to the conversation on reading for reconciliation with a pragmatic phenomenological exploration of reading and shared-reading as decolonizing praxis for settler Canadians.

### Indigenous Literatures

*Works of art make the act of listening possible.*

— Louise DeSalvo, 1999, p. 205

The Indigenous Voice resounds in Indigenous Literatures, a distinct, contemporary art form comprising a new literary canon (Justice, 2018; Younging, 2018). Gregory Younging (2018) conceptualizes the Indigenous Voice as “a dialogue with Oral Traditions and Traditional Knowledge—a process alive with connection and transformation” (p. 11). It arises along the continuum of Oral Traditions and Traditional Stories told for millennia and “spiritually connected to the land, ancestors, and the particular Indigenous Nation they come from” (p. 12). Younging (2018) takes care to explain that “Indigenous *Peoples* have Indigenous *Literatures*” and cautions against perpetuating pan-Indigenous colonial thinking by referencing Indigenous Literatures in the singular form (p. 13). He positions these works as “the most culturally authentic literary expression of Indigenous realities” (p. 11). Daniel Heath Justice (2018) concurs and characterizes Indigenous Literatures as texts that engage with and respond to colonialism without being determined by it. Aubrey Hanson (2017) contends that Indigenous writers are “storying their communities forward” (p. 87) as the communities focus on resurgence, not reconciliation. Resurgence “requires attention to the specificity of Indigenous cultures and contexts: resurgence is about people in their own communities nourishing their own traditions, languages, worldviews, stories, knowledges, and ways of being” (p. 75).

For settler readers, Indigenous Literatures provide an opportunity to listen to the Indigenous Voice, to feel, to learn, to re-learn, and to respond. In effect, Indigenous Literatures have the capacity to disrupt dominant colonial narratives, inspire critical self-reflection to unsettle settler identity, evoke a re-storying of our nations, and ultimately add to the momentum of reconciliation and decolonization processes. Jo-Ann Episkenew (2009) identifies this as a socio-pedagogical function for Indigenous Literatures and insists these works of art hold the promise to be more effective than efforts on a political level, “based on the premise that an enlightened population will demand equitable and effective public policy” (p. 193). She examines the impact of public policy as revealed through contemporary Indigenous Literatures and investigates the power of story to heal historical and

generational trauma. Contemporary Indigenous Literatures provide “settler readers with a window into the daily life of Indigenous people, including the challenges and disappointments along with hopes and dreams” (Episkenew, 2009, p. 190), inviting settler readers to relate emotionally, empathically, and empathetically. Episkenew (2009) contends empathy has the potential “to create a groundswell of support” (p. 191) for social justice and equity initiatives to redress persistent disparities between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples. I believe the type of empathy Episkenew (2009) envisions as the momentum for a groundswell of support is genuine, other-oriented empathy as described by Amy Coplan (2011) and explained below. This is the only form of empathy that makes positive societal change actionable beyond individual feelings and expressions of the emotion.

Scholars point to the relational nature of Indigenous Literatures and contend that it acts to counter the divisiveness of colonization (Episkenew, 2009), and persistent forces of erasure (Justice, 2018). Episkenew (2009) finds that contemporary Indigenous authors write to “reassert their individual and collective narratives ... that aspire to accomplish many of the same aims as the oral stories did: to explain the history of the people, to buttress cultural practices and norms, and to articulate their relationship with the world” (p. 11). Justice (2018) concurs and expands by stating that Indigenous texts: are at least as concerned with developing or articulating relationships with, among, and between Indigenous readers as they are with communicating our humanity to colonial society, if not more so. Indeed, I’d go so far as to argue that *relationship* is the driving impetus behind the vast majority of texts by Indigenous writers—relationship to the land, to human community, to self, to the other-than-human world, to the ancestors and our descendants, to our histories and our futures, as well as to colonizers and their literal and ideological heirs—and that these literary works offer us insight and sometimes helpful pathways for maintaining, rebuilding, or even simply establishing these meaningful connections. (p. xix)

Scholars expound the power of story to instill understanding of the life experience of others, foster empathy, and inspire new perspectives (see, for example, Barstow, 2003; Berg, 2008; Episknew, 2009; Hodgson & Thomson, 2000; Justice, 2018; MacAdam, 1995; Long 1986, 1993, 2003; Ross et al., 2006; Younging, 2018). Episknew (2009) also connects reading Indigenous Literatures to civic engagement and prosocial behaviour through empathy fostered by story. Literary works by Indigenous authors acknowledge and honour the stories of Indigenous Peoples, the expanse and uniqueness of place-based cultures, traditions, values, and life experiences, and carry the potential to heal through cultural affirmation (Episknew, 2009; Justice, 2018; Younging, 2018). Indigenous stories are good medicine (Episknew, 2009; Justice, 2018). Episknew (2009) observes the impact of Indigenous Literatures as they transcend “the boundaries of the text to affect the material world” (p. 193) and finds herself “prescribing” (p. 194) the words of Indigenous authors. Episknew (2009) further suggests:

Indigenous literature, as a healing implement, is holistic and relationship-oriented in that it ‘treats’ the minds, bodies, spirits, and hearts of individuals and repairs the rifts in communities. Indigenous literature is inclusive as well; it does not limit its healing properties to Indigenous people. Indigenous literature reaches out to settler communities to advance social justice, to heal the wounds of oppression, and to reconcile our communities. (p. 194)

I draw on the work of scholars such as Episknew (2009), Justice (2018), and Younging (2018) to centre Indigenous Literatures in the discourse on reading and shared reading as a means to disrupt dominant colonial narratives, provoke critical reflection, and inspire new ways to think and act in order to address and redress past harms, and promote social justice. As Justice (2018) attests, Indigenous Literatures “help us bridge the gap of human imagination between one another” (p. xix).

### Empathy as Relational Experiencing

What is empathy? It seems the only point of agreement in response to this question is that there is no clear consensus (Coplan, 2011; Pinotti & Salgaro, 2019). Andrea Pinotti and Massimo Salgaro

(2019) debate the need to agree on a shared definition versus positioning empathy as a pluralistic concept encompassing multiple voices, contexts, and experiences of, between, and beyond humans. Based on an extensive examination of the interdisciplinary research literature, the authors find the term subject to a myriad of interpretations and seemingly self-evident notions. Coplan (2011) agrees and characterizes the discourse on empathy as difficult to follow and navigate. The term is frequently used as an umbrella concept to cover a range experiences that vary in form, function, affect, and effect (Coplan, 2011; Pinotti & Salgaro, 2019).

James Jardine (2014) probes investigations of empathy by Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein, originating proponents of phenomenology, to conceptualize empathy as “an intuitive experience of other minds” (p. 273). He reports that these early phenomenological inquiries into interpersonal and intersubjectivity describe empathy as experiential phenomena in which one understands the mind of another as other and point to empathy as a more complex and cognitive experience than simply understanding and relating to others as a matter of inner simulation, inference, or projection (p. 273).

Coplan (2011) examines empathy in all of its complexity. She conceptualizes empathy as an imaginative process whereby an observer simulates the situated psychological state of another while clearly differentiating between self and other (p. 58). Coplan (2011) labels this *other*-oriented perspective taking as genuine empathy and distinguishes it from *self*-oriented perspective taking, a type of pseudo empathy. In other words, if I, as an observer, simulate the situated experience of another from my own point of view then I am practicing self-oriented perspective taking, or pseudo empathy. If I attempt to simulate the experience of another from their point of view, then I am engaging in other-oriented perspective taking and approach a genuine form of empathy (pp. 54–55).

This delineation in the orientation of observer perspective is significant. According to Coplan (2011), other-oriented perspective taking is the only process that “can provide experiential understanding of another person, or understanding of another from the ‘inside.’ It is in virtue of its

ability to provide this type of first-person access to another, however imperfect, that empathy is a unique and invaluable process” (p. 58). Coplan (2011) contends that familiarity and identification with another influences both the form of perspective taking and the extent to which it is achieved, and stipulates that “the more unlike a target we are, the more difficult it is to reconstruct her subjective experiences” (p. 58). Of relevance to this research is the fictional portrayal of other. Does a fictional character provide a window into the experiencing of another that creates a space for other-oriented perspective taking and genuine empathy? Does it allow the possibility to feel what another feels from *their* perspective instead of our own even when we perceive the other as very different from ourselves?

“The effort and regulation involved in other-oriented perspective taking suggests that empathy is a motivated and controlled process, which is neither automatic nor involuntary and demands that the observer attend to relevant differences between self and other” (Coplan, 2011, pp. 58–59). Coplan (2011) suggests that, although we abstractly understand that we are different from others, we often slip into an expectation of likeness. She explains that “it is not simply that we fail to understand others’ subjective experiences; we often assume that we do understand them, which leads to a new set of problems” (p. 56). This can result in a type of pseudo empathy, according to Coplan (2011), who argues that “people often mistakenly believe that it provides them with access to the other’s point of view when it does not” (p. 56).

Coplan (2011) insists the distinction between self- and other-oriented perspective taking is critical to “prevent us from assuming that we ‘get’ the other’s experience when actually we do not” (p. 56). In situations where we do not have the knowledge, understanding, and experience to engage in other-oriented perspective taking, Coplan (2011) advises it is best to recognize that “we are sometimes incapable of genuine empathy, rather than making the assumption that we know what the other is going through just because we know what we would be going through in some similar situation” (p. 56). This distinction between pseudo empathy as self-oriented perspective taking and genuine empathy as other-

oriented perspective taking is critical to the discourse on empathy arising from aesthetic engagement with literature. Is the idea that a reader can *get* the experience of a person who differs from them ethnically, socially, and culturally, and in a different place and time, because they have engaged with a fictional portrayal of other and experience based on the assumption that what a reader experiences is genuine empathy when it is actually self-oriented perspective taking or pseudo empathy?

Of significance to this study, Coplan (2011) distinguishes between empathic and personal distress as an aspect of empathy. In instances of empathic distress, the observer experiences the distress of another as a vicarious simulation and is able to maintain focus on the other. Personal distress, as a feature of pseudo empathy, occurs when a person observing the distress of another reacts by becoming distressed themselves and shifts to focus on efforts aimed at alleviating their own discomfort. In this case, a person can lose sight of the fact the observed experience is that of another, not their own, and can become completely focused on their own reaction and desire for relief, according to Coplan (2011).

Coplan (2011) finds pseudo empathy, although frequently motivated by concern for another and a desire to understand, is associated with “personal distress, false consensus effects, and general misunderstandings of the other” (p. 57). She concludes that:

When we imagine ourselves in another person’s situation, it frequently results in inaccurate predictions and failed simulations of the other’s thoughts, feelings, and desires. It also makes us more likely to become emotionally overaroused and, consequently, to focus solely on our own experiences. (p. 57)

Her explication of pseudo empathy as self-oriented and genuine empathy of other-oriented perspective taking is significant to an exploration of experiential phenomenon related to fiction reading, especially reading for reconciliation. Megan Boler (1997) explores the semiotics of empathy in reader engagement with fiction as literary representations of the power relationships inherent in society and culture.

“Empathy is produced within networks of power relations represented by reader and text, mediated by language, narratives, genres and metaphors” (p. 261).

Boler (1997) suggests that although literature prompts identification and emotional engagement, and positions the reader to witness the experience of others, it does not necessarily motivate “reflection or action, either about the production of meaning, or about one’s complicit responsibility within historical and social conditions” (p. 261). In her research with readers, Boler (1997) recognizes the “desire to occupy a particular space of empathic identification” (p. 260). She delineates empathic emotions on a scale of identification between self and other. This aligns with the concept of self- and other-oriented perspective taking Coplan (2011) defines as pseudo versus genuine empathy. For Boler (1997), passive empathy is characterized by “concern directed to a fairly distant other, whom we cannot directly help” (p. 257). Passive empathy arises out of “the denial of power relations” (p. 261). “What is at stake is not only the ability to empathize with the very distant other, but to recognize oneself as implicated in the social forces that create the climate of obstacles the other must confront” (p. 263). Boler (1997) suggests testimonial reading as a practice to bring intentionality to self-reflection and a sense of awareness to the relative position of power afforded by the act of reading itself. Boler (1997) provides a clear sense of the risks involved in reading literature in isolation from the fullness of its historical and contemporary sociocultural context. Hanson (2017) raises similar concerns regarding encounters with Indigenous Literatures in non-Indigenous spaces. Both authors consider the act of reading in relation and in context.

### Reader Response Theory and the Experience of Reading for Pleasure

Reader response theory characterizes the act of reading as a transaction between reader and text in which a reader draws on prior personal experience and previously acquired knowledge to construct and interpret meaning from a text (Rosenblatt, 1978; Ross, 1999). Prior to theory carving out the role of readers, meaning was presumed to be as fixed as the words printed on the pages of a book—

set, prescribed, permanent. It is now understood that a reader, suffused with lived experiences, memories, thoughts, and feelings, enters a new experience ushered in by “the ordered symbols of the text” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 12). This new experience is then swept up into the full rush of life and becomes the substance of cognition, memory, reflection, and affect (Rosenblatt, 1978). Readers use personal experience to construct meaning from a text and use the same text to make sense of their lives through a reciprocal transaction (Ross, 1999). Reader response theory aligns with an ontological perspective of reality as pluralistic, relational, and contextual, and with an epistemological drive to explore, examine, interpret, and understand the phenomena of reading and shared-reading experiences in the context of reconciliation and decolonization.

Raymond Mar and Keith Oatley (2008) expand on the concepts of reader response theory and assert “stories are abstractions and thus rely on the participation of the reader in order to be completely comprehensible” (p. 178). Research by the authors, and others (see, for example, Djikic et al., 2013), suggests narrative fiction sparks vivid imagery and prompts autobiographical memories in a reader more than other text forms (p. 178). A reader’s memories, in turn, support imagery suggested by the text and facilitate narrative engagement (p. 180). Research points to the function of fiction narratives to expose readers to characters, cultures, and circumstances beyond their own personal experience, and, at times, beyond what is possible for the reader to experience (Baron, 2015; Davis, 2008; Hoggan & Cranton, 2015; Jarvis, 2006, 2012; Johnson, 2013; Lawrence & Cranton, 2015; MacAdam, 1995; Mar & Oatley, 2008). Literature is described as rich context in which to explore relationships, emotions, and motivations (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Boler, 1997; Dewan, 2013; Johnson, 2013; Mar & Oatley, 2008; Oatley, 1999).

The findings of my master’s thesis suggest reading triggers autobiographical memories, and the binding of lived experience to abstractions in the fiction narrative transports readers into the story, creating an experience that is a hybrid of both (Bartlett, 2017). The affective response of participants to

the novel *Indian Horse* by Richard Wagamese (2012) was largely characterized by empathic distress expressed as shame, horror, anger, and sorrow. During the book discussion, participants wove back and forth between their personal life experience and their reading experience. New perspectives, understanding, and awareness garnered from the book combined with reflection on personal experience to culminate in moments of individual reflexivity during the group discussion. “For some, the book both signalled and mediated change, and the social forum of the book club became the epicenter for cultural work enacted as prosocial behaviour in their daily lives” (Bartlett, 2017, p. 3).

Mar and Oatley (2008) study the cognitive and affective experience of readers as they predict, infer, and derive meaning, and suggest fiction functions “to abstract social information so that it can be better understood, generalized to other circumstances, and acted upon” (p. 173). Jarvis (2012) finds the use of literary devices such as symbolism, metaphor, and imagery make apparent “new patterns and connections in the world, stimulating our imaginative faculties and expanding our perceptions” (p. 486). Reading holds the potential to disrupt and connect (Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2014; Long, 1986, 1993, 2003; Wagamese, 2016), give rise to insights and personal truths (Oatley, 1999), and elicit visceral and vicarious experiences (Armstrong, 2013; Jarvis, 2012). Fiction readers can become completely engaged in a story (Leavy, 2018), immersed, absorbed, or lost in a book (Nell, 1988). Research by Matthijs Bal and Martijn Veltkamp (2013) and Dan Johnson (2013), labels this as transportation, observed as a high level of cognitive engagement, emotional involvement, and vivid imagery. Studies by the scholars indicate a capacity for reading to foster and facilitate empathy and identify transportation as a predictive factor for the emotion. The significance of empathy lies in the positive correlation between high levels of the emotion and prosocial behaviours (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Johnson, 2013).

Research also indicates fiction narratives create a space and sense of safety to explore aspects of reality that pose a challenge to a reader’s beliefs, attitudes, and values (Davis, 2008; Hoggan & Cranton, 2015; Jarvis, 2006, 2012; Lawrence, 2012). Chad Hoggan and Patricia Cranton (2015) find fiction reading

prompts meaningful critical reflection within the space between reader and the experience of fictional characters that mitigates the threat to a sense of self (p. 22). They find that study participants experience a desire for change that translates into action, establishes new, more inclusive perspectives, and provokes re-evaluation and revision of beliefs and values. As a result of the findings, Hoggan and Cranton (2015) suggest “the power of fiction lies in its potential to provide an intellectual and emotional catalyst by which readers can fully engage in processes that are at once empathic, as well as reflective and imaginative” (p. 20). Reading fiction carries the potential to disrupt and act as a catalyst to learning that transforms (Davis, 2008; Hoggan & Cranton, 2015; Jarvis, 2006, 2012; Lawrence, 2012; Lawrence & Cranton, 2015). Randee Lipson Lawrence (2012) describes the arts as “a way to expand the boundaries of how we learn by evoking strong emotion and provoking us to sit up and take action against injustice” (p. 482).

Reading fiction is potentially disruptive and may serve as a catalytic force for transformative learning (Davis, 2008; Hoggan & Cranton, 2015; Jarvis, 2006, 2012; Lawrence & Cranton, 2015). Christine Jarvis (2012) articulates the process of transformation prompted by fiction:

Standing back and seeing the world, with its values, assumptions, and ways of being, laid bare as a piece of fiction can be a profoundly disorienting dilemma. It challenges viewers and readers to face the social construction of reality, shaking sociocultural and epistemic assumptions. (p. 493)

In her study of fictional literature and film, Jarvis (2012) finds transformative learning emerges from the capacity for fiction to stimulate powerful responses via “concrete manifestations of our semi- or unconscious fears and desires, stimulating powerful responses. When we engage with them, we may come to a fuller awareness of them and a better understanding of ourselves” (p. 492).

Evidence in the research literature on reading points to the potential for engaging with Indigenous Literatures to disrupt hegemonic perspectives, power dynamics, and assumed social structures regarding the relationship between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples. Reading

Indigenous-authored fiction is viewed in this context as a provocation for critical reflection to question the world we live in, and critical self-reflection to question the role we play in that world. Fiction has the capacity to prompt the critical reflection and critical self-reflection Mezirow (1997, 2000, 2011, 2012) deems as requirements for transformative learning. Jarvis (2006) views fiction to be potentially disruptive and aligned with Mezirow's (2000) concept of a disorienting dilemma. According to Jarvis (2006), "fiction offers scope for imagining alternatives—different resolutions to familiar problems, alternative lifestyles, and moral choices" (p. 76), and this ability to think beyond unexamined assumptions is the basis for transformative learning. She contends the potential for transformative learning is greater if the literature resonates with the reader and is "related to important issues in their own lives" (p. 76). I suggest that reconciliation and decolonization, as current social, cultural, and political issues in Nova Scotia, prime readers of Indigenous Literatures for transformative learning.

#### Reading as a Social Activity

The social nature of reading is a focus of study for many scholars (see, for example, Baron, 2015; Collins, 2010; Collinson, 2009; Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2014; Long, 1986, 1993, 2003; Ross, 1999; Ross et al., 2006). Shared reading is enacted in book clubs, reading groups, and large-scale community reading events. When individual readers convene to share their experience of the same novel, reading groups can become sites of significant cultural work (Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2014; Long, 1986, 1993, 2003). Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo (2014) define a book club as a social group in which members meet on a regular basis to repeat and reconceive their individual reading experience by listening to and engaging with the emotional and cognitive reading experience of others. Fuller and Rehberg Sedo (2014) further posit shared reading events serve as sites to:

explore ideas and experiences that unsettle normative social relations, official histories, and institutional structures. In such circumstances, the book itself is a social artifact, and the shared reading of it becomes a form of cultural mediation that is not only ideologically dynamic and

disruptive but also potentially creative and even politically empowering in terms of permitting citizens agency. (p. 17–18)

Elizabeth Long's (1986, 1993, 2003) ethnographic research on the historical and contemporary practices of women's reading groups points to the potential for collective reading as a vehicle for social and cultural change. Long (1986) explores shared reading by middle-class women in the late twentieth century and identifies reader response theory as the theoretical underpinning "for investigations of the cultural work accomplished by readers in interaction with text" (p. 593). She stakes out the importance of such groups and contends that "books both provide a signal that people must come to terms with change, and mediate between people directly involved in activism or analysis and those who feel the impact of social change more subtly or more indirectly in the routines of daily life" (p. 600). This assertion by Long (1986) provides the impetus to investigate the lived experience of reading literatures written by Indigenous authors. Viewing another culture through a lens of its own making has the potential to create new insight and perspective on how people perceive the world and their experience in it.

Long (2003) contends the study of book clubs contributes to our understanding of meaning-making and the actions that follow (p. xvi). She positions the formation and the ensuing activity of shared-reading groups as cultural practices and "creative behaviors that bring people into new relationships with themselves, each other, and the enviroing social world" (p. xvi). Long (2003) argues for reading as a social practice, and states, "if books become the language through which people narrate their own experience and understand the experience of other group members, conversation can show considerable insight and innovative understanding" (p. xviii). She further suggests this insight and understanding can lead book club members to critically evaluate social order, and finds such critical dialogue supports group members in dealing with inconsistencies between social structures and their lived experience. Long (2003) concludes that "book discussions can—but do not always—lead group

members toward creative and expansive appraisals of social ‘others’ as well as of their own historical situation and life choices” (p. xviii).

Long (2003) and Kimberly Davis (2008) agree regarding the potential to develop new awareness and perspective, not the certainty. Davis’ (2008) ethnographic research challenges the view that “cross-racial identification and sympathy” largely constitutes “symbolic annihilation of the other” (p. 156). She analyzes discussions that took place within 21 book clubs comprised primarily of white members, and that centred on African American-authored novels. Davis (2008) acknowledges the risk that white readers may commodify and consume racial identity and experience as they take up black and ethnic-centric literature but asserts such “readership cannot simply be dismissed as a form of imperialism that reasserts the status quo” (p. 156).

Although not presented as such, Davis’ (2008) study is laced with threads of transformative learning theory. She describes “radically destabilizing” (p. 157) empathy as part of both the reading and discussion experience, echoing the notion of a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1997, 2000, 2011, 2012), or catalyst (Hoggan & Cranton, 2015; Lawrence & Cranton, 2015). Davis (2008) also reports white readers, moved by the experience of fictional black characters, undergo a “self-critical unmasking of white-skin privilege” (p. 157). This statement speaks to critical self-reflection and critical reflection as study participants question the assumptions that structure their personal beliefs, attitudes, and actions, as well as the role they play in broader social, cultural, and political systems (Brookfield, 2000; Mezirow, 1997, 2000, 2011, 2012; Taylor, 2009, 2011; Hoggan & Cranton, 2015; Lawrence & Cranton, 2015).

Davis’ (2008) study aligns closely with this phenomenological exploration of the lived experience of settler readers who engage individually and collectively with the Indigenous-authored fiction novel *Celia’s Song* by Lee Maracle (2014). Davis (2008) finds the lines between private and public spheres overlap as the personal and emotional act of reading becomes the basis for book club discussions linking the text to broader social, cultural, and political issues. Ian Collinson (2009) also

investigates contemporary reading practices and suggests the formation of informal sociocultural networks through the shared consumption of books is another aspect of reading culture that extends outside the text. Collinson (2009) finds a reader's engagement with a book continues and expands beyond the text as they discuss it with others (p. 88). Rather than privileging the text as the arbiter of meaning, he situates the reader as active meaning-maker, and both illustrates and illuminates the social nature of contemporary book reading.

Catherine Ross et al. (2006) also examine reading as a social activity, beginning with a review of the history of reading groups from the nineteenth century on to support the notion that book clubs are not a new entity. The authors describe the social infrastructure of reading, echoing Long (1993) when they assert reading "is taught within a web of social relations and the practice of reading is sustained by conversations about books" (p. 224). Ross et al. (2006) infer all aspects of reading are socially mediated and serve as a means by which to connect to others and engage with the world.

Many researchers find reading groups privilege books that provoke personal, affective responses (Addington, 2001; Barstow, 2003; Berg, 2008; Long, 1986; Ross et al., 2006). Ann Addington (2001), Temma Berg (2008), and Jane Barstow (2003) specifically investigate reading practices in academic versus book club settings. Addington (2001) credits the book club setting with "creating a forum for egalitarian, exploratory talk that allow[s] students to make connections among texts, among people, and between texts and human experience" (p. 242). She finds the academic class setting provides more knowing with regard to the author, characters, structure of the narrative, and genre, whereas the book club discussion creates stronger personal connection to the text and demonstrates "the power of collaborative sharing about literature and life" (p. 242).

Berg (2008) explores the subtle, complex differences between reading in and out of school. Her observations suggest book club members "seek intellectual stimulation but not at the expense of enjoyment" (p. 146). She contends book clubs provide opportunities for "personal insight, and collective

support in dealing with the stresses of everyday life” (p. 146), corroborating research by Long (1986, 1993) and Barstow (2003). Berg (2008) concludes that “book clubs, spaces where authority can be neutralized, offer us unexpected and indispensable laboratories for observing collective reading,” and notes they are “places where lives are intentionally plotted, and literature is richly lived” (p. 151). Where Berg (2008) observes literature richly lived, however, Barstow (2003) sees unrealized literary potential in book clubs. Barstow (2003) suggests reading by book groups offers a narrow slice of life and tends to support rather than challenge the preconceived notions of group members. She notes “the power of more radical texts to exercise our decoding skills and enable a fuller understanding of language and culture” (p. 16). The author recommends book groups maximize their potential by choosing less conventional texts, digging deeper to mediate meaning, and recruiting more diverse members.

A broad convergence of political, cultural, and social forces is currently bringing Indigenous Literatures to the fore. In the past, these same forces have silenced the oral narratives of Indigenous Peoples. The publication industry, distribution channels, and marketplace practices determine what is available to read (Chartier, 1994; Long, 1986; Radway, 1997), and “collective and institutional processes shape reading practices by authoritatively defining what is worth reading and how to read it” (Long, 1993, p. 192). Anouk Lang (2012) further suggests that online retail sites position book buyers as “literary critics and discerning members of an imagined community of other readers” (p. 10), and that reader views, lists, and purchasing analytics serve to confirm and socially validate readers’ book selections. I extrapolate these concepts of online book-buying behaviour to the current interest in reading literary works by Indigenous authors. In this line of thinking, the hash tag #IndigenousReads, CBC Radio’s list of Indigenous-authored books, and the federal government’s declaration of June as Indigenous Book Club Month, combine to create real and imaged communities of readers, affirmed in their selection of genre and book, and imbued with social and cultural capital.

Episkenew (2009) in her examination of Indigenous Literatures, and Megan Sweeney (2010) in her historical account of reading in the United States penal system, demonstrate the power relationships that exist in reading cultures, and portray the uses, values, and impact of reading. The work of both authors alludes to the value of reading literature penned by people whose voices have been quieted or silenced; a concept that is supported by scholars who have examined the lived experience of solitary readers (Collinson, 2009; Hodgson & Thomson, 2000; Radway, 1997; Rosenblatt, 1978; Ross, 1999) as well as readers who share interpretation of texts in a social setting (Addington, 2001; Barstow, 2003; Berg, 2008; Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2014; Konchar Farr, 2008; Long, 1986, 1993; MacAdam, 1995). Other scholars investigate reading on psychological (Nell, 1988), physiological and cognitive (Armstrong, 2013; Baron, 2015; Beglar, Hunt, & Kite, 2012; Dehaene, 2009) levels as well as the specific influence of fiction reading on empathy (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Boler, 1997; Djikic et al., 2013; Johnson, 2012, 2013; Koopman, 2015; Mar & Oatley, 2008; Oatley, 1999). Collectively they paint a detailed portrait of the ability of the human brain to transform symbols on a page into an intellectual, emotional, visceral, and vicarious experience—essentially, the opportunity to see the world through the eyes of another (Baron, 2015). Individual and collective engagement with Indigenous Literatures holds the potential to create awareness and understanding in settler readers, to evoke a response to the TRC's call to think and act in new ways, and ultimately to “advance social justice, to heal the wounds of oppression, and to reconcile our communities” (Episkenew, 2009, p. 194). To think and act in new ways is, in essence, to transform.

### Transformative Learning Theory

*Transformative learning is “the creative function of cognitive crisis.”*

— Edmund O’Sullivan, 2012, p. 171

The body of literature on transformative learning research, theory, and practice is rich, extensive, and diverse (see, for example, Brookfield, 2000, 2012; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Hoggan &

Cranton, 2015; Kitchenham, 2008; Lawrence, 2012; Lawrence & Cranton, 2015; Mälkki, 2010; Merriam & Kim, 2012; Mezirow, 1997, 2000, 2011, 2012; O'Sullivan, 2002, 2012; Schapiro, Wasserman, & Gallegos, 2012; Stuckey, Taylor, & Cranton, 2013; Taylor, 2009, 2011; Taylor & Snyder, 2012). Transformative learning theory, articulated by Jack Mezirow in 1978, has received intense examination from education researchers, theorists, and practitioners. Patricia Cranton and Edward Taylor (2012) state unequivocally that "no other theory of adult learning has experienced as much research, controversy, and promise" (p. 16). Transformative learning is a theory in progress (Cranton, 2006; Kitchenham, 2008; Lawrence & Cranton, 2015; Mezirow, 2011) and is evolving in many educational contexts.

Mezirow (2000) states that "[a]s there are no fixed truths or totally definitive knowledge, and because circumstances change, the human condition may be best understood as a continuous effort to negotiate contested meanings" (p. 3). This statement summarizes the concept of transformation as perpetual human endeavour to grow and evolve in, through, within constructed meaning.

Transformative learning is theorized, within the context of adult learning, as a significant shift in perspective based on reflection and assessment of problematic assumptions, leading to revised beliefs, attitudes, and values that are subsequently justified, validated, and acted upon (Brookfield, 2000; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Hoggan & Cranton, 2015; Kitchenham, 2008; Lawrence & Cranton, 2015; Mälkki, 2010; Mezirow, 1997, 2000, 2011, 2012; Taylor, 2009, 2011). Mezirow (2000) describes the adult learning process specifically as "a phased and often transformative process of meaning becoming clarified through expanded awareness, critical reflection, validating discourse, and reflective action as one moves towards a fuller realization of agency" (p. 25). Transformative learning, therefore, is a process by which we learn to think and act in new ways. It is, according to Edmund O'Sullivan (2012), "the creative function of cognitive crisis" (p. 171).

The depth and breadth of transformative learning theory and practice is evidenced in the literature (see, for example, Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 2011). As author of the original theory,

Mezirow (2011) provides a state-of-the-theory overview and presents transformative learning as evolving theory with a clear set of principles applicable to many educational contexts. Transformative learning theory focuses on a critical dimension of adult learning that allows the recognition, reassessment, and modification of the assumptions that structure and frame our points of view and guide what we think, how we feel, behave, and act (Mezirow, 2011, p. 18). Transformative learning theory is pivotal to the lived experience of reading Indigenous Literatures as we are called to think and act in new ways in order to establish and maintain mutually respectful relationships (Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation, 2015). To think and act in new ways is, in essence, to transform.

Mezirow's (2011) description of communicative learning as dialogue involving "dialectical and critically reflective thinking" (p. 20), based on the work of Jürgen Habermas (1991), is specifically relevant to this research endeavour. Mezirow (2011) cites the requirements for exemplary discourse reflecting the democratic ideals of respect for self and others, and a willingness to engage openly in diversity (p. 20). These concepts figure prominently in the phenomenological exploration of the lived experience of individual and relational engagement with Indigenous-authored fiction. Reading prompts critical reflection and critical self-reflection, and book clubs provide a dialogic venue to repeat and reconceive individual experiences with other readers who have engaged with the same text (Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2014). This creates a milieu with the potential for further critical reflection and critical self-reflection through dialogue regarding the assumptions that structure the meaning perspectives that ultimately shape a reader's beliefs, attitudes, and actions.

Also of significance to this research is Taylor's (2011) distinction between two theoretical frameworks of transformative learning. The first places emphasis on personal transformation and growth and entails critical self-reflection and dialogue around the assumptions that influence beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours. Lawrence and Cranton (2015) further delineate personal transformation as both rational, or cognitive, and extrarational, or affective (p. 2). The second theoretical orientation links

personal transformation to social transformation through awareness, individual agency, and ideological critique. With respect to this research endeavour, both theoretical perspectives of transformative learning lend to the phenomenological exploration of individual and relational engagement with Indigenous-authored fiction. Reading for reconciliation implies a personal experience that can lead to critical reflection, critical self-reflection, and dialogue with other readers that potentially situates the experience within a broader social, cultural, and political context as re-evaluated assumptions are tested, justified, validated, and enacted.

Reflection is identified in the literature as a pivotal aspect of transformative learning (Brookfield, 2000; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Hoggan & Cranton, 2015; Kitchenham, 2008; Lawrence & Cranton, 2015; Mälkki, 2010; Mezirow, 1997, 2000, 2011, 2012; Taylor, 2009, 2011). Kaisu Mälkki (2010) theorizes the nature and prerequisites of reflection in an attempt to redress the focus on cognitive and rational aspects of reflection over affective and relational dimensions, a key criticism of transformative learning theory as formulated by Mezirow (Kitchenham, 2008; Mälkki, 2010). Mälkki (2010) constructs a new theory to conceptualize challenges to reflection based on a close analysis of transformative learning theory, and the neurobiological theory of emotions and consciousness posited by Antonio Damasio (1994, 1999, 2003). She isolates elements of each theory that pertain specifically to reflection to describe the propensity for “biologically anchored emotions” (p. 56) to support a consistent meaning perspective and therefore act as a counterforce to reflection. I suggest Mezirow (2000) points to this concept when he states that “[a] defining condition of being human is our urgent need to understand and order the meaning of our experience, to integrate it with what we know to avoid the threat of chaos” (p. 3).

Mälkki (2010) labels the uncomfortable feelings aroused by recognition and assessment of problematic assumptions as “edge-emotions” (p. 49). She contends that “the essential issue is to pay attention to these emotions as physical and psychological indications of our thinking possibly being

oriented not toward openly examining the situation or ourselves in it but on the contrary toward restoring balance and returning to the comfort zone” (pp. 56–57). Mälkki (2010) provides an interesting, biological perspective from which to explore the cognitive, emotional, and embodied dimensions of reflection as a key component in transformative learning as readers engage with Indigenous Literatures as individuals. Becoming aware of the emotional and embodied processes at play supports the possibility of shifting out of a space of avoidance and into a space of allowing the discomfort that arises during reading encounters that disorient, disrupt, and challenge. The work of Mälkki (2010) deepens understanding of the emotional and embodied dimensions of reflection prompted by reading, specifically reading imbued with social, cultural, and political significance, and packed with potential to provoke intellectual, affective, and embodied responses that confront a reader’s assumptions, beliefs, values, and behaviours.

Through a phenomenological research lens, Mälkki and Larry Green (2014) extend understanding of edge-emotions and comfort zone, and introduce liminality as an experiential dimension of transformative learning. The authors position the process of transformation as an “existential challenge” (p. 7) and “a journey through liminality” (p. 8). They identify liminality as a transitional phase and highlight the difficulties experienced “in a state between two sets of meaning frameworks” (p. 8)—the established meaning framework and the one not yet fully perceived, conceived, or received. Mälkki and Green (2014) describe this as a letting go and a giving up of the “relative stability of one configuration (of self) in preparation for a new way of being” (p. 8). In other words, the sense of relative stability—the ability to rest in knowing—can be destabilized by some phenomenon that draws attention to the fundamental truth that all meaning perspectives—all configurations of self—are, in fact, changeable and changing. Knowledge is contextual, which makes it complex, often contradictory, and always impermanent. As Lorri Neilsen Glenn (2002) attests, “[k]nowledge, like fiction itself, is liminal

space. It never arrives. It is always on the brink. It is always a waiting space, a green room, ... a journey” (p. 208).

Like Mälkki (2010) and Mälkki and Green (2014), Lawrence and Cranton (2015) posit new theory in order to extend and expand understanding. The authors link fiction with transformative learning and enter into new territory for theoretical research as they access the cognitive, affective, and embodied experience of seven fictional characters and extend them beyond the confines of print to act as participants in fictional focus group dialogues. Their exploration of the nature of transformative learning through contemporary fiction novels highlights the depth of fictional characters and their holistic portrayal in text. To explain the unorthodox methodology, Lawrence and Cranton (2015) contend that “arts-based research challenges and expands the dominant paradigm of what constitutes research and what counts as research data” (p. 3). Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2005) characterize qualitative research as “endlessly creative and interpretive” (p. 26), and further argue that participants “are seldom able to give full explanations of their actions or intentions; all they can offer are accounts, or stories, about what they have done and why” (p. 21). Given that reality is socially constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Jarvis, 2012) as is meaning (Brookfield, 2000; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Dewey, 1938/2015; Freire, 1970/2018; Mezirow, 1997, 2000, 2011, 2012; Taylor, 2009, 2011), it is perhaps not so far of a stretch to extend fictional characters, as imaginative constructs based on reality, from page to participant. Lawrence and Cranton (2015) state that “[g]ood fiction reflects the lives of real people and helps us to interpret events in our own lives” (p. 2).

Lawrence and Cranton (2015) explore the nature of transformative learning as portrayed in fiction narratives by extending seven fictional characters beyond the pages of six contemporary novels and into virtual focus group sessions with the researchers and the other characters. The methodological risk is balanced by the extensive experience and deep theoretical knowledge of both Lawrence and Cranton that is evident in the research process and outcome. The authors position transformation as a

process of authenticity and suggest that “[w]e forge new identities by embracing who we were all along, but the knowledge of who we are or what we are capable of is hidden from our conscious awareness” (p. 73). In this respect, the process of transformation is as much about unveiling what already unconsciously exists as it is about becoming something new.

Through an emergent research process, Lawrence and Cranton (2015) structure a new model for transformative learning based on a gardening metaphor to reflect the notion of transformation as growth (p. 61). In the model, a seed represents the catalyst that contains the impetus for transformation. Germination takes place in its own time, or not at all, depending on a variety of factors that stimulate, slow, or stop growth (p. 61). Lawrence and Cranton (2015) purposefully locate the act of becoming conscious at the core of the model to signify its centrality to the process of transformative learning. The authors use the term *catalyst*, rather than “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22), to capture the initiation of transformative learning in a broader theoretical perspective, and to retain the concept of both dramatic and incremental processes at play. The authors also identify influential contextual factors and personal characteristics in becoming conscious, and suggest relationships factor largely in transformation, both its facilitation and its hinderance (p. 76). The role of relationships speaks to the relational and social nature of reading and book club participation. The research presented by Lawrence and Cranton (2015) prompts questions regarding how reading group relationships may influence, support, challenge, or discourage transformation. It also provides a clear and logical model of transformational growth to phenomenologically explore the lived experience of engaging with Indigenous Literatures individually and collectively in the context of settler-colonial lifeworlds.

Of specific relevance to this study, Lawrence and Cranton (2015) point to relationships and affect as significant, influencing factors for transformative learning. Mezirow’s (1991, 1997, 2000, 2011, 2012) theorization is often critiqued for being limited to the cognitive aspects of individual changes in self. A close reading of his work, however, confirms a clear appreciation of individuals as holistic,

relational beings, and “the crucial role of supportive relationships and a supportive environment in making possible a more confident, assured sense of personal efficacy” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 25).

Acknowledgement of the relational and affective aspects of transformative learning is important to an exploration of settler readers of Indigenous-authored fiction, their individual cognitive, emotional, and embodied response, as well as their experience discussing the text in a group setting.

From a broader perspective, constructivist, humanist, and critical social theory assumptions converge to forge a holistic perspective of transformative learning and highlight “a tension between individual and societal change” (Cranton & Taylor, 2012, p. 17). O’Sullivan (2002) explicates the process of transformation in depth and breadth:

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race, and gender; our body awarenesses, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy. (p. 11)

The encompassing description offered by O’Sullivan (2002) illustrates transformative learning as an embodied, relational, contextual experience that flows through *and* connects the constructed, natural, and spiritual spheres of human existence. This definition offers much to explore experientially through a phenomenological lens.

O’Sullivan (2012) situates transformative learning as “an imperative to survive, critique, and create” (p. 165), and points to the denial, despair, and grief that characterize the survival task. As a protective response, denial mitigates the feeling of being overwhelmed by the complex issues we face. Once denial gives way to awareness, a sense of despair rushes in, followed by grief for the loss now

clearly perceived. Although O'Sullivan (2012) is coming from a perspective of human survival in an ecological sense, his description of denial, despair, and grief resonates with the findings of my master's thesis research. Participants experienced aspects of denial, despair, and grief presented as articulated feelings of anger, sorrow, horror, guilt, and shame triggered by reading and discussing the novel *Indian Horse* by Richard Wagamese (Bartlett, 2017). I interpreted this as a "deep, structural shift" (O'Sullivan, 2002, p. 11) in thoughts and feelings triggered by Wagamese's (2012) fictional account of the experience of residential school. This intense emotional response characterized the individual reading experience and dominated the initial discussion during the book club session.

As the discussion progressed, however, the discourse took on a reflective tone as the participants shared childhood experiences, focusing especially on their early education with respect to Indigenous history, traditions, and culture. At this point, some participants experienced moments of reflexivity, and most critiqued the dominant ideology, culture, and power structures that produce and perpetuate injustice and inequality. Finally, the discussion turned to feasible individual action with respect to reconciliation. For many of the participants, a sense of efficacy within their own familial and social spheres led to commitments to share the novel, and their experience of it, with as many others as possible. They also spoke about conversations already engaged in that challenged family, friends, and colleagues to think and act differently. Reading and discussing an Indigenous-authored novel prompted transformative learning in these settler readers. A significant shift in perspective served to motivate "more inclusive and comprehensive ways of knowing, embracing, and integrating data of which [they] had been previously unconscious" (O'Sullivan, 2012, p. 171).

### Critical Theory and Transformative Learning

Stephen Brookfield (2012) demonstrates critical theory and transformative learning as interrelated processes. A tenet of critical theory is awareness and understanding that reality is socially and politically created, and actions, therefore, ideologically determined (p. 132). Brookfield (2012)

breaches transformative learning theory to extend it beyond a cognitive focus on self and aligns it to a social justice focus to disrupt and challenge ideology (p. 133). Brookfield (2012) maintains ideologies limit, and even prevent, the learning necessary for transformation to take place by means that we are not consciously aware of (p. 133). He champions a critical theory of adult learning focused on examining “the systems and forces that shape adults’ lives and oppose adults’ attempts to challenge ideology, recognize hegemony, unmask power, defend the lifeworld, and develop agency” (p. 135). This form of learning is about awakening consciousness and empowering action through human agency (p. 135). For Brookfield (2012), learning that is intrapersonal and relational must be enacted as a collective response that moves beyond subjective changes in personal perspectives (p. 136). Book clubs provide a forum for readers to further explore their personal response to a text in relation to the experience of other readers of the same text.

Educational theorists have long drawn on the arts as a trigger to transform. Maxine Greene (1995) recognizes the shared condition among all human beings regardless of the internal, or external, constructed aspects of self that deem us to be separate. She maintains, “we are called upon to use our imaginations to enter into [the] world [of another], to discover how it looks and feels from the vantage point of the person whose world it is” (pp. 3–4). Greene (1995) precisely describes the essence of story and its power to transport us into a narratively constructed world that is beyond our own life experience. The result can be the development of new understandings, perspectives, and insights. She further describes her aesthetic experience with works of art as being “plunged into all kinds of reconceiving and revisualizing. I find myself moving from discovery to discovery; I find myself revising, and now and then renewing, the terms of my life” (pp. 4–5).

Reading fiction written by Indigenous authors provides a window onto the life experience of Indigenous Peoples that is not easily accessible to settlers elsewhere. It offers a path to reconciliation and a means to begin the process from where we stand. O’Sullivan (2012) defines equifinality as the

existence of multiple paths to a single destination. “A corollary is that we begin where we are and in a way in which we are moved and able to begin” (p. 172). O’Sullivan (2012) characterizes transformation as learning buoyed by a sense of adventure, and suggests it be embraced as a journey “concerned with identifying what we need to learn to live well—ecologically, peacefully, and justly” (p. 176).

Transformative learning theory provides an educational framework for this phenomenological exploration of the experience of settler readers, and to analyze how “expanded awareness, critical reflection, validating discourse, and reflective action” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 25) triggered by Lee Maracle’s (2014) fiction novel, *Celia’s Song*, might converge to generate the impetus to think and act in new ways.

In the next chapter I explore phenomenology as a philosophy and a methodology. It is the path I chose to access experiential understanding and insight into what transformative learning is like for settler readers who engage with *Celia’s Song* (Maracle, 2014) individually and collectively within their established shared-reading group. Hermeneutic phenomenology constitutes an ontological turn in this research endeavour. It shifts the focus from what it is to *know* to what it is to *be*. Phenomenology, as methodology, centres the phenomenon of interest as it arises in consciousness—the *being* and *becoming*—as the space where all possibilities for transformation exist and await as “untested feasibility” (Freire, 1970/2018, p. 102). Through the research methods the reader-participants granted access to their lived experience. The interpretation and re-presentation of their experiencing was not determined by the theoretical and practice research literature that informed the theoretical framework for the study but, rather, illuminated it in ways that are expansive and pragmatic.

### Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

Constructivist and critical perspectives seek understanding of transformative learning through qualitative methodology as a pivotal means of exploring phenomena that transform through processes that are cognitive, rational, “complicated, personal, and often powerfully emotional” (Merriam & Kim, 2012, p. 68). Lived experience, accessed through those experiencing, storying, and making meaning becomes a rich resource to describe, explore, and interpret the breadth and depth of transformative learning. Merriam and Kim (2012) suggest a critical research approach to structure methodology to “assess the link between personal and social change and the power dynamics involved” (p. 68). This extends beyond a constructivist goal to understand experience into awareness and action on social justice and equity issues (p. 59). In the following section I explore phenomenology and the concept of research as praxis to situate and explicate the resonance and relevance of the methods employed in the study.

#### Phenomenology

*Wonder means seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary.*

— Max van Manen, 2015, p. 49

Phenomenology, as a sphere of philosophy and a research methodology oriented to the nature of phenomena in human experience (Aagaard, 2017; Creely, 2018; Ravitch & Riggan, 2017; Smith, 2018; van Manen, 2014, 2017a, 2017b; Vagle, 2018), is a viable approach to qualitative education research (Aagaard, 2017; Budd, 2012; Creely, 2018; Neubauer et al., 2019; Noon, 2018; Stolz, 2020; van Manen, 2014; Vagle, 2018). At its essence, phenomenology is the study of human consciousness (White & Lemieux, 2017), as well as a paradigmatic way of seeing and knowing (Eberle, 2014; Vagle, 2018). Vagle (2018) views phenomenology as “a way of being, becoming, living, and moving through the world” (p. xii), and positions it as an encounter arguing that humans experience a multitude of phenomenological encounters in any given day. Of these some “might go unnoticed, others faintly recognized, and a few

deeply felt—etched into our memories, our bodies, our beings, and our identities” (Vagle, 2018, p. xii). This phenomenological mindset resonates with research exploring what the transformative learning experience—those deeply felt moments of being and becoming—is like for settler readers who encounter and engage with Indigenous Literatures in cognitive, emotional, and embodied ways. As Kearns (2015) attests, “[r]ecognizing the wonder that surrounds us in life and art enriches our beings” (p. 117). The intent then of this research endeavour was to illuminate a specific reading experience to derive thoughtful, meaningful understanding and insights.

Edmund Husserl is cited as the philosopher who originated phenomenology at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and turned a new lens on the world (Eberle, 2014; Lemieux, 2020; Vagle, 2018, White & Lemieux, 2017). Husserl posited that a phenomenon is lived experience that takes place in the intentional relationship between a subject (a person) and an object or objects (everyone and everything other than the subject). The intentional, subjective consciousness of the experience or thing *is* the phenomenon (Eberle, 2014). Husserlian phenomenology unites the subjective and the objective, and consciousness from this perspective is always *of* something (Eberle, 2014; Vagle, 2018). In other words, “[i]f I perceive, think, feel, imagine—I always perceive something, think of something, feel something, imagine something” (Eberle, 2014, p. 185). Husserl further delineates the perceiving subject and the perceivable object or objects as two distinct aspects of any phenomenon (Eberle, 2014).

Phenomenology then becomes a focus on the relationships between the one experiencing and the object or objects of the experience—“with *how* objects are experienced, rather than *why*” (White & Lemieux, 2017, p. 3). Martin Heidegger, a student of Husserl, is acknowledged as the philosopher who joined phenomenology and hermeneutics in such a way that the two are difficult to distinguish in post-Husserlian phenomenology (Vagle, 2018). “For Heidegger, a phenomenon was not so much a ‘thing itself’ that resided in intentional consciousness, but was ‘brought into being’ in the day-to-day contextualized living in and through the world” (Vagle, 2018, p. 9). This shift in focus from what it is to

*know* (epistemology) to what it is to *be* (ontology) represented an ontological turn that centred *being* in philosophy and the social sciences (Vagle, 2018).

The phenomenality of a phenomenon arises only when we turn our attention to it by asking, *What is this lived experience like?* (van Manen, 2017b). The phenomenological term *lived experience* “names the ordinary and the extraordinary, the quotidian and the exotic, the routine and the surprising, the dull and the ecstatic moments and aspects of everyday experience as we live through them” (van Manen, 2017b, p. 813). Phenomena, observable as lived experiences, are the ways individuals find themselves being of, in, and moving through the world (Neubauer et al., 2019; Vagle, 2018). A phenomenological inquiry explores how a particular phenomenon manifests and appears, and individual research participants afford access to the manifestations and appearances of the phenomenon of interest. The unit of analysis in phenomenology then is the phenomenon, not the individual. “The philosophical assumption is that the individual is being, becoming, and moving through the lifeworld in intersubjective relationships with others and with intentional relationships with other things” (Vagle, 2018, p. 23). Mark Vagle (2018) stipulates that the purpose of phenomenological methodology is to study what it is like to be in relation to others and other things as we find ourselves in the experience. He notes that the verb *find* is intended to signal “a careful, reflexive, contemplative examination of how it is to *be* in the world” (p. 21). This clear sense of being in the world—the *in-ness* of lived experience—is also significant in that it places primacy on the context in which experience is lived and orients to hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology.

This study resonates with a triad of concepts that are fundamental to phenomenology as a philosophy and as a methodology for qualitative education research. The three concepts include 1) lifeworld, 2) intentionality, and 3) phenomenological reduction. First, the term *lifeworld* signifies the world of human experience as the context in and through which experience is lived and subjectively structured (Nicholls, 2019). The concept of lifeworld is a tenet of phenomenology and is understood as a

confluence of time, space, place, and relations in constant flux (Creely, 2018; Neubauer et al., 2019; Vagle, 2018). A focus on the lifeworld means interpreting observations and participant narratives within the context of lived experience to illuminate subjective understanding of being in the world as well as how that understanding influences thought and behaviour (Neubauer et al., 2019). Hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry extends beyond descriptive understanding to interpret aspects of experience that are externally observable, as well as aspects of experience revealed only through the narrative an individual composes as the product of the phenomenon and the lifeworld (Neubauer et. al., 2019). Brian Neubauer et al. (2019) assert that while subjective experience is inextricably linked to the lifeworld, it is not necessarily predetermined and an individual has latitude to make choices.

Neubauer et al. (2019) further contend that “individuals are understood as *always already* having an understanding of themselves within the world, even if they are not constantly, explicitly, and/or consciously aware of that understanding” (p. 94). This articulates a state of being unaware or unconscious to our own understanding and subsequently to the reasons we navigate lived experience the way we do. Husserl theorized the concept of *natural attitude* to signify the assumptive, unquestioning, uncritical way humans engage in and with the world (Eberle, 2014; Vagle, 2018). According to Vagle (2018), Husserl “called this attitude natural not because our own perceptions or perspectives were correct or accurate or good or bad, but because he felt this attitude assumed, or ... ‘made obvious,’ what we do, think, feel, and see day-to-day” (Vagle, 2018, p. 13). From a critical theory perspective, concern is noted regarding the use of the word *natural* as indicative of a “dominant and hegemonic assumption of truth—where the privileged get to determine what is natural and therefore what deviates” (Vagle, 2018, p. 13). I interpret the word *natural* in this context to mean attitudes that arise without conscious critique rather than attitudes that reflect or convey a single truth. The concept of a natural attitude ties into transformative learning that is theorized as a significant shift in perspective premised on reflection and critical self-reflection on the perspectives and beliefs we typically assume

and accept without challenge (Mezirow 1991, 1997, 2000, 2011, 2012). This shift in perspective leads to more open, inclusive, and just attitudes, beliefs, values, and actions. Broadly speaking, we are all enmeshed in an emerging, evolving lifeworld shaped by social, cultural, and political movements intent on challenging presumptive, hegemonic attitudes on issues of power, gender, race, and colonial systems.

The second tenet of phenomenology that resonates with the study is the concept of *intentionality*. For van Manen (2014), intentionality encompasses the notion “that all our thinking, feeling, and acting are always ‘about’ things in the world” (p. 91). In other words, the structure of all consciousness is intentional. Vagle (2018) concurs with this interpretation and adds that intentionality, as understood phenomenologically, signifies “how we are meaningfully connected to the world” (p. 28). It is not action-oriented as in having a purpose or rationale to do or achieve something. It encapsulates the notion that we are inseparably connected to others (experiencing subjects) and other things (experienced objects) in the world. This sense of interconnectedness is significant to the study as an exploration of what the experience of transformative learning is like for settler readers as they engage with Indigenous Literatures as individuals in and of the world, *and* in relation to the experience of other readers.

The concept of intentionality is interpreted differently by other researchers. For Claire Nicholls (2019), intentionality denotes the idea that consciousness is actional, meaning that it is as much about something one does as it is about something one is or has. Edwin Creely (2018) explicates this interpretation of intentionality further by stating that it “implies both a doing and a sense in doing, with both action and meaning experienced together, tacitly, in consciousness” (p. 109). Creely (2018) aligns his understanding of intentionality to education research by emphasizing that learning is situated in *and* expressed through the one experiencing. He finds the nature of learning to be complex and often subtle, with learning understood as a socio-cultural phenomenon enmeshed in contextual understandings,

discursive practices, and learning communities. The interpretation of intentionality as consciousness that is both sensing and doing is also important to the study of the experience of transformative learning that leads to thinking and acting in new, meaningful, and substantive ways.

Finally, the third concept that resonates with the study is *phenomenological reduction*. It is a fundamental method of phenomenological inquiry and involves reflection as a method to explore the spectrum of meaning of a lived experience to “gain an eidetic grasp, fundamental understanding, or inceptual insight” (van Manen, 2017b, p. 819). Phenomenological reduction is undertaken in two stages (Creely, 2018; Nicholls, 2019; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2014, 2017a, 2017b). The first, the *epoché* reduction, is an opening up to allow observation of all perspectives to gain a full appreciation of the lifeworld in and through which an experience is structured as it is lived. The second, the *eidetic* reduction, is a closing in on the aspects of a phenomenon that are essential for the experience to be as it is (Nicholls, 2019).

Nicholls (2019) points to *epoché*, *eidetic reduction*, *bracketing*, and *bridling* as terms used to denote notions of phenomenological reduction. She likens these concepts to the reflective, critical self-reflective, and reflexive practices broadly employed by qualitative researchers. Nicholls (2019) qualifies the reflective and reflexive skills under the umbrella of phenomenological reduction as practical, learned abilities essential to crafting a study in which a researcher meta-cognates. Meta-cognition—thinking about your own thinking—is fundamental to a study oriented as interpretive phenomenology and involves navigating various tensions in and between personal worldviews, theoretical frameworks, and relevant research literature (Nicholls, 2019). Nicholls (2019) defines reflexivity as “a practical skill and attitude by which a researcher is systematically aware of and attends to how knowledge is being constructed” (p. 2, attributed to Bloor & Wood, 2006). She proposes mindfulness as a practical skill to foster the ability to constantly return to and consciously maintain focus on the phenomenon under study amidst the absorbing, often distracting, mental activity of the research process.

For van Manen (2017a), epoché and eidetic reduction are the specific and essential devices that orient a researcher to phenomenological meaning and delineate a research approach designed to provide “genuine phenomenological understandings and insights” (p. 778). He notes that reflectiveness constitutes as phenomenological method to open up to the spectrum of possible meaning (epoché), and to close down or focus on particular phenomenological meaning as it appears, arises, or is somehow revealed (reduction). Vagle (2018) describes the practice of phenomenology as “a dance between reduction and reflexivity” (p. 14, citing Finlay, 2008), and defines reflexivity as ongoing, critical examination of researcher perspective, positionality, insight, and background, and the influence these exert on the entirety of a study. He finds that bracketing, as a way to practice phenomenological reduction, is undertaken routinely in descriptive phenomenology and less typically in the interpretive form of phenomenology undertaken in this study. Bridling, on the other hand, is a nuanced approach to phenomenological reduction that accounts for the lifeworld of the researcher by placing an emphasis on becoming more aware of and familiar with your personal perspectives rather than attempting to suspend or bracket them out (Nicholls, 2019; Vagle, 2018).

It is understood that what we know is based on what we experience (Creely, 2018; Eberle, 2014; Kovach, 2009; Neubauer et al., 2019; Nicholls, 2019; Vagle, 2018), and further that limitations inherent to observation and language filter our understanding of the lived experience of another (Aagaard, 2017; Eberle, 2014; van Manen, 2015). Yet, according to Thomas Eberle (2014), “[t]here is no approach that analyses the subjective perspective as concisely as phenomenology” (p. 200). The expanse of literature on phenomenology speaks to the plurality of the philosophy, and to the myriad of ways it is interpreted and expressed ontologically, epistemologically, and methodologically (Vagle, 2018). By purposefully engaging with a cross section of the literature on phenomenology broadly, and its application to qualitative education research specifically, I identified lifeworld, intentionality, and phenomenological reduction as the aspects of phenomenological philosophy and methodology most relevant to the study.

This triad of concepts is further emphasized in the methods used to gather phenomenological material and in the analytical approach that follows, all of which were undertaken with what Vagle (2018) describes as a phenomenological attitude—a mindset that is curious about what we typically take for granted.

### Research as Praxis

For this research endeavour, I assembled a concept of research as praxis using Indigenous perspectives of knowing (Michell, 2017) and reciprocity (McGregor & Marker, 2018), education philosophy (Dewey, 1938/2015; Freire, 1970/2018), and constructivist (Charmaz, 2005) and post-qualitative (Lather, 2017; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) research understandings as component parts. Concepts of praxis pervade critical social theory and research. With respect to ecological thought, Timothy Morton (2010) defines praxis as “action that is thoughtful and thought that is active” (p. 9). For Freire (1970/2018), “[t]here is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world” (p. 87). He makes clear the intent of his words by formulating word equals work equals praxis (p. 87). At one pole, a word without action becomes hollow verbalism that echoes and reverberates as “idle chatter” (p. 87), at once “alienated and alienating” (p. 87). At the opposite pole, a word minus reflection becomes inauthentic, ineffective activism. Drawing on Dewey’s (1938/2015) notion of learning as a “continuous spiral” (p. 79), I believe humanity continuously spirals on an axis between these two poles in an ongoing process of transformation as a means of adapting to an ever-changing world. In Canada, individual and collective learning is currently spiralling through emergent and relational processes of reconciliation and decolonization that continuously challenge people of settler ancestry to review and renew what they know and, importantly, what they do from where they stand. A relationship, whether it is to self, to another, or to the land, arises as an active expression of thought.

Heather McGregor and Michael Marker (2018) define decolonizing as the “ongoing processes of coming to know the ways that colonizing relations have shaped the conditions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous lives and relationships to land in the present” (p. 318). They emphasize that knowing must lead to doing grounded by ethical relationship and the re-centering of Indigenous interests. This reflects the TRC’s call to think and act in new ways, and to establish and maintain mutually respectful relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples as the essence of reconciliation. Patricia Lather (2017) argues for “research openly committed to a more just social order” (p. 71) as a form of praxis. She contends the feasibility of praxis rests on theory illuminating lived experience while it is illuminated by the experience. It requires the reciprocal relationship between theory and experience be explored, made explicit, and explicated. Research presents a “powerful opportunity for praxis” (Lather, 2017, p. 73) by encouraging self-reflection that leads both participant and researcher to a deeper level of awareness and understanding of self in relation and in context.

### Materials and Methods

This section articulates how the research question, theoretical framework, and methodology align, and demonstrates the appropriateness and rigour of the data collection methods used to provide “the raw material needed to explore” (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017, p. 5). The methods are the tools employed as strategic points of inquiry to put the research design into practice. In so much as hermeneutic phenomenology deals with interpreting meaning rather than simply describing content, the term *phenomenological material* is a more nuanced descriptor for what is typically labelled as data in the research process (van Manen, 2017b). “[M]ethodologically speaking, phenomenology does not rely on (numerical, coded, or objectifying) data but rather on data as ‘phenomenological examples’” (van Manen, 2017b, p. 813).

David Kember (2018) articulates the interrelatedness of theory, method, and paradigm. Methods evolve and emerge directly from how a research inquiry is theorized, and both theory and

methods are situated within a specific, clearly defined paradigm (p. 9). In alignment with my constructivist stance, the phenomenological methodology and methods of the study centred on dialogic material gathering methods including one-on-one interviews, a group discussion, and participant-generated reading journals as a point of inquiry focused specifically on intentional, individual reflection. The multiple methods were intended to structure a holistic approach to gathering phenomenological material centered on the lived experience of participants and flowed from the tenets of phenomenology that resonated with the study. Dialogic phenomenological material, audio recorded in interviews and a group discussion, was transcribed into a series of texts and looped through iterative cycles of writing, reflection, and interpretation to extend academic understanding to experiential insight into transformative learning as lived experience.

The methods were purposefully selected to focus on the process of transformative learning, and not transformation as an outcome; on the journey rather than the destination. This is significant since the process of transformative learning is often overshadowed in research and in practice by whether transformation has occurred as an outcome (Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Mälkki & Green, 2014). Hermeneutic phenomenology aligns with an inquiry that privileges an ontological focus on the nature of being and temporality with human beings viewed as agents in the world as opposed to an epistemological focus on the nature of knowledge and on human beings as knowers of phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019; Vagle, 2018). Hermeneutic or interpretive-oriented phenomenology pivots on the ontological assumption that lived experience is an interpretive process situated within the context of the one experiencing (Neubauer et al., 2019). The gathered phenomenological material flowed out of the lifeworlds of the participants and was intended to bring a new level of awareness, understanding, and insight to the experiential phenomenon of settler readers engaging with Indigenous Literatures. As prescribed by Vagle (2018), I endeavoured to practice humility in crafting and conducting this phenomenological inquiry:

the kind of humility whereby we turn ourselves over to openness, wonder, and inquiry ... the kind of humility we engage when we try to stop being so certain of what we know and think ... the kind of humility evinced when we truly consider new things. (p. xvi)

I also borrowed courage from the words of Lather (2008) who contends that “[t]o stumble and bumble and make mistakes is what it means to work the necessary tensions that structure research as praxis toward the production of new practices” (as cited in Lather, 2017, p. 79). For Lather (2017), research as praxis amounts to operating within a space of uncertainty, unsure of process or outcome, with rules and roles to be determined. It is a decentering of the research participant as “self-knowing subject,” and of the researcher as “the one who knows” (p. 80). This undoing of research roles created a space to engage in the process of research as praxis while also being and doing in the context of reconciliation and decolonization.

Journaling proved to be an invaluable reflective and reflexive practice as I undertook the research methods and engaged with the lived-experience of the reader-participants. The research journal served as a tool to process and document my experience as a researcher, as a settler, and as a reader. This research journal entry, for example, articulates a search for clarity in the methodology literature during a moment of uncertainty as I analyzed the initial interviews:

*Research journal entry Sunday, February 26, 2023. Vagle (2018) suggests positioning missteps in interviews as opportunities rather than mistakes. These missteps became clear as I read and reread the initial interview transcripts. Missed follow-up questions became glaringly obvious and interesting tangents revealed themselves as just that. Vagle (2018) advises “that we treat these moments as inevitable outcomes of choosing to craft phenomenological research” (p. 93). So, these moments are to be anticipated and embraced as part of the process of exploring and opening to lived experience with an appreciation that phenomena “come into being and in language as humans relate with things and one another” (Vagle, 2018, p. 43).*

This research journal excerpt, and the ones that follow, are formatted using italics in 1.5 line spacing to signal it as an iteration of thought as the research process unfolded.

### *Participants*

Seven research participants granted access to the lived experience of transformative learning for adults of settler ancestry who engaged with the fiction novel *Celia's Song* by Lee Maracle (2014), first as solitary readers and then as members of the same, existing shared-reading group. I was introduced to this group of readers by an academic colleague who was an acquaintance of a founding member of the reading group. Familiarity among the participants, as well as with the meeting location and discussion format, helped to maintain focus on the reading experience as they engaged collectively with the novel.

Six of the participants were geographically located in Nova Scotia. The seventh had moved to New Brunswick just prior to the start of the study. Both provinces are located within Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. I have an experiential, situated understanding of this place, space, and time as a person of settler ancestry that is relevant to describing, interpreting, and representing the lived experience of adult settler readers who live in the same place, space, and time. The seven reader-participants comprise a purposeful sample of avid readers who take part regularly in scheduled, structured events in which they mediate the meaning of a selected text, first as individual readers, and then within an interactive, dialogical group setting. Edward John Noon (2018, citing Clarke, 2010; Smith et al., 2009) advocates for small, concentrated samples of less than 10 participants for dissertation research. I gathered an abundance of phenomenological material through four access points to the lived reading experience of the seven study participants. This provided an opportunity to explore in-depth and render rich description (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) as the grist for analysis and interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation.

Originally, the number of consenting participants was nine. I was informed that one participant had withdrawn from the study by another member of the book club who returned her unread copy of the novel at the group discussion. This participant did not respond to an email requesting written confirmation of withdrawal as outlined in the signed Consent form. I chose not to include the material

gathered in the initial interview with her in this study. The other participant did not respond to multiple email and text messages requesting her to continue the research process or to confirm her withdrawal. Again, I chose not to include the material gathered in the initial interview, from her reading journal, or the incomplete follow-up interview since she did not complete her individual reading of the text or participate in the book club discussion. Neither participant offered an explanation for their decision to withdraw from the study.

Exploring aspects of the lifeworld of each participant is pivotal to interpretive-oriented phenomenological inquiry (Creely, 2018; Nicholls, 2019; Vagle, 2018). I began the process of coming to know the reading lifeworld of each participant with a one-on-one interview. This included gathering demographic details such as age, gender, education, and occupation (see Table 1, Appendix A). The reader-participants all self-identified as she/her and were between 50 and 69 years of age. The initial interview then expanded into early reading experience, a significant reading experience, a recent reading experience, shared-reading experience, and reconciliation as reading context as recalled, recounted, and rendered by each participant. This first one-on-one conversation also began the process of establishing a research relationship grounded in trust with the participant positioned as “fellow phenomenological explorer” (Creely, 2018, p. 107). The time and effort requested of participants for the purpose of this study was not considered onerous and aligned with their commitment to the shared-reading group. Participant involvement in the study spanned 3.5 months (mid-March to end of June, 2022) as the book club session was delayed to accommodate the schedules of group members. To protect the confidentiality of participants, I devised pseudonyms that were not shared with the individuals taking part. The names I assigned to the participants were drawn from three generations—ascending branches—of my family tree (Abbie, Eleanor, Helen, Holly, Flora, Letitia, and Rose). Using given names, rather than an identifying code, maintained my awareness of the participants as humans

being and experiencing. The connection to women in my family, past and present, became a subtle source of strength and support throughout the research journey.

### *Chosen Text*

*This story deserves to be told; all stories do. Even the waves of the sea tell a story that deserves to be read. The stories that really need to be told are those that shake the very soul of you.*

— Lee Maracle, 2014, p. 7

Vagle (2018) advises spending time with a phenomenon informally to gain a sense of how it might manifest in a research context. I engaged in pre-study work as an avid reader of Indigenous Literatures and someone who shares a lifeworld context similar to the research participants who are also of settler ancestry and reside in Mi'kma'ki. I chose *Celia's Song* by Sto:lo author Lee Maracle (2014) as the text for participants to engage with based on its rich content, on the ease of accessing the book for purchase or loan in both hardcopy and e-book formats, and on the author and her extensive body of work that includes fiction, nonfiction, and poetry.

A Sto:lo perspective on healing, justice, kinship, spirituality, and land is the soul and substance of *Celia's Song*. It stories generations of a family and a community, their lifeworlds and lived-through experience. Maracle (2014) juxtaposes Sto:lo means and ways of being with settler perspectives to bring the consequences and influences of colonialism into stark focus. This is literature that disrupts the colonial narrative. The following excerpt, an exchange between two characters, is one of many that point to the totalitarian impact of colonization:

They kick around stories about the times they poached something that used to be theirs until the magic foot of the white man landed on it and it wasn't theirs anymore.

"I want a pair of white man's boots before I die. I want to be able to step on something and make it mine," Ned says to Jim.

Maracle describes her approach to writing, and to navigating the tension between the Indigenous Voice and Eurocentric editorial expectations:

Indigenous writing is about writing from the centre to the edge, to create a circle. We don't say things in a linear way. We have long sentences and we grocery-list things with lots of semicolons. Editors with a European frame of mind, when they read that kind of writing, react that there are too many things running around in their heads. There aren't too many things for me. It's all connected to the first line and wraps up with the last line in a wheel of understanding. To put something into "Eurostructure," I have to find a way of breaking it down into a line-by-line linear map. I'll do that in some cases, but if something has gone on for ten thousand years, I'm not changing the way we say that. (Younging, 2018, pp. 21–22)

*Celia's Song* exemplifies contemporary Indigenous Literatures as it describes and demonstrates specific ways of being and knowing through Sto:lo traditions, values, and perspectives. Gregory Younging (2018) points to key characteristics of Indigenous Literatures that define it as a unique literary canon. That authority is conferred on all voices in Indigenous Literatures stands as one defining characteristic. This includes the voices of people, animals, spirits, and natural phenomena in a story. Another key characteristic is the telling of story across and through time, with actions transcending time (p. 14). In *Celia's Song*, Maracle (2014) exhibits these delineating elements of Indigenous Literatures with eloquent prose.

In a synopsis of the novel, Daniel Heath Justice (2018) pinpoints truth-telling as the essence of the story Maracle (2014) weaves. He states that "truth is often hard to face. There's a lot of ugliness to sort out, a lot of unforgiveable cruelty to contend with, losses that can't be undone" (p. 160). Justice (2018) also captures the relational sense of truth, agency, and hope conveyed by the text:

They [the characters in *Celia's Song*] look within as well as without, and draw on the energies of all their extended community—Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike—to create a stronger,

more respectful, more grounded present. It's truth that actually makes it possible for them to live together; it's truth-telling, even in its challenges, that enables them to imagine a future rather than linger in a present burdened by an unacknowledged past. (p. 161).

Maracle (2014) poignantly dedicates the story to "all those children who were removed from our homes and who did not survive residential school" (n.p.). The succinct description on the back cover of her book positions the text as "a novel that matters. It speaks of the unspeakable, but it also speaks of things that must be said: the resilience and strength of First Nations people to come together to heal themselves and to regain their traditions and knowledge" (n.p.).

The following is a research journal entry that expands on the book choice through reflection and reflexivity:

*Research journal entry Friday, October 6, 2023. I never met Lee Maracle (1950–2021). I never saw or heard her speak or sing or dance or crash a festival stage in protest (see Maracle, 2017). I know her only through her words bound in books, and through the words others have spoken and written about her. Every word points to a woman who knew and honoured the power of story. It is as if she felt it deep in the very marrow of her bones. She lived it as a woman, mother, grandmother, leader, mentor, teacher, writer, poet, and performer. Her deep knowing resounds in large print on the back cover of a book of stories and songs by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2015):*

*Islands of Decolonial Love is the sort of book I have been looking for all my life—the kind of book that is going to make me a good writer, a good listener, a good citizen—it is going to wake up everything that is brilliant in everyone that reads it. (back cover, Betasamosake Simpson, 2015)*

*Inside the front cover of the same text these clear and poignant words stand alone on the page: "still, i am not tragic" (Blind Justice, Maracle, 2013, as cited in Betasamosake Simpson, p. 5, 2015). These words, like breadcrumbs on a path, led to this poem by Maracle (2013):*

*Blind justice  
Ts'leil Waututh, Chaytoose, Snauq'w  
The mountains rise behind my ancestors  
And disappear in the sale of them*

*Orchestrated by a department that seeks  
Their vanquishment—\$25.00 becomes millions in the blink of an eye  
\$25.00 becomes hunger in the next blink  
Becomes inadequate in the next blink  
Becomes murder of cedar, sea vegetables, Ouske, whale and sockeye  
As I struggle to mature without food  
I am sorry too Mr. Harper  
Sustained Violence  
We could have recovered from small pox  
We had Xway-Xway  
We had medicine  
We had healing songs and dances  
But they were banned  
Violation  
We could have recovered  
We had friends  
Christian friends  
But they too were banned  
My relations were banned from speaking  
Organizing or fighting for land rights  
Fishing rights,  
The right to sing and dance  
To raise our children  
To educate them  
We could have included you in our ceremony  
Of facing ourselves,  
Recovering ourselves  
Transforming ourselves  
But our ceremonies were banned.  
Still, I am not tragic  
Not even in my addicted moments  
A needle hanging from the vein of my creased arm*

*I was not tragic  
Even as I jump from a boat in a vain attempt to join my ancestors  
I am not tragic  
Even in my disconnect from song, from dance,  
I am not tragic  
Even in seeing you as privileged,  
As an occupier of my homeland in my homeless state  
Even as men abduct as I hitchhike along these new highways  
To disappear along this lonely colonial road  
I refuse to be tragic  
My body has always understood justice  
Everyone eats and so we included you  
There is no word for exclusion,  
So your whiteness is not threat  
We have lived for 11,000 years on this coastline  
This is not the first massive death we have endured  
We girded up our loins,  
Recovered and re-built  
We are builders,  
We are singers,  
We are dancers  
We are speakers  
And we are still singing  
We are dancing again  
We are speaking in poetry  
In story, in film  
In the millennia that we have lived here there are constants  
The tide will retreat and it will return  
The fishes that are threatened will return  
The people who died during those epidemics are returning  
The plants, the trees, the animal world will recover  
It may take another Tsunami of the sort that nearly killed us all*

*It may take earthquakes and storms  
 But the earth, the waters, the skies, the plants and the animals will return  
 I am a witness  
 I am inspired by the earth's response to her desecration  
 A tsunami cleanses the earth  
 A hurricane re-arranges rivers  
 An earthquake is an objection  
 And we will all have to face ourselves,  
 Face our sense of justice  
 To include all life  
 We will need to nourish our imagination  
 To include a new equality  
 And summon our souls, our hearts and our minds to a justice,  
 which includes all life*

*I feel that these are words of life as lived, celebrated, storied, sung, danced; of sorrow rooted in loss; of violence and violation; of refusing, returning, recovering, rising, renewing. The final stanzas speak to being a witness, to seeing what is outside before looking inward to face ourselves in order to embrace inclusive concepts of equality and justice. This is the critical reflection and critical self-reflection Mezirow (1991, 2000) describes. It is bearing witness to the world and to our role in it; to the truth and to the reconciliation. If each letter, each space, each punctuation mark, and each line return of this poem were a seed, then Celia's Song is the garden germinated and grown into full foliage, tangled and layered with texture, colour, scent, and animated with the movement of air and water and all manner of beings living and non.*

### *Phenomenological Material*

Methods to gather phenomenological material focus on facilitating and fostering opportunities for participants to reflect on their experience and to share it in rich detail. It is, in essence, a way to retrospectively bring awareness to the experience as it was lived-through in order to reflect phenomenologically on its living meaning (van Manen, 2017). These methods can be generative for the participants *and* the researcher as a phenomenon shifts, moves, is undone, redone, in and over time, in and through different contexts (Vagle, 2018). As researcher, I observed the generative nature of

reflection and the process of translating thought into words to be spoken and shared as inner cognitive, affective, and embodied experiencing made visible and tangible as an expression of sound, subtle emotional sensing, and visible body language. There were moments with each reader-participant when new understanding arose out of this process of assigning words to assumptions as points of unconsciously held and accepted knowledge or knowing. It was as if the sound of the words spoken into the space between the experiencing subject and the object(s) being experienced provoked a new level of awareness. The thought and talk prompted by the interactions between researcher and individual participants in the interview scenarios, and among the participants in the book club discussion demonstrated that focused, intentional attention on a topic is generative and expansive. This is the case even when the discursive moment clarifies an individual's commitment to what is, as it is, since such moments become a relational point of knowledge and knowing for self and for others.

The specific tools used to gather material for this study reflect the most frequently used techniques employed in human science-oriented phenomenological research including interviews, written descriptions, and group discussions (Creely, 2018; Noon, 2018; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2014). They were chosen as the most effective means to access and explore what the transformative learning experience is like for the reader-participants. Aspects of the individual and shared-reading experience that were explored included the mode of reading, location and material objects of the reading space, temporality of the act of reading, embodiments of learning (what is thought, felt, and sensed during individual and relational engagement with the text), learning arising as internal moments of awareness, relational experience to other readers in the book club setting, external acts as expressions of learning, as well as processes of transformative learning and aspects of experience that appear to act as contingencies. Researcher observations, fieldnotes, memos, and a reflective/reflexive journaling practice added to the participant-centred material to expand the base of phenomenological material to draw on for analysis and interpretation.

*Interviews.* To explore and examine subjective experience involves a participant reflecting, interpreting, and ascribing meaning to their experience. I considered the one-on-one interviews to be guided conversations with participants as meaning-makers (Warren, 2002), and guides to the lived experience. Individual interviews are endemic to qualitative research studies (Weinbaum & Onwuegbuzie, 2016), and specifically hermeneutic phenomenological inquiries (Creely, 2018; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2014). For interpretive-oriented inquiries it is critical to gather phenomenological material that encompasses the context of the experiential phenomena. To that end, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted, and audio-recorded, at the beginning and at the end of the research period. Interviews “exemplify a heightened sense of trust between the research participant and the researcher” (Van Den Hoonaard & Van Den Hoonaard, 2013, p. 59). Emphasis was on active, mindful listening to build trust, rapport, and a sense of safety (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Noon, 2018). Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (2017) suggests establishing a reciprocal relationship between interviewer and interviewee as the basis of a cooperative, collaborative pursuit of knowledge. In essence, the interviewee is positioned as a research collaborator and the authoritative expert on the topic under investigation as they narrate what they know, sense, and feel relevant to their lived experience.

Participant involvement in the study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. All necessary precautions related to the COVID-19 pandemic were taken to minimize the exposure risk during in-person interviews including two-metre physical distancing, proper wearing of face masks, and handwashing. Face-to-face interviews took place at locations chosen in collaboration with the participants and included a restaurant booth, a big-box store cafeteria, a café, and at a kitchen table. I deferred the choice of interview venue to each participant to respect their autonomy during the COVID-19 pandemic and, as a result, conducted a few of the initial interviews, and most of the follow-up interviews by telephone.

Phenomenological material acquired through interviews reflects a moment in time and capture participant experience retrospectively rather than as it is lived through (van Manen, 2017b). The interview format (see Appendix B) was open-ended, prepared, and practiced in advance to actively foster reflection on the phenomenon at the heart of the inquiry as well as the fundamental question for which the interview serves as a means of exploration (Vagle, 2018). A funneling technique was used to organize questions from broad to specific to attain a range of material that was holistic and contextual, as well as to prime participant recall (Noon, 2018). The overall interview approach centred on participant voices and provided an opportunity for each to speak to the aspects and meanings of the experience that were pertinent to them. Sequential interviews, at the beginning and at the end of the research period, were intended to explore past and future experiences as understood in the present. I read through individual interview transcripts, the book club discussion transcript, research comments, and reading journal entries to formulate follow-up questions specific to each participant to add to a common list of prompts and questions for the final interview. The intent of these questions was to clarify, extend, and expand on the lived-experience previously voiced.

Interviewing at the start and at the end of the research project also provided an opportunity to collect comparative material for individual participants (see Table 2, Appendix C). Vagle (2018) advises paying special attention to those moments when you catch yourself assuming what a participant means. I attended to these moments of intersubjectivity with questions or statements to elicit more detail, by journaling reflectively post-interview, and by posing follow-up queries in subsequent interviews. I also undertook a process of honestly appraising each interview so that each experience effectively informed the next (Vagle, 2018). For example, I chose to minimize my own vocalizations during interviews when I became aware of how often I interjected a sound in the dialogue to signal active listening, attentiveness, engagement, agreement, and encouragement. The first few transcripts include these vocalizations. I recognized them as an unnecessary aspect of the interview and analytical process. At first, I stopped

transcribing these moments, recognizing them as interruptions to the participant voice. I then became conscious of this vocal habit during the actual interviews and minimized making these vocalizations in favour of using words to support the flow of experience sharing when necessary.

In addition to recording audio, I made observational fieldnotes during in-person interviews to document visual cues such as gestures and facial expressions, to note my perceptions of the experience, and to describe the setting. For the interviews conducted by telephone, I focused on the observable aspects of my own surroundings and the felt sense of the exchange. I transcribed the fieldnotes immediately following each interview to capture the encounter in rich, descriptive detail. I then used the fieldnotes to compose interview scenarios to limn the research moment. These vignettes became a means to elucidate each interview as lived experience and illuminate the research process, especially for those interested in pursuing this line of inquiry. The scenarios detailed the mode of communication, setting, and felt sense as aspects of each interview experience that converged to influence and inform it. Writing each scenario was an exercise in awareness and required alertness to sensory perceptions as well as the felt sense of the interview. Philippa Hunter (2012) conceptualizes self-reflexivity as *inside* storying (p. 90) and vignettes as accounts, depictions, and recollections of situations and scenarios (p. 92). The reflective nature of vignette writing served to chronicle interview experiences such as the need to navigate pandemic protocols. Writing interview vignettes was a sense-making exercise intent on contextualizing and exploring the complexity of phenomenological methodology as well as the reading experience at the centre of the study. I believe that capturing the context of each interview extends self-reflection and reflexivity, as meaning-making, beyond the self and adds depth to the research process. For each vignette, I used first-person storying to recount the lived experience, and wrote in present tense to convey a sense of the interview happening in the moment of reading. The intent is to have the effect of capturing *a* moment in *the* moment and have the text stand in contrast to the analytical writing.

Insights regarding interviews as a method of gathering phenomenological material also arose as I undertook initial analysis of the first round of interviews. There were points in reviewing each interview transcript that I recognized where I could have probed further to elicit more detailed descriptions, confirmation of my understanding, and clarification to accurately capture the essence of what was being shared in the moment. The follow-up questions seemed obvious as I read the talk transcribed to text. I realized that, in this form, all other sensory elements were subdued as distractions, including tone of voice, inflection, body language, facial expression, along with ambient sights, sounds, smells, and tactile sensations. Caught up in the flow of conversation, I was continuously anticipating the next question, perceiving what was being said through the lens of my own lived experience, and cognoscente of the time I was requiring of the participants. I used these moments to customize the final interview format for each participant. I made this note as I did the initial analysis of a first interview with one participant:

*Research journal entry Saturday, October 22, 2022. As I go through this transcript, I have the sense of an interview as an entering into a liminal space with another person. As it is when a reader picks up a text and engages with the symbols on the page, so it is when I come together with another person to learn about their lifeworld (lived experiences, memories, knowing, understandings, perceptions, beliefs, values). We both participate in these encounters from a place of current knowing based on all that has come before. The interaction places both of us on the precipice of new awareness, new understanding, new knowing. Thus each interview, its path, and its trajectory is completely unique in its potential, the possibilities it holds, and the new understanding it provides to both of us as evolving and emerging beings.*

*Participant-Generated Representations of Experience.* The intent of the participant-generated representations of experience was to capture the embodied, affective, and cognitive experiencing as participants engaged individually with the novel. Having readers describe their reading experience as a situated, temporal, and intentional act as well as describing and reflecting on their embodied, affective, and cognitive engagement with the text was intended to reveal a holistic understanding of the reading

experience as an aspect of the lifeworld of each participant. Participants were asked to note what they sensed, felt, thought, found resonance with, and relevance in as they read, and then to journal later in detail to expand on the notes and describe what they wondered about and found meaning in (see Appendix D). Written reflections were not prescribed as the only way for participants to represent the *in-ness* of the experience. The reader-participants were encouraged to explore other means to facilitate reflective and reflexive thought, however, all chose to write a journal. It is important to note that the extant literature on fostering transformative learning demonstrates reflective writing as an enhancement to the process of examining uncritically held assumptions and perspectives (Taylor, 2011). Given that, the material gathering process must be recognized and acknowledged as an intervention in the transformation process.

The participants submitted their journals in a variety of formats including a small coil-bound notebook with hand-written notes, emailed photographs of hand-written bullet points on a pad of standard-sized, lined paper, and emailed word documents. I read through each submission, transcribed the handwritten notes, and edited the text according to APA style and grammar guidelines. To improve clarity and readability, I corrected obvious errors in spelling and spacing that did not alter the context. I also replaced abbreviations with words when a singular meaning was obvious. I maintained the original formatting, line spacing, punctuation, and emojis wherever possible to accurately represent the journal of each participant. I chose to include the journals verbatim in the Findings (Chapter 4) for three reasons: 1) to bring the individual reading experience of each participant to life through their own words, 2) to provide a level of transparency to my interpretation and analysis, and 3) to allow other understandings to arise in readers of this dissertation. I re-read *Celia's Song* and journaled about my own experience of the text in parallel with the participants to gain a deeper, experiential understanding of the journaling task. I also embraced it as an opportunity to play with writing in a phenomenological way. I share these early entries as a sample of the reading and journaling experience:

*Reading journal entry Thursday, February, 3, 2022. The book sits on my desk. Words await beyond the title and an artful image of tall, still, silent trees; like sentinels of the story to be revealed on the pages stacked, numbered, and bound. The cover is smooth. It adds no weight to the volume. The accumulation of pages carries a faint scent of pulp pressed into paper, the smell of trees and forest floor extracted in the process. Light has turned the edges of the pages yellow in contrast to the original grey colour of the open book. Light reaches here only in a reader's turn of the page. ...*

*I appreciate the poetry of the prose, the lilt of the words, the weaving together of description, image, and felt sense. I am aware of being in the story. The tangible sounds and sensations that inform my physical reality dissolve, evaporate, fade, disappear. Yet it is not the reality of the sounds, smells, sensations, sights that recede. It is my connection to it. I untether from my here and now to join the here and now of the story. I willingly cross/bridge/traverse the divide.*

*The words encompass the specific perceptions of life and living and loss of the author, and extend an invitation to the reader to attend to things unknown, things assumed, things taken for granted or overlooked or ignored or buried.*

*Reading journal entry Sunday, February 6, 2022. I am immersed in the story of another only to find a path into my own story to relive, rethink, reprocess, and reemerge at a new point; both lost and found in story—their story, my story, our story.*

*Reading journal entry Tuesday, February 15, 2022. I read along. I let myself be guided along the path of the story; allow the author to set the direction and the gate. I notice more repeated elements as I read. Maybe it is the speed at which I am reading; slow, thoughtful, open to connections between scenes, characters, other things I'm reading and doing beyond the book. I am not aware of emotions or embodied sensations, and only vaguely aware of my own surroundings here and now.*

The participant-generated journals were an access point to the phenomenon of reading *Celia's Song* as it unfolded as lived-experience and, as such, were a good source of phenomenological material. I did struggle, however, with the emotional weight of the reading experience as expressed by the participants. As I immersed myself in the journals, I strove to practice the phenomenological research stance espoused by Linda Finlay (2011): "... non-judgemental acceptance, wondering openness[,] and

respectful empathic dwelling” (p. 79). I found that this approach required time to deeply engage with the cognitive, emotional, and embodied experiencing of the participants. As researcher, I felt the weight of responsibility in re-presenting the individual reading experience while considering the reading lifeworld context of each participant, and the broader social context of reconciliation and settler decolonization.

*Audio-Recorded Book Club Discussion.* Audio recording the book club discussion session meant entering the field as an observer. Observation is a useful tool to gather phenomenological material for an inquiry situated as *in-ness* research that assumes phenomena move in and through contexts, as well as in relation to other experiencing subjects and other experienced objects in the lifeworld. Observation then becomes a tool to access “the way phenomena circulate among relations, in space and place” (Vagle, 2018, p. 94). Observational data such as gestures, non-verbal communication, body language, facial expression, and setting were documented in written fieldnotes to capture the discussion in rich, layered detail. I transcribed the fieldnotes immediately following to maximize recall of observations, perceptions, and initial impressions.

The intent was to observe as an unobtrusive presence during the book club session and so I did not participate in the discussion. Given the dimensions of the small living space, I had to occupy a space in the circle formed by the group. I introduced my presence, reiterated the purpose of my attendance, and noted that I would be writing observations and using digital audio recording devices (a main recorder and a backup recorder). I also acknowledged and thanked the participants for allowing me to be present to gather material for the study. Once the discussion was underway, the participants appeared to pay little attention to my presence.

Overall, the lived-experience of engaging with *Celia’s Song* individually and collectively was explored through audio-recorded interviews, participant-generated reading journals, and observation of

the audio-recorded book club discussion. The first level of interpretation of the gathered phenomenological material was through the process of transcribing talk to text.

### *Transcription*

Transcription is described as selective, theoretical, interpretive, and representational (Davidson, 2009), as pivotal and powerful (Oliver et al., 2005), and as research method with transcripts as constructed texts (Weinbaum & Onwuegbuzie, 2016). Christina Davidson (2009) describes the selective nature of transcribing as necessary from both practical and theoretical perspectives. It is important that the process is transparent beyond a single statement indicating the audio was transcribed verbatim. This verbiage assumes a positivist approach as the “default position” (Davidson, 2009, p. 41, citing Lapadat & Lindsay, 1998), and implies that talk presented as text is a precise, unambiguous, and objective rendering of what was said. Verbatim refers only to the words spoken, yet, the inference is that the transcript captures the entirety of the experience. I reflected on the challenge of translating the fullness of experience into linear text in this research journal entry:

*Research journal entry Tuesday, April 4, 2023. The page is a flat, finite surface that simultaneously contains and confines words. The linear nature of the page becomes, somehow, a determinant of the linear nature of the stories spelled out on its surface; the form of conveyance becomes context for the content. Through text, as fixed print on a page, it is difficult to translate an accurate and robust perception of the multiple, layered voices speaking at once; how they work to weave or unravel threads of thought; how they intertwine and interrupt; questions arise; answers pour out, flow from other voices and other people's thoughts. These words, set and confined to this linear space of the page, fall short as an attempt to reflect the depth and the movement of language representing thought as it emerges.*

Reflecting on the transcription process created experiential understanding of a transcript as a construction and the first phase of interpretation (Davidson, 2009). As I progressed through the research methods, however, I began to consider the transcription process as a second analytical engagement. The first phase of interpretation occurred as I engaged with participants in the interviews

and observed the book club discussion. These research encounters proceeded the transcription process and were layered with thought, emotion, and sensory perceptions as each experience unfolded. This first phase of interpretation and analysis included: visual perception of facial expressions, body language (hand gestures, leaning in or away) of the one speaking and of others as they took in and reacted or responded to what they perceived from the content and context of what was said; auditory perception of the tone, tempo, cadence, and volume of the voice(s) speaking; ambient bodily sensations of the temperature, light, scents, and sounds of the spaces we shared; and, subtle perceptions of the physical and emotional energy of the people present.

I assumed the task of transcribing all the audio recordings to engage deeply with the gathered material and become familiar with the nuanced vocabulary of each participant as well as with verbal and non-verbal aspects of the recorded speech including pace, pauses, intonation, emphasis, and emotion. I used an iterative process, moving back and forth between each audio recording, the related fieldnotes, and the transcript to accurately replicate the words as spoken by participants. Given the time spent one-on-one with each participant, and the hours spent playing and replaying the audio recordings, I was able to accurately identify each speaker in the recorded audio of the book club discussion.

Textual representation of diction, the pronunciation and enunciation of words, can be complicated (Oliver et al., 2005). Replacing words that are mispronounced or misused is viewed as a form of judgment and can be reflective of the transcriber's value system, education, and positionality. I did not need to edit the transcript for grammar and questioned the vocabulary of the participants twice, suggesting alternatives for clarity. For example, Letitia used the term *complacent* when the context of what she was saying suggested *complicit* was a more accurate word choice. To make the transcript more readable as text, I chose not to include repeated words when it did not change the context of what was said. In some cases I included the repetition when it seemed relevant to the conversation. For example,

Hazel spoke the word *no* three times in a row to add emphasis to her statement at one point in the group discussion.

Consistent use of punctuation was an important part of the transcription process. I used the Comments feature in Microsoft Word to capture methodological notes as I transcribed the recorded audio. For example, I documented how I used ellipses in the context of the transcript this way: *Here, ellipses indicate a pause in speech followed by a shift in topic; an incomplete sentence/thought.* I elaborated further on the use of ellipses in this comment:

*The ellipses, here and elsewhere, denote a trailing off of speech; a hanging thought; the silence of the pause often filled by another speaker; words flowing without punctuation. ... Even using a period sometimes feels too abrupt.*

I found transcribing to be a skill honed in the doing of it. I was committed to producing an accurate re-presentation of the lived experience of the readers who committed to the study. I frequently reflected on the transcription process to be open to ways to improve both accuracy and efficiency. In addition, functional updates to Microsoft Word changed the transcription process over the course of the study. For example, I used a newly installed Dictate feature as I conducted the final interviews by opening a document on my laptop and running the dictation feature for the duration of the interview. This provided a rudimentary transcript to edit for accuracy, add punctuation, identify speakers, and format as I replayed the audio recording. Microsoft Word also incorporated a Transcribe feature as I was transcribing the final interviews. This enabled me to upload digital audio recordings that were turned into text in a few minutes. I then edited these documents for errors, added punctuation, identified speakers, and formatted the final transcripts. These two updated features on Microsoft Word decreased the time spent on transcription and increased efficiency while still providing an opportunity to dwell in participant experiencing.

There were many times during the book club discussion that more than one person spoke at once and rendered the audio recording inaudible. I noted these moments in the transcript as *inaudible*;

*multiple voices*. I captured one instance by noting *all voices on deck*, and described two others in the following comments:

*Simultaneous expression of a multitude of thoughts; words dispensed, dispersed; scatter and scutter; flip, flop, float, flutter, fall into a disjointed jumble out of which stray syllables arise to steer the course of conversation in a new direction.*

*All speaking about their individual interpretation of the meaning/relevance of the old bones; everyone speaking at once; a rush to speak; sense-making; speaking over listening; expression over reception. ... storied experiences inaudible; unfortunate. ... everyone speaking at once; anyone listening?*

I searched for the term *inaudible* using the Find feature in the book club transcript document and noted 54 points when the dialogue was inaudible due to multiple voices. Near the end of the discussion I noted that some of the inaudible moments did not centre on book talk as the energy level and focused attention of the participants dissipated. By this point, the group conversation splintered into several simultaneous discussions on a variety of topics between individuals. In addition to the 54 points of inaudible dialogue, however, I noted another 35 times when multiple voices, although individually inaudible, expressed agreement. With respect to these moments when agreement was evident I documented the following comment:

*I find it difficult to convey in the text version of the talk, the many times there were vocalized utterances of agreement; not words spoken but other forms of vocalized/audible consensus. I believe these moments are significant; they are representative of shared experiences; at times, perhaps, it is a matter that what one person says triggers a recollection of the same thought or emotion in another, maybe something they would not have thought to mention in the discussion; these moments seem to also have the effect of bonding the group as people feel seen and understood because someone else's experience corroborates their own.*

Daniel Oliver et al. (2005) suggest “transcription is a powerful act of representation” (p. 1273), with the potential to “affect the way participants are understood, the information they share, and the conclusions drawn” (p. 1273). The practice of transcription falls on a continuum between naturalism and

de-naturalism that reflects an emphasis on either the content or the mechanics of speech (Oliver et al., 2005). Generally, I followed the guidelines outlined in *Guide to Transcribing*, authored by Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) professor Áine Humble and located on the MSVU website ([Guide to Transcribing PDF](#)). This guide falls on the transcription continuum closer to the naturalistic mode to reflect actual speech, pace, pauses, emphasis, involuntary vocalizations, and nonverbal communication. Including as much detail as possible in the transcript maximized the phenomenological material and made the transition from talk to text a phased selection process that enhanced analysis and interpretation. I inserted time stamps frequently to provide efficient access to specific sections of the original digital recordings as needed.

This detailed articulation of the transcription process is intended to build a level of trustworthiness into the transcripts as phenomenological material used to explore the living meaning of the phenomenon. Importantly, these choices also served to honour and preserve participant voices in order to represent the experience as accurately and as fully as possible. Rebecca Weinbaum and Anthony Onwuegbuzie (2016) advise researchers to be reflexive with respect to how an audio recording is interpreted and constructed as a transcript. As the sole transcriber I used the Comments feature in Microsoft Word to note thoughts, impressions, questions, and emotions as I transcribed talk to text. This became a record of the first interpretive pass through the text material and generated leads for further iterations of writing, reflection, and interpretation.

### *Analysis*

Max van Manen (2015) describes wonder as the spark and the sustenance of phenomenology. As methodology, interpretive-oriented phenomenology does not translate into standardized methods or a checklist of procedural steps (Aagaard, 2017; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2017b). van Manen (2017b) argues that “[t]rue insights are not ‘technically derived’ or ‘methodically produced’ but rather phenomenological insights are ‘encountered,’ ‘discovered,’ ‘given,’ ‘found,’ or sometimes even

‘stumbled upon’” (p. 820). The focus of phenomenological inquiry then is to gather a rich array of phenomenological material to create an environment for careful reflection on lived-through experience that allow insights to form, arise, and be encountered as knowing. According to van Manen (2017b), this space for allowing insight already exists and does not require a researcher to structure or coerce it into being by way of analytical procedures such as sorting, coding, and calculating. It calls for trust that the act of inquiry will yield salient understanding and insights as experiential moments in the continuous flow of experiences lived-through by the researcher. This is how the methodology of phenomenology is positioned in theory (Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2015, 2017b). In practice, however, a variety of study-specific methods, procedures, and sequenced analytical steps are described in detail in the research literature (see, for example, Creely, 2018; Neubauer et al., 2019; Nicholls, 2019; Vagle, 2018).

By and large, interpretive phenomenological inquiries feature deep, iterative, reflective engagement with gathered material in cycles of reading, reflection, and writing (Creely, 2018; Neubauer et al., 2019; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2014, 2017b). The approach pivots on the assumption that phenomena come into being, or manifest ontologically in lifeworld contexts, and that understanding of lived experience is a continuous act of interpretation (Vagle, 2018). This aligns with Jack Mezirow’s (2000) description of the human condition as “a continuous effort to negotiate contested meanings” (p. 3). The process of engaging in phenomenological research, in fact, resonates with transformative learning and transformative growth as detailed in the proceeding chapter, and as described in the reading experience of the study participants in the next two chapters. With respect to phenomenology, specifically, a hermeneutic cycle encompasses the interpretive process as an ongoing act whereby a researcher reads through the material to gain a preliminary understanding, explores this understanding through reflective writing, and then rereads the material from a place of new understanding (Neubauer et al., 2019; Vagle, 2018). It is through iterative cycles of engagement with the research material that robust, insightful understanding of the lived experience is rendered.

Once I completed the transcription process, I was left with 22 transcribed texts—the product of 17 hours and 48 minutes of recorded talk, and 11 thousand words of participant-generated journaling—to analyze and interpret. I used the Comments feature in Microsoft Word to capture initial impressions, thoughts and questions for further reflection, links to the extant theoretical and research literature, and markers to note repeating themes across the four points of access to each individual participant as well as across the participant group. I also undertook a regular journaling practice to capture and work through initial responses to the research material. Vagle (2018) positions this as bridling, a way to own and interrogate our immediate reactions to the gathered material. I changed the User Name in the Comments feature for each iterative pass through a transcript so that the level of analysis was clearly defined (e.g., A1, A2, A3). For example, comments made while transcribing were labeled as A1. Many of these noted methodological choices, as articulated in this comment:

*I don't think there is value in transcribing the elements of speech that vocalize pauses so I will eliminate that component beginning now (the first 3 transcripts include these utterances). If a vocalized pause is significant in terms of length and/or context I will include it going forward, otherwise I will leave this element out of the transcription process. It is not something that I expect to include in the analysis or representations of participant voice. This decision may prove to speed up the rate of transcribing talk to text which, to this point, is 2 hours per 15 minutes of recording.*

I also reviewed all relevant transcripts to prepare for the final interview with each individual participant and labeled these memos and questions accordingly. The Comments feature automatically recorded the date and time a comment was written. This enabled me to track the analytical process chronologically as understandings and insights emerged. Using the Comments feature also meant that every research memo was recorded in context with the voiced experience of the participants.

As I conducted the second analytical pass through the transcripts (A2) I cut extraneous text to focus on participant-voiced experiencing relevant to the research question. This iteration was saved as a new document and named to note the participant and the level of analysis. After a third analytical pass

through the individual interview transcripts, I organized the remaining content under a series of headings. The headings were consistent among the individual transcripts based on consistency in the approach to each interview, as well as in the prompts and questions used to explore participant lived-experience. The intent was to ensure that the re-presentation of individual participant experience was consistent in flow, structure, and content. It also helped to ensure that the process of comparing and contrasting individual experiencing in the Discussion of Findings was thorough and drew on all gathered material from the one-on-one interviews.

Some phenomenologists (see, for example, Creely, 2018; Neubauer et al., 2019; Vagle, 2018) describe a whole-part-whole method of analysis that considers the relation between experiential moments (the parts) and the broader experiential context (the whole) in which they are situated. When “we begin to remove parts from one context and put them in dialogue with other parts, we end up creating new analytic wholes that have particular meanings in relation to the phenomenon” (Vagle, 2018, p. 108). Vagle (2018) outlines his application of a whole-part-whole process to provide an example of interpretive analysis while clearly positioning it as a guide and not a series of prescriptive steps that might stymie flexibility and creativity if applied in another phenomenological research context. The above description of my analytical process closely resembles his approach. Vagle (2018) also finds that deep, rich insights can arise from a powerful statement voiced by one participant in a specific moment, as well as from a convergence of statements generated in multiple moments through multiple means. I found this to be the case in the reading experience of Abbie, specifically, and in the experience of all four participants, generally, with respect to discourse dynamics, for example, as described in the Discussion of Findings.

Although leading phenomenologists eschew standardized and mechanistic approaches to analysis (see, for example, Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2014, 2017b), many scholars who conduct phenomenological inquiries articulate procedures broadly similar to other qualitative methodologies.

Constructivist grounded theory method guidelines, for example, resonate strongly with the interpretive process outlined by Vagle (2018). Constructivist grounded theory is a means to integrate experience *with* social conditions (Charmaz, 2005)—phenomena within the lifeworld in phenomenological terms (Neubauer et al., 2019; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2017b). Kathy Charmaz (2005) suggests looking at the data and asking questions such as, *What is happening? What are people doing?* Charmaz et al. (2018) also describe a memoing practice to create an intellectual workspace to document and “elaborate processes, assumptions, and actions that codes subsume” (p. 429). This echoes the margin notes, highlighted excerpts, and journal entries Vagle (2018) advocates. Memoing, note taking, highlighting verbatim excerpts, and journaling, therefore, were integrated, ongoing analytical practices as the research progressed. To be clear, I used memoing, a method more commonly associated with grounded theory, in the spirit of writing as reflective practice (van Manen, 2017a). I wrote memos to capture moments of resonance, tension, and intuition to deepen my interpretive attention to the materials rather than to build theory.

van Manen (2017a) characterizes themes as “the intermediate reflective tools for phenomenological inquiry and reflective writing” (p. 777). I applied this concept to draw on the extant theoretical and research literature in the analytical process and, through that process, found resonance with Charmaz et al. (2018) who state that awareness and understanding of the relevant literature “can enhance sensitivity to nuances in data, generate concepts for making comparisons with fresh data, stimulate analytical and critical questions, and suggest areas for possible conceptual development” (p. 419). Based on the transformative learning model Lawrence and Cranton (2015) conceptualize, I was sensitized to indicators of becoming conscious, to evidence of individual and collective agency, and to indications of variables that influence the transformation process in neutral, positive, or negative ways. I was also sensitized to the concepts of edge-emotions (Mälkki, 2010; Mälkki & Green, 2014) and liminality (Mälkki & Green, 2014) as experiential aspects of transformative learning. An academic

understanding of transformative learning theory became the foundation for a more nuanced and robust experiential understanding of the lived experience of the study participants. At several points in the analytical process I was compelled to loop through both the theoretical and methodological chapters of the research proposal to confirm that I was on track with the methods as outlined and approved, and to ensure that I was adhering to best practices for a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry.

I strove to produce a dissertation that approached the idealized description of phenomenological texts that van Manen (2017a) offers:

The outcomes of phenomenological research are full-fledged reflective texts that induce the reader into a wondering engagement with certain questions that may be explored through the identification, critical examination, and eloquent elaboration of themes that help the reader recognize the meaningfulness of certain human experiences and events. (p. 777)

He further cautions that the use of phenomenological concepts such as thematic analysis and lived experience in qualitative research simply qualifies an inquiry as phenomenologically-inspired and not necessarily phenomenology. By this measure, my dissertation will earn a phenomenology designation based on the depth, quality, and luminosity of the understanding and insights rendered in the final analysis, interpretation, and written presentation of the findings. I will leave that for the readers of this dissertation to determine.

### *Presentation of Findings*

David Kember and Michael Corbett (2018) articulate how theoretical, methodological, and paradigmatic issues influence, even determine, the structure and presentation of the research conducted. A research question in the social sciences often generates numerous answers and issues through the analysis of qualitative data. Complexity arises from multiple emerging themes that interconnect, overlap, and interrelate. This complexity requires a rich and creative approach to presentation of the research outcomes. With this in mind, I chose to present the findings as a holistic re-

presentation of the lifeworld context and lived-experience of reading *Celia's Song* for each participant. Due to the sheer volume of the analysis for seven participants, I opted to include the experience of four participants in the final dissertation. I chose to focus on the four participants who completed most of the research tasks and who I believe adequately represented the breadth and depth of the reading experience of this group of readers. Of the three participants whose experiences do not appear in the final dissertation, one did not read the book due an inability to visually process text (there is no audio version of *Celia's Song* available). Another participant participated minimally in the book club discussion via a FaceTime connection that restricted the ability to communicate clearly and interrupted the flow of conversation among the group members attending in person. The third participant did not journal and provided minimal material during the two individual interview encounters.

The initial interviews focused on the reading lifeworld of each participant, the context in and through which they live and subjectively structure their reading experiences. In the findings for this, and each subsequent research encounter, I strove to illuminate the phenomena of reading as lived and storied by each individual by weaving their words (in italics) and my analytical notes together in a representation of participant experience. The second research encounter was through the reading journals in which participants documented the cognitive, emotional, and embodied experience of reading *Celia's Song* as it arose. Not all participants kept a journal or completed the journaling task. The entirety of each journal as it was submitted is included with participant words in italics along with my analysis of each entry. The book club group discussion was the third research encounter with participants and is represented with analysis. Where relevant, I noted individual speaking patterns that influenced the course of discourse in the two-hour discussion. Finally, the fourth and last research encounter, and second one-on-one interview, is represented with analysis. This was an opportunity for each reader to story their overall reading experience and for me to seek clarity and expansion on the proceeding encounters with the lived experience of each participant.

The Discussion of Findings chapter describes the complex connections between the extant literature, theory, and participant experience. It weaves together three strands of knowing—what was known, what has become known through the research process, and what remains to be known—into the final dissertation. The intent is to enable and allow for a deep exploration of the relevance and resonance of the phenomenological material. According to Kember (2018), clarity on an organizational level will translate into clarity in the writing process and outcome (pp. 8-9). The approach used is intended to benefit both the writer and the reader of the final dissertation.

### Ethics

The study adhered to the core ethical principles of respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice as detailed in the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2, 2014). I assessed participant risk to be minimal based on the TCPS 2 (2014) definition of minimal risk as “research in which the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research is no greater than those encountered by participants in those aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research” (p. 22). Reader-participants in the study were active members of an existing shared-reading group and, as such, were avid readers of a variety of literary genres. Although reading fiction novels is a voluntary, regular, and recurring aspect of their everyday lives, most participants volunteered that they typically avoided books with violent and/or otherwise disturbing events and storylines. When this came up during the initial one-on-one interviews, I was clear and direct in instructing each reader-participant to treat the book chosen for the study in the same manner that they would any novel selected for a book club read and discussion. I reiterated the need for each individual to be aware of their well-being as they read *Celia’s Song* and to practice self-care in whatever form resonated with them, including abandoning the read, the journaling task, and/or the study all together.

The TCPS 2 (2014) document buttresses the ethical foundation of this research endeavour. As with any set of codes of conduct, however, the TCPS 2 (2014) serves only as a guide, and I recognize that I am the agent of my own ethical practice (Van Den Hoonaard & Van Den Hoonaard, 2013, p. 14). This understanding is grounded in the idea of conducting research in a good way, under the guiding principles of fairness, respect, and honesty (Kovach, 2009). Confidentiality, anonymity, and consent are key aspects of ethical qualitative research. I did not use the real names of participants, or other identifying information, at any phase in the research process, including transcription, analysis, debriefing, and re-presentation of the findings. This practice will continue into the dissemination phase of communicating the findings. Pseudonyms were employed to maintain participant confidentiality. It must be noted, however, that given the small number of participants, and their familiarity with each other, it may be possible for participants and people in their immediate social spheres to be able to determine the origin of the experience recounted in the final report. This possibility was included in the formal consent process as was the commitment of time and effort, the reasonable risks and benefits, and the timeline for the project.

Ethical conduct has pervaded the research process beginning with the initial contact and recruitment of participants, through to the re-presentation of the research findings. Free and informed consent was an active and ongoing process throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained via a consent form that included: an invitation to participate; the background and purpose of the study; the reason the participant is being approached; their ongoing right to withdraw; a description of participation including the expected time commitment, risks and benefits; handling procedures for research data; procedures for confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy; anticipated use and dissemination of results; and contact information for the researcher, dissertation supervisor, and an arms-length contact (see Appendix E).

Recognizing consent as an ongoing consideration, participants had the option to opt out at any time from the study. Cecelia withdrew after participating in the initial one-on-one interview. I was informed of her decision by Hazel who returned her copy of the book when we met for the book club discussion session. I requested a formal notification of withdrawal via email and invited Cecelia to share her reason(s) for withdrawing. Cecelia did not respond to the email and I respected her choice to end communication regarding the research project. Another participant, Helen, withdrew after participating in the initial one-on-one interview, the journaling task, and an incomplete follow-up one-on-one interview. Helen did not receive a notification for the date of the book club discussion session from the host and, so, did not attend the discussion. Helen stopped responding to communications via email and text message to complete the follow-up interview. She did not provide a formal notification of withdrawal from the study. I chose not to re-present the reading experiences of Cecelia and Helen in the study findings. I based the decision on two points. First, the scope of the research question delineates transformative learning arising out of individual and shared reading experience of a specific text. Cecelia did not participate in either the individual or shared-reading experiences. Helen participated in the individual reading experience but not the shared-reading experience. Second, I understood the lack of response to email and text message communications as a clear indication that these two participants had withdrawn for reasons that remain unspecified and, therefore, unknown to the researcher.

As described in the section detailing the analytical process, I chose to focus on the findings related to four of the remaining seven participants. I made this decision once I completed analysis of the reading experience of all seven reader-participants. The primary decision to limit the Findings and Discussion of Findings chapters was based on the volume of phenomenological material derived from seven participants in this in-depth study. The choice to narrow the field of participants rather than the field of investigation, was a choice for depth over breadth in this phenomenological exploration.

Overall, the intent of the ethical approach to the study was to recognize and demonstrate a value for the contribution participants made to the research, and importantly, a value for participants as persons (Danaher, Baguley, & Midgley, 2013). I strove to enact this approach by centring the voices of the reader-participants as spoken and without judgement in the findings. I demonstrated this approach by recognizing value in Eleanor's participation, a book club member who, as the result of a motor vehicle accident, is no longer able to visually comprehend text in print form. There is no audio version of *Celia's Song* available to date, so Eleanor was not able to read the book selected for the study. She was, however, welcomed as a participant in the study as an active member of the book club.

### *Reciprocity*

Reciprocity, the concept of give and take in the cooperative pursuit of knowledge, underpins ethical research (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Lather, 2017; McGregor & Marker, 2018). Lather (2017) takes reciprocity to mean "a mutual negotiation of meaning and power" (p. 73) between researcher and researched. I understand her use of the term negotiation to indicate a continuous process more than an agreement as a final outcome. This negotiation involves self-disclosure by both parties, and a temporal, sequential approach to looping through description, analysis, and findings in an effort to gain understanding and insight into the phenomenon at the heart of this study. Lather's (2017) approach to research design reflects and closely aligns with phenomenological inquiry and transformative learning theory when she calls on researchers to design inquiries to be dialogic, reciprocal, and reflective in forums that test the resonance and usefulness of new understanding and insights (p. 74). This mirrors key aspects of Mezirow's (1991) theory of cognitive and rational transformation based on reflection, critical self-reflection, and discourse to challenge, test, and validate new and more inclusive perspectives to guide action.

McGregor and Marker (2018) also extend understanding of reciprocity beyond the notion of compensation. "Reciprocity can be understood etymologically as moving backward and forward. In

other words, the benefit of research should move backward and forward between those who design the research and those who are affected by it” (p. 319). The authors specifically focus on reciprocity in Indigenous education research and their work sets a standard of ethical conduct that is broadly applicable to other areas of research. McGregor and Marker (2018) characterize reciprocity as a research stance that incorporates giving back, knowledge sharing, and relational accountability in continuous, circular motion and momentum. They label reciprocity as “complicated” (p. 327), and dependent on situated understanding “of respect, responsibility, benefit, and other principles associated with research” (p. 327). Of specific relevance to this phenomenological exploration, McGregor and Marker (2018) stipulate that “[k]eeping one’s eyes and spirit open to the connections to be made, remade, unmade, and not made in research makes researchers vulnerable” (p. 325). They suggest “a commitment to reciprocity should be understood as the sensing and witnessing of a path through dense spaces” (p. 325). This levels responsibility on a researcher to be aware, humble, and creative in ensuring they give back, share knowledge, and be accountable on an ongoing basis to the relationships formed. As a tangible demonstration of my commitment to reciprocity, I plan to invite the reader-participants to meet with me individually and/or as a group so that I may share the dissertation findings with them directly.

I gave each reader-participant a print copy of the novel selected for the study, *Celia’s Song* (Maracle, 2014), as well as a book of essays entitled *My Conversations With Canadians* (Maracle, 2017) to express appreciation for the time and effort they committed to the study. Another intent in gifting the latter was to provide a nonfiction resource as a potential catalyst to lean into learning about reconciliation and decolonization for these adult settler readers. Maracle (2017) speaks to many of the most common points of unawareness, confusion, and falsehoods that non-Indigenous peoples are either unconscious of, or struggle to grasp. This book is a potential resource for these reader-participants to continue “the sensing and witnessing of a path through dense spaces” (McGregor & Marker, 2018, p.

325). Words that resonate with transformative learning as “a continuous effort to negotiate contested meanings” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 3).

### *Validity*

Validity in qualitative research speaks to the quality, rigour, trustworthiness, and credibility of the data and how it is interpreted (Lather, 2017; Lincoln et al., 2013; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I wove validity throughout the research with respect to multiple sources of data including participant-generated expression of experience, and research texts describing and interpreting reading experiences as storied by the participants. With respect to hermeneutic phenomenological research, Vagle (2018) contends that:

whatever understanding is opened up through an investigation will always move with and through the researcher’s intentional relationships with the phenomenon—not simply in the researcher, in the participants, in the text, or in their power positions, but in the dynamic intentional relationships that tie participants, the researcher, the context, broader social issues and matters, the produced text, and their positionalities together. (p. 32)

As primary researcher, validity begins with transparency regarding my positionality. Ongoing and structured researcher reflection and reflexivity are essential to ensure participants and readers of the final dissertation are able to construct their own interpretation of the findings within the appropriate context (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). My understanding of validity, and how I attempted to achieve it in this study, aligns most closely with Lather’s (2017) concept of validity for research oriented as praxis (p. 76). Lather (2017) reconceptualizes validity “for research that is openly committed to a more just social order” (p. 75). She argues that for trustworthiness to be established, a researcher must expand beyond the use of multiple measures to “include multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical stances” (pp. 75-76). In effect, execution of the research design must allow and enable the recognition and articulation of counterpoints as well as convergences in the data (p. 76). The author delineates this

expanded notion of triangulation as one of four aspects of validity, each necessary yet singularly insufficient to establish data credibility (p. 76). Concepts of construct, face, and catalytic validity scaffold trustworthiness.

Construct validity calls on a researcher to have a “self-critical attitude toward how one’s own preconceptions affect the research” (p. 76). To that end, I have come to a completely new level of understanding with respect to my role as convener and conductor of a researched reading experience that created a space in which a work of literary art and a group of readers were placed in positions of vulnerability. I introduced an Indigenous-authored novel into a wholly non-Indigenous space with no context to support its reception with intention, openness, and respect. The book was vulnerable to misinterpretation, misuse, and misrepresentation. The readers, who trusted me to re-present their lived experience, were and are vulnerable to scrutiny and judgment as their reading experiences are shared, undergo interpretive iterations, and possibly generalized to exemplify the settler reader experience of Indigenous Literatures. It is my hope that, by creating awareness and understanding of the vulnerabilities embedded in the research design and execution, the research findings will stand as experiential understanding of transformative growth that leads to more thoughtful, open, and intentional engagement with Indigenous Literatures by settler readers who are conscious of their role and responsibility in the reading experience. The research findings are not intended to provide a prescriptive approach to encounters with Indigenous Literatures.

Lather (2017) further argues for “a ceaseless confrontation with and respect for the experiences of people in their daily lives to guard against theoretical imposition” (p. 76). This concept privileges the logic of the data over priori theory to “contribute to the growth of illuminating and change-enhancing social theory” (p. 76), as it also fosters respect for participants and the lived-experience they share with the researcher and other participants. Construct validity, then, aligns with the phenomenological attitude I aspire to as a researcher and as a human being and becoming; an attitude that is open, willing,

non-judgemental, curious, and compassionate (see Finlay, n.d., 2011; Vagle, 2018). Additionally, face validity recognizes and acknowledges the very real possibility that part of the research experience includes uncritical acceptance and identification with hegemonic ideologies that cause participants to operate under a degree of false consciousness (p. 76). I recognized and documented these moments as I became conscious of them. It is important to note again that I am both in and of a lifeworld that is very similar to that of the participants who are my demographic peers. I say this to be transparent and not as an excuse for my own uncritical acceptance of hegemony. I am aware that it is only through the experiences I have had as a university student over the past 10 years that I have begun to recognize the settler-colonial ideologies I assumed. Joanne Episkenew, Richard Wagamese, and Lee Maracle, as thinkers, writers, teachers, and scholars, have changed the way I see the world and my role in it. They introduced me to Indigenous Peoples, to their histories, traditions, knowledges, and ways of being. They inspired me to excavate my identity as a settler, confront my complicity and complacency, and discover my ancestry and agency.

The concept of catalytic validity is perhaps the most relevant aspect of establishing credibility with respect to this research endeavour. "Catalytic validity represents the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality to transform it" (Lather, 2017, p. 76). This, according to Lather (2017), recognizes "the reality-altering impact of the research process" as well as personal growth and the discovery of individual agency. This research required the reader-participants to engage with and become aware of their cognitive, affective, and embodied reading experience. This was a process of being and becoming, as is all lived-experience. It was a first encounter with Indigenous Literatures for most of the reader-participants and the research tasks involved intentional reflection and group discourse, key elements of transformative learning. Each participant was asked to articulate their understanding of reconciliation and decolonization and the mere process of coalescing thought into words was generative. These were not typical points of

conversation within their familial, social, or professional spheres. The reading experience lead participants to confront their lack of knowledge regarding settler-colonial and Indigenous histories, the contemporary context that perpetuates injustices and inequities, and Indigenous knowledges and ways of being. Although confusion pervaded the reading experience, *Celia's Song* did expand awareness in these settler readers and, therefore, transformation as growth as described by Lawrence and Cranton (2015).

### *Ongoing Researcher Reflexivity and Debriefing*

Generally, I define reflexivity simply as critical self-reflection. Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln (2005) provide a more robust explication of researcher reflexivity as “conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the processes of research itself” (p. 210). Reflexivity, then, entails thinking and writing about the research process and outcomes as they unfold to capture emerging and evolving understanding of what is known and unknown, all within a context that constantly changes. Charmaz et al. (2018) emphasize the need to articulate researcher positionality, especially with respect to inquiry oriented to social justice, including an aim to transform. Charmaz (2005) advocates for researchers to assume a reflexive stance on locating self, as well as ways of knowing and representing. “What observers see and hear depends upon their prior interpretive frames, biographies, and interests as well as the research context, their relationships with research participants, concrete field experiences, and modes of generating and recording” (p. 509). In effect, Charmaz (2005) is describing how aspects of the researcher lifeworld influence an inquiry.

Hermeneutic or interpretive-oriented phenomenology represents one phenomenological research approach and centres on the ontological assumption that lived experience is an interpretive process situated within the context of the one experiencing. Epistemologically, the researcher is assumed to be part of the world and is, therefore, given to interpreting meaning through their own situated context. Fundamentally, hermeneutic phenomenology “recognizes that the researcher, like the

research subject, cannot be rid of his/her *lifeworld*" (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 95). This places the onus on the researcher to reflect on participant experience of the phenomenon as well as their own experience of the phenomenon *and* the research process itself. According to Neubauer et al. (2019), a more robust and nuanced analysis is rendered through iterative cycles of capturing and articulating such reflections.

Also of relevance to the proposed study is Corbett and Green's (2018, citing Foucault, 1980; Giddens, 1979; Rancière, 2004) cautionary note that research is an intervention in social life and the frame of reference it constructs establishes a way of seeing and knowing that "tends to support established arrangements of power, and even the very power imbalances that structural analysis purport to unmask" (p. 276). To mitigate this tendency, and align with the philosophical roots of hermeneutic phenomenology, I kept a research journal throughout the study. Reflective and reflexive writing was an ongoing practice that served to document my personal journey of being and becoming as a means of achieving transparency for self and others. It captured moments of uncertainty and clarity, ignorance and awareness, process and progress. From a methodological perspective, it traced the path from the beginning of the research journey to this moment in a level of detail that memory alone would not have the capacity to accommodate. I also engaged in regular conversations with my supervisor, academic colleagues, and others willing to listen, engage, question, and add new perspectives to this research endeavour. This helped to mediate the tendency to be oblivious to realities that exist and function outside of my own knowing and experience. It was, in effect, an action intent on destabilizing my own ideas of privilege. Lather (2017) finds hope for critical research and researchers in "the dizzying destabilizations of thinking constantly against ourselves in the struggle to turn critical thought into emancipatory action" (p. 78).

In thinking against myself, I draw on Laura Rodriguez Castro's (2018, p. 322) concept of the white privilege of feminism (citing communitarian feminist Lorena Cabnal), to conceptualize the white

privilege of reconciliation. Here I mean to draw attention to a potential for settlers to assume that because we have listened to the truth-telling, because we have expressed feelings of guilt, shame, and remorse, and because we have apologized, that we can assume the apology has been accepted and we can move forward having achieved reconciliation. Reconciliation is not synonymous with apology. I understand it as a component of broader processes of decolonization that address land and resources, treaty obligations and responsibilities, systemic barriers to health care, education, and economic equity, as well as legal and social justice issues. I now understand reconciliation as part of a much bigger process that requires settlers to first truly reckon with the truth of colonialism as descendants of colonists. Only once there is a reckoning with the truth is reconciliation possible. I believe that reciprocity will be the focus beyond reconciliation. I circle back to the work of McGregor and Marker (2018) to extend their concept of reciprocity from the relational realm of research into the realm of mutually respectful relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The authors point to the vulnerable space one enters by keeping “eyes and spirit open to the connections to be made, remade, unmade, and not made” (p. 325). We are called to be aware, humble, curious, and creative in our commitment to reciprocity “as the sensing and witnessing of a path through dense spaces” (p. 325). This resonates strongly with liminality as an experiential phase of transformative learning (Mälkki & Green, 2014). To wander on this path leads to the wonder of human experiencing as it manifests in consciousness to be known. Phenomenology allows an entry into this space of experiencing where all possibilities for transformation exist and await.

## Chapter 4: Findings

Hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry extends beyond descriptive understanding of phenomena to interpret aspects of experience that are externally observable, as well as aspects of experience revealed through the narrative an individual composes as the product of the phenomenon and their lifeworld (Neubauer et. al., 2019). I present the findings as a re-presentation of the lived experience of each reader, weaving their words (in italics) and my analysis together in a single narrative. The detailed findings were derived from the reading experience of the four reader-participants that completed the research tasks (see Table 1, Appendix A for participant demographics). Four points of contact granted access to their lived experience. These included: 1) a one-on-one interview to establish a composite of the reading lifeworld; 2) a participant-generated reading journal as a record of the cognitive, affective, and embodied experience of individual engagement with the fiction novel *Celia's Song* (Maracle, 2014); 3) group dialogue about the book as a shared-reading experience; and, 4) a second one-on-one interview to clarify, reflect, and expand on the reading experience articulated in the three previous research encounters. The participant experiences appear in alphabetical order according to the pseudonyms assigned to each reader: Abbie (Chapter 4a), Hazel (Chapter 4b), Letitia (Chapter 4c), and Rose (Chapter 4d).

I also include a brief description of each interview scenario to orient the narrative in time and place, and centre research as lived experience. The intent is to layer transparency in and through the research encounter and to demonstrate implementation of the research methods as a dynamic and fluid element of the research process. The book club scenario is included in Chapter 4(a): Abbie and is not repeated in the subsequent participant findings. The interview scenarios offer a nuanced view of a phenomenological research process in progress for researchers interested in pursuing this form of inquiry.

The findings focus on the material gathered through talk and text that reveal the reading lifeworld of each participant as the context in and through which she experienced the phenomenon delineated as the scope of the study. The findings recount the reading experience in sufficient detail to validate and justify the insights that emerged. The intent in providing this level of detail is also to allow for new insights to arise in those who may engage with this work.

What follows is a re-presentation of the cognitive, affective, and embodied experiences of five adult women of settler ancestry—four reader-participants and one reader-researcher—as they engaged with the novel *Celia's Song* (Maracle, 2014). You may find some of what was read, spoken, and written in the process of conducting this research difficult. I approach Indigenous Literatures, and this work, as spaces for inspiration and insight to think and act in new ways as a treaty person and hope it will serve those who find themselves on a similar path. Reconciling and decolonizing are living processes that call on people of settler ancestry to do the inner work necessary to be in good relations.

The extant literature on reading, shared reading, transformative learning, reconciliation, and decolonization, as well as my reflective and reflexive research notes, are woven in and through the findings in the Discussion chapter that follows to position the insights arising out of this research endeavour within a body of existing knowledge. In the concluding Outro chapter, I explore the relevance of the findings as they relate to settler readers of Indigenous Literatures and to those people of settler ancestry who seek to think and act in new ways.

## Chapter 4(a): Abbie

### Initial Interview

*Interview Scenario.* The in-swinging door, split-entry stairwell, and tiny, tiled landing demand that we maneuver in too-close proximity, exchanging masked apologies for our lapse in pandemic distancing. I am warmly welcomed into this bright and comfortable space that feels loved and lived-in. The conversation is a smooth exchange framed by queries and thoughtful responses. Clear details about lived experiences seem elusive, teasingly just out of reach of recall, and yet a sense of what was is shared somehow. It is a reading life that resonates with familiarities and similarities linking her memories and stories to my own.

### Reading Lifeworld

*Early Reading Life.* A love of reading and books did not come naturally to Abbie, a retired nurse in her early sixties, who characterizes her early reading experience as *painful, terrifying, and traumatizing*. As an extremely shy child, she recalls lacking the confidence to read and being singled out by her third-grade teacher to stand up in class and read aloud.

*... ohhh, grade three, I had to stand up and the teacher, you know, would pick on you and point at you and say, "Read this!" And, it was just, it was traumatizing. It just, it was awful being singled out and hav[ing] to do it, and not having the confidence to read ... those are impactful things.*

Abbie suspects an undiagnosed learning disability meant that she struggled with reading and comprehension. Having a brother who read everything with ease only compounded her sense of inadequacy. By grade five she could not keep up and, by then, had learned to fake an ability to read and understand the curriculum.

*... I had difficulty [with] reading and comprehension, and anything we had to read in school was painful. ... I think it was probably grade five-ish, or maybe earlier, and I faked it. I couldn't keep up.*

Reading seemed to be so valued that to not have the ability to read easily became a source of shame and embarrassment. Abbie felt compelled to hide her reading level from teachers, peers, and family, which led to a sense of isolation. Being singled out by the teacher was an extremely negative and, by her account, even *traumatizing* experience.

*I always felt that I was alone with it too. I didn't know that there was an issue, or didn't have the help, or didn't know how to ask for it ... I always felt behind ... I wouldn't understand it because I would pretend I'd read it so fast—because I'd be the last one reading it—that I wouldn't get anything from it.*

I sense the emotional pain that still lingers as a shadow to the memory. Her description conveys a sense of it being unacceptable to experience difficulty reading and, therefore, feeling the need to hide out of embarrassment and shame.

Never one to bury her head in a book, Abbie relied on a keen imagination. Perhaps this was a way to balance her surreptitious struggles with reading and buoy her sense of self, even fill a void as a non-reader alone in the midst of a reading family. As she grew, however, so did her enjoyment of books and reading. At times, she finds herself unable to put a book down that she is enjoying, choosing instead to *plow through* it to the final page. And, yet, she confides that reading is still not her go-to activity—an aversion she attributes to her early reading experience.

*... the older I got, you know, the greater pleasure I had in a book. But, I'm not a fast reader. But, I do enjoy it. When I find a book that I love to read, then I can't put it down, I can't stop it and I*

*just plow through it. But, it's [still] not my first thing. I will not sit with a book and spend hours at it. It's just something that I've never done.*

*Significant Reading Experience.* Abbie witnessed the joy her mother found in books and reading, and was influenced by her book recommendations. She uses terms such as *great, avid, beautiful, trust, and enjoy* to describe her mother's reading experience.

*I always trusted her judgment. And, I always enjoyed everything that she picked up and read.*

Abbie conveys a sense of agency in her own reading practice when she puts aside a novel she is not thoroughly enjoying—*Why waste my time?*—or when she dives into a thick volume—*the thicker, the better*—to postpone the end of a good read. *All the Light We Cannot See* by Anthony Doerr (2014) was one of those books.

*Ahhh, that to me ... I have to read it again! ... I don't know what it is, but you can tell the difference as soon as you start reading a book and you feel like you're part of it. That's when you know ... it's just something special. ... one of the best books I ever read, I think. I think it is. And, I think I loaned it to somebody, and I want to read it again!*

As much as she enjoys a good book now, Abbie still clings to a self-deprecating appraisal of herself as a reader. An attitude leftover, perhaps, from her childhood experience of reading.

*I'm certainly no scholar, I can't compete [with the avid readers in the book club]. But, I do know what I like and what I don't like. And, I just like a good story.*

*Recent Reading Experience.* Asking about her most recent reading experience reveals that Abbie has not been reading very much of late.

*Oh, dear! This is going to prove the very few things I've actually read in the last little while.*

As she describes her life experiences during the pandemic—including taking on a part-time retail job to cover a shortage of workers in a big-box store managed by her husband—it seems the stress of the health crisis drained her of time, energy, concentration, and focus for things like reading. It also caused her to shift her book buying and borrowing practices from in-person to online as a strategy to limit exposure to the virus in public spaces such as bookstores and libraries.

*The last two years I really found I just haven't had the interest. I haven't had the focus. I haven't been able to focus on reading.*

She tends to read at the end of the day before bed, but when she does find herself immersed in a really good book she will read anytime, anywhere.

*... the problem is, if it's a really good book, I read to the exclusion of everything else, and it's like all or nothing, and I'll sit here and read, read, read, read; stay up till 3 in the morning to read. I'll wake up at 3 in the morning and go, "Oh! I can read."*

A chaise in the sun-drenched living room is her usual place to read since it comfortably mitigates any strain on her arms or neck. Her favourite reading spot, however, is the bathtub.

*I could read for hours in the tub. Love the tub. And, that's where I go and get in a couple of chapters of a book.*

Abbie values and acts on book recommendations from specific family and friends, especially her two book club cohorts. She prefers to read on a tablet and finds she reads faster in electronic versus print format. She appreciates features that enable her to enlarge the font and flip through pages easily. Abbie also enjoys the ease of accessing ebooks via the public library website.

*I find I'm on devices all the time so I might as well be on reading a book as opposed to doing anything else with it.*

When she purchases a book it is an intentional and deliberate choice based on a recommendation from a trusted source. Abbie is not particular about genre if a book is well written and relatable. She finds violent storylines tolerable in nonfiction narratives, but she shies away from fictional portrayals of violence.

*I don't like anything violent, or anything, like, really sinister ... . There's enough of that in the world. I don't want to read about it, you know. ... I find the older I get, the less tolerant. I just can't, I can't watch it, I can't be part of that.*

Abbie is unable to articulate whether this is a matter of self-protection from emotions she finds intolerable or a need to feel safe in a physical and embodied sense. Instead, she reiterates that what she looks for is a compelling story well-written. It needs neither a tidy nor a predictable resolution.

*I think it just has to be something that you want to sit down and read. You just want to be able to read it, and not put it down.*

*Shared-Reading Experience.* Hazel extended an invitation to Abbie to join this book club several years ago and she has been a regular attendee since then. She finds it to be an eclectic group of readers even though, by demographic measures, all the members are educated women in their 50s and 60s who own homes in two very similar urban neighbourhoods. For Abbie, her commitment to the book club is, at times, the impetus she needs to read, and the book itself acts as a point of connection and a conversation starter.

*It's fun to talk about a book ... I think it's more the social [aspect], but it's a good way to connect with a book ... you always learn something about somebody else, right? ... Yeah, it's always a fun evening. It's very comfortable and pleasant.*

Abbie finds that the reading experiences other book club members bring to the meetings can highlight a perspective or interpretation that had not occurred to her. In this way, the discussions provide different points of view to consider and offer possibilities to learn something new.

*It [my opinion of a book] may not change, but it at least brings a different perspective so that, you know, it certainly gives you another idea or way of thinking that perhaps you didn't notice before. So, you always learn something new. Like, if someone interprets something in the book differently than you do, then you go, "Oh, yeah, yeah. I never thought of it that way." ... you come from a different space, I guess.*

By and large, Abbie frames the experience she and the other group members have of a book simplistically in terms of *like* and *do not like*. She finds that there seldom is consensus on a book and divergent opinions can lead to book talk that is spirited yet inclusive. Abbie likes to hear about the reading experiences of the others and feels free to share her own, even when hers is the only dissenting voice. She is also very cognizant of the time, thought, and effort that goes into choosing a book for everyone to read.

*So, when someone takes that time to think about the book, then I should at least take the time to consider it a little bit deeper than perhaps any other time. So, to give that respect to that book.*

Abbie is an active member of two book clubs. She describes the nature of this group as serious and refers to the book discussions as critiques. Her negative self-comparison to the other members is reminiscent of how she compared herself to her brother when she was young. A view of herself as inferior to others with respect to her reading ability seems to remain from childhood.

*I don't live up to their standards because they create games and little exercises, you know, word searches for different books when they critique it. And, they're very, you know, they're way more*

*serious [in this book club] about how they discuss the book. But, yeah, with this group I try to be more mindful, I try to pay more attention and, you know, look at the details.*

Putting more effort into her book club reads may be Abbie's way to counteract her sense of not being as literary as the others and, perhaps, also avoid being singled out in a negative way as she experienced as a child in school.

*Like, I know this book club is very serious and they highlight areas that are impactful to them.*

*Like I say, if it's a library book, then, you know, I'm very careful with it. I may re-read it a couple of times just so that I can, you know, try to remember where it is ... maybe I'll put a bookmark or something in it.*

Abbie describes a sense of uncertainty and hesitation in selecting a read for the avid, and more serious, readers in the book club. She invests time in online searches, seeking recommendations, and listening to book-centric programming on CBC Radio.

*Yeah, there is [a sense of pressure in choosing the right book club book] because I'm not the reader. I'm not the one who has to have a book in their hands. And, so, yeah, I do find it a little bit ... I'm not the resource for the book list, I guess, because everybody else will read five and six books before I'll even pick one up ...*

*Reconciliation as Reading Context.* Abbie has not read Indigenous Literatures on her own or in either of her two book clubs. She talks about her mother growing up in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia, during the time when the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School was in operation.

*It's interesting because my mother, so she grew up in Shubenacadie, and she would have grown up in that time when that Residential School was running ... I don't know when it opened though, I'm ignorant to the timeframes ... there was a large Indigenous population, but they're always on*

*the fringe, right? Like, they're always in their own community. ... there was always more negative things associated with the Indigenous [Peoples].*

Abbie acknowledges and accepts, as a matter of fact, that she does not know the history of the Residential School. She also describes Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities as separate with Indigenous people occupying what she perceives as the margins of society. This sense of separation and projection of marginalization are uncritically accepted and unchallenged. There seems to be no awareness, at least no verbal acknowledgement, that settler communities were/are often inhospitable to Indigenous Peoples. Abbie does not question or challenge the negative stereotypes she has been witness to.

*Reconciliation* is a term Abbie is hearing more often lately in televised news and on CBC Radio. She sometimes watches programs on The Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN). Abbie struggles to define or describe the term.

*I just think It's something that we as white, privileged society, we have no idea, we have no idea the damage that we've done and perpetuated. And, you know, the whole experience of finding these mass graves, I think it's horrifying to think that we have been a society that has done that. And, in the name of religion, and worse. So, reconciliation, uhm, I don't know specifically ...*

Admissions of ignorance such as *we have no idea* and *I don't know* imply a claim of innocence. Abbie is not alone in making this claim as Maracle (2017) contends that “[i]nnocence is a recurring insistence of white people” even as they “continue to live more comfortable lives” (p. 75). Although Abbie has not considered linking her reading to reconciliation, it is not something she is opposed to doing. Reconciliation does not factor into her work life nor is it something that typically comes up in conversations with friends or family.

*... yeah, perhaps it should more often. I think the more that we hear about it, I think it's important that it is present all the time, because, I think we all need to hear it and we need to really look at it, and examine, you know, our part in it, and how we can make it better. So, yeah, I mean, I don't know how we ... how can we do that? How do you atone for that, those actions? And, I guess, maybe, keeping your own mouth shut and being more observant and listening more ... it's such a complex, complex issue, you know, because we all have our prejudices, and we like to think we don't, but we do. How do we deal with it? Like, how do you actually deal with that on a day-to-day basis, you know?*

Abbie recognizes and articulates the need to be more aware, more willing to observe and to listen, and more open to conversations about reconciling. She does not know how to begin to atone for past harms and wrestles with what actions to take to recognize and redress prejudices. I wonder whether professing to not know how to atone for past and present harms is another expression of innocence and a way to deny responsibility.

Abbie has heard more about decolonization of late and articulates an understanding of colonization. She struggles to grasp the atrocities that took place.

*... what we did to an Indigenous population to make them assimilate, or not be the way that they are. To be more like the colony, so, they, it's sort of a way of stripping the Indian out of the Indian, I guess. I don't know. And, the things that they did. I can't believe that they did to the Indigenous people what would never be acceptable to themselves. Like, that to me is just mind boggling, but, you know. How does that happen? How does that happen? It happened over centuries. So, how do you undo that? How does, how do you undo that? I don't know. I don't know how that ... there's not going to be one thing.*

Abbie draws attention to murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls and questions the pace of the response.

*Like, why don't we care about them just as much as somebody else who goes missing? They're trafficked, you know, they get scooped up, they get abused, they get killed. And, at what point do we start to care? Shouldn't we care after the first one disappeared? And, not the 1000<sup>th</sup> one, like, that to me is mind boggling, you know. ... That we don't start to care sooner, or it doesn't appear that we do, or nothing gets done at the same pace, because why?*

When Abbie turned her attention to describing her experience and understanding of the terms *reconciliation* and *decolonization*—terms she is hearing more frequently in the media but not taking the initiative to investigate—a momentum gathered in the way she engaged and responded as she began to reflect, question, and challenge her own thinking.

### Reading Journal

*Methodological Note.* This section re-presents Abbie's entire journal as transcribed from bullet points hand-written on a pad of standard-sized, lined paper. Abbie photographed each of three pages and sent the images as an email attachment. The dates indicate a month-long break in her reading experience after Chapter 1. Several journal entries are undated and there is a gap in journaling for Chapters 9 to 12. Abbie stopped journaling after Chapter 13 of 26. Words in italics are those of the participant. The journal text was edited according to APA style. To improve readability, abbreviations were replaced with words when a singular meaning was obvious. For example, the word *between* was used in the transcript instead of b/w, and ampersands were replaced with the word *and*.

*Friday, April 22, 2022*

*Chapter 1.* The first sentence of *Celia's Song* (Maracle, 2014) reads, "There is something helpless in being a witness" (p. 1). Abbie notes the power of the opening statement and questions who is witnessing

what. She does not place herself, as reader, in the role of witness. Abbie finds the detailed descriptions *compelling* as opposed to Rose who finds the same *aggravating*. The story prompts Abbie to reconceive the *connectedness* between nature, humans, and animals, blurring the lines of separation and categorization that she seemingly perceives. Abbie also notes feeling *sadness* as she acknowledges the sense of loss and disregard for life portrayed in the story.

- *Powerful first sentence*
- *At first I thought the observer was a person, but I'm uncertain of the connection between Celia and the mink. Is she having visions of what the mink is observing[?] Is this how she is in fact the witness to the story[?]*
- *The descriptions are very detailed, yet very compelling to read and there is a connectedness between nature and human/animal that is new to me.*
- *It's like the people and nature blur as one unit—if that makes any sense.*
- *I felt a sadness at the loss of the community and that there was a disregard for the lives that had existed and there seemed to be no rest or justice for what had happened to them.*

*May 24, 2022*

*Chapter II.* Abbie notes her confusion and inability connect disjointed elements in the story. She is unsure who or what is witnessing the scene that unfolds in this chapter. She acknowledges a *devaluation* of Indigenous knowledges and, in effect, *a need to prove them wrong or incapable of knowing*.

- *Is Celia listening in/observing the discussion among the scientists? Are they searching for something they can't explain or disregarding the possibility that something can't be explained by a scientific measurement[?] What are they searching for and is it still valid and true without that measurement[?]*

- *There is disregard for the knowledge and the abilities of the native people (Inuit and the whales). It's almost like there is a need to prove them wrong or incapable of knowing what they know. A devaluation.*
- *It was a confusing chapter as I'm not sure how it relates to the story at this point.*

*May 27, 2022*

*Chapter III.* Abbie describes her reading experience as simultaneously *engaging* and *confusing*, leaving her feeling *a bit tense* as she senses rather than sees the trajectory of the story. It is worth noting that confusion can be a sign of engagement (Lemieux, 2020). She questions what Celia is seeing and through whose eyes, and is cognizant of her lack of knowledge regarding the specific cultural beliefs, practices, and traditions described in the novel.

- *An engaging chapter, but confusing as well. Reading it made me feel a bit tense.*
- *It made me think that something "big" was building up, but not yet revealed.*
- *I'm confused about what it really means and what is happening to Celia. Is she seeing the destruction of the longhouse through the eyes of the mink or the serpents?*
- *I'm not knowledgeable about the significance of the 2 headed serpent on the longhouse.*

*May 27, 2022*

*Chapter IV.* Abbie notes her deepening emotional response to the story using words such as *anger*, *fear*, and *deep sadness* regarding transgressions against the land. She identifies *a sense of shame for allowing it to happen*. The idea of *allowing* suggests an underlying sense of being complacent and complicit.

Abbie questions the timeline as another point of confusion.

- *Anger and fear.*
- *A deep sadness for how the land is being treated.*
- *A sense of shame for allowing it to happen.*
- *What is the timeline?*

*Chapter V.* Abbie continues to question elements of the narrative and articulate uncertainty about the meaning and trajectory of the story. She expresses a felt sense of momentum churning toward *something big*, and tentative anticipation seems to thread through a knowing that all will be revealed.

- *I'm still confused about the meaning of Celia's visions. Something big seems to be slowly revealing itself.*
- *How does Steve hear the voices?*

*Chapter VI.* Abbie notes feeling *sad, angry*, and unsure as she reads this chapter. She balances her assessment of a *vile* character with recognition of the broader circumstances contributing to his actions. In taking this stance Abbie is acknowledging the significance of *connections to traditions, nature*, and community to the lived experience of an individual.

- *Page 41. Is this a reference to Robert Pic[k]ton the serial killer apprehended in 2002[?]*
- *Nuu'chalnulth territory*
- *Not sure what is happening*
- *I felt both sad and angry when I read this chapter.*
- *Even though Amos was an evil person (vile) I don't think he even understood how his life was the way it was.*
- *He lacked the connections to traditions, nature and his people.*

*Chapter VIII.* Abbie describes her continuing sense of anticipation, uncertainty, and *confusion*. She is attempting to make sense of the story as it is emerging. *Sadness* and *hope* mingle and mark the read as an oscillating emotional experience.

- *I felt like I was sitting on the edge of my chair just waiting for something to reveal itself, but unsure of what was going to happen. The story is unfolding, but not visible yet.*
- *Sadness and hope.*

- *Old bones meeting the new—confusion*

*[no dates noted; no journaling for Chapters 9 through 12]*

*Chapter XIII.* Abbie steps away from journaling and pauses her reading experience. There is a sense in this entry that she is emotionally invested in the characters, the decision they take, and the outcome. Her lived experience as a nurse seems to be enmeshed in the experience of the characters.

*I can't journal anymore. This chapter is horrific to read and I'm not sure I can continue. I find the fact that they don't call 9-1-1 very interesting. The women need to care for the child and they believe that that is her only hope. If external help comes they know she will be taken away and never healed. I can't believe they were able to nurse the child to health.*

*[journaling ends]*

Although Abbie did not complete the journaling task she did capture a sense of her cognitive experience of the book as *compelling, engaging, and confusing*. She uses terms such as *hope, sadness, fear, anger, and shame* to express her affective experience of *Celia's Song*, and notes tension as an embodied response to reading the text. Abbie shares more about her journaling experience and her choice to stop journaling in the book club discussion that follows.

### Book Club Discussion

*Methodological Note.* The following is a re-presentation of Abbie's participation in the book club discussion as she shares her approach to and experience of the book. I weave her words, which appear in italics, in and through the analysis. Given that group dialogue is relational, I include the experience of other book club members when it is relevant to Abbie's individual reading experience. I also describe observed patterns of speech that are specific to Abbie and influential in the group dynamic.

*Book Club Scenario.* The dark drapes are parted to let in the waning light. The patterned rugs and deep-seated, upholstered furniture establish the living room as a warm and comfortable embrace. A curio cabinet displays a treasured trove of mementos—a lifetime of moments frozen in glass, wood, and

metal. The framed art adorning the rich, rust-toned walls suggests an eclectic sensibility. Seven friends, bound by their love of books, wine, and good conversation, settle in to share their experience of reading *Celia's Song*. I am a researcher-witness warmly welcomed into the fold for this book club session.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, this Methodological Note and Book Club Scenario apply to all participants and, as such, will not be repeated.

*Approach to Book.* Abbie shares that she found the story *really hard* and struggled through the first 100 pages of the book. She read the remaining 168 pages on the day of the scheduled book club session. By reading this volume, at this pace, without interrupting her reading experience to reflect and journal, she got a *better feel for the book*. This change in her approach to reading the book is significant given her self-assessment as a slow reader in the initial interview. The dramatic shift in approach resulted in a dramatic shift in her experience of the book. She found the narrative to be *beautifully written* and enjoyed the descriptive prose. Abbie noted that reading in the bathtub or at night in bed were not conducive to journaling. This research task required her to adjust her temporal and locational reading practice..

As she responds to the reading experiences shared by other group members—*confusion, anxiety, dread*—Abbie speaks in a clear voice and her words flow as she expresses herself without hesitation. She describes reaching a dilemma in her reading experience. *I almost put the book down and said that was it.* Rather than quit the read, however, she chose instead to end the journaling task. *I think the important thing for me, when I was reading, I just had to let that go. ... I just had to let it flow.*

Abbie recognized the journaling task as a *distraction* from the story and her enjoyment of it. She found herself caught up in figuring out elements of the story that she did not understand, let alone document. The act of scribing her reading experience embroiled her in sense-making and meaning-making and she lost the flow of the story.

*I can't concentrate on thinking about what I'm writing in a journal. I have to leave that because I lose the essence of the whole flow of it because I'm trying too hard to figure out what it is, and it's like, if I don't understand it, I don't understand it. ... I could underline a lot, you know, every second page you could underline something and write it down ... if I had continued to do that, I think I would have lost the whole flow of the book. ... when I just let go and just read it, it was a really, really, really good book. I really liked it.*

Abbie accepted that she did not understand some elements of the story and the sense of uncertainty that accompanied the confusion. Conscious awareness of her discomfort in not knowing created an opening to accept the dis-ease and continue. She came to a realization that she did not need to fully comprehend the story to get *a glimpse into maybe what their life is like and what's important to them*. In other words, an appreciation of the experience of fictional characters living in, by, and through the context of a lifeworld that is different than her own. This reading experience enabled Abbie to see the world through the eyes of another (Baron, 2015). Abbie accepted occupying a state of uncertainty and gained self-awareness that it was her urge and effort to figure out the unknown that obstructed and restricted the essence and flow of the story. She consciously chose to quiet her mind as a way to allow the story to be as it was, to not get *lost* in the mechanics of journaling, to not be bound by thinking structured and conditioned in, by, and through her lifeworld, and to not let expectations of reading and storying based on prior experience limit this reading experience.

Abbie talked herself into continuing the book. The decision to *let go and just read* was a conscious, intentional choice that dramatically shifted her experience of *Celia's Song*. *And, then, I go, well I'm just going to read on because it's got to get better, it's got to get better*. She clarifies that what she hoped would get better was the story and not the author's writing. Abbie describes an embodied response to reading a scene of violent abuse without labelling it as such. *I almost put it [the book] down because I couldn't stomach the thoughts of the little girl being injured*.

Abbie both seeks and provides clarity during the course of the discussion. For example, she recognized the formatting cue that signaled the voice of Mink and shares the significance of the italic typeface to offer a point of clarity to the other readers.

*Experience of Book.* Abbie articulates a direct correlation between the fictional narrative, colonization, and the experience of having *everything stripped away over time*. She states ... *they were colonized ... I think it's [the book is] all about that*. Abbie makes explicit the connection between the read and reality. *Celia's Song* is a fictionalized account of lived experience and, as such, it is an entrance into the known, sensed, felt, embodied, individual, and relational lived experience of colonization. Abbie's comments shift the conversation away from sharing individual reading experiences and approaches to the book, and toward a broader understanding and deeper engagement with the text. This represents a high level of engagement, reflection, and meaning-making for this reader as she extends and expands meaning beyond the book.

Abbie engages in dialogue centred on identifying an overarching theme. Others in the group test their understanding of the book and seek corroboration. *Was Celia's Song about them trying to come back to their roots and, you know, their own ways?* Abbie agrees, validates another's perception of the narrative, and, then, extends and expands the dialogue. *Well, yeah, and I also think that the evolution of their whole [story] is recognizing they have value. There's value in everything that they have forgotten and, you know, they don't need anybody else to tell them that.* Together these readers demonstrate active, cognitive engagement with the text as they make connections to events and themes beyond the fiction narrative. When no other readers weigh in, this line of conversation goes no further. It appears that silence speaks.

Abbie shares her experience of the descriptive prose. *Like, you could see it. Like, you could see ... nature [in] the descriptions of things.* Her words echo with conviction. ... *like, oh, my god. It's so crucial, it's so crucial to the story.* Her comment regarding *the descriptions of things* is not specific, or descriptive

in and of itself, and, yet, there is a sense that she was moved by the prose. For Abbie, the words conjured imagery so vivid that she felt as if she *could see it*. The writing style induced a deep, rich, and nuanced immersion into the narrative. Fiction readers can become completely engaged in a story (Leavy, 2018), immersed, absorbed, or lost in a book (Nell, 1988). This experience of vividly visualizing the narrative is also a signal that Abbie was transported into the story. Transportation is observed as a high level of cognitive engagement, emotional involvement, and vivid imagery (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Johnson, 2013).

Abbie sparks a discussion on a scene that appeared early in the text (pp. 48–49) when mink is skinned alive and Celia, a seer, “is a voyeur” (Maracle, 2014, p. 49) to the event. Mention of the scene instigates immediate reactions and exclamations from the other readers who share their reading experiences in a tumult of voices. The scene led Abbie to physically put her book down. To be able to choose to stop reading a story when it becomes uncomfortable, intolerable, off-putting, too much or, conversely, too little, is part of the power, privilege, and positionality of a reader. Abbie was able to resolve her resistance to the story and continue. *I put the book down and I said, I can’t, I just can’t read this. And, it was like, ok, I got to get past this, you know. I made the commitment.* Abbie recognized her resistance as a reaction to the scene and something she was able to move beyond.

Abbie was confused by a number of scenes in the book. She raises these as points of discussion to leverage the experience of the other readers and reach a new level of clarity and understanding. More often than not, the others in the group had experienced a similar sense of confusion. As a result, during these attempts at shared sense-making, the dialogue serves to validate the unknown as unknowable to these settler readers and uncertainty remains. No one moves beyond the book to seek answers to the questions that arise in the discussion.

Several times during the discussion, Abbie validates another reader's experience of the text, identifying it as a shared experience. Abbie makes a statement of agreement, for example. *So true*. Her words are simple, concise, precise, and unequivocal. She is validating the experience of another. In essence, she is saying I hear you, I understand you, I experienced it in the same way as you. Another instance of this happens as Abbie and Rose talk about the backstory of a character in a way that indicates a shared experience and understanding of the text. When Abbie pauses during this exchange, Rose speaks up to complete Abbie's statement with precise accuracy. When two or more members of the group are in sync cognitively, emotionally, and verbally, connections are forged and the group experience is made tangible. Moments such as these are a meeting of the minds as an individual experience is validated by another.

Abbie also offers explanations to clarify confusing elements in the text for the other group members. This has the effect of expanding and extending sense-making and meaning-making for the entire group. Specifically, Abbie does this in response to the shared confusion around the shifting timeframes in the story. She seems open and receptive to time as it is conveyed in the narrative, bending and folding over onto itself like fabric in nonlinear, nonsequential ways.

The conversation turns to the character of Amos and the singular reference in the book to his Residential School experience. Letitia refers to him as *a product of Residential Schools* and adds, *not that you want to feel any pity for him*. Letitia is clear that she does not concede *pity* for Amos based on his life experience. Abbie is adamant in her response. *But you do. How could you not, knowing what he endured?* Her statement suggests both compassion and disbelief at the indifference expressed regarding the early life of this character who perpetrated a heinous crime. Her quick disagreement is indicative of a level of comfort among the group members and acceptance of dissenting and conflicting opinions.

Abbie goes on to clarify that she does not condone the behaviour of Amos regardless of his past personal experience. She demonstrates expanded awareness, critical reflection, and a sense of openness as she grapples cognitively and emotionally with events in the book that she finds disturbing. She begins to articulate her thoughts regarding the role of extenuating circumstances in grievous, incomprehensible acts of violence and violation to explore this topic further. When Abbie hesitates, searching for the right words to express herself, Rose interrupts and fills the silent pause. The meaning and momentum that infuse the discussion do not coalesce to return to this line of conversation again. The thread of discussion regarding the generational impact of trauma experienced at Residential Schools hangs unexplored; the course of discourse shifted. Rose seems unaware that she is interrupting the flow of dialogue as it unfolds. Abbie does not finish her sentence. Her thoughts go unspoken, unshared, and unheard as Rose reads again from her journal.

Abbie describes the precise moment that she abandoned any expectations of the reading experience and simply read the story; allowing herself to be transported into a lifeworld that was unknown, uncertain, and unpredictable to her. The descriptor *really good*, and the evaluation *really liked*, do not illuminate her reading experience and, yet, the comments suggest Abbie was swept into the flow of the story and transported into the narrative following an intentional and temporary suspension of the thinking and reading expectations conditioned in, by, and through her lifeworld.

*... the horrible events and, then, it speaks to the courage of the women, like you said, to believe that she was going to get better. And, they just had to do it. They had to, you know, make her well. And, from then on, when I just let go and just read it, it was a really, really, really good book. I really liked it.*

Abbie speaks to the *courage* and strength of belief among the female characters who helped the child to heal using traditional methods and means. Abbie acknowledges their determination,

resignation, and ability to respond to events that were *horrible*. She is struck by the solidarity in their belief that healing was possible for the child, the family, and the community. Abbie also speaks to the need for care in a character who participated in violent and unspeakable acts against herself and her child. Her sense of compassion is evident. ... *she needed nursing as well*. This scene in the book was discussed earlier. That the discourse spirals back to the same point in the narrative may suggest that concepts and practices underpinning restoration, redemption, and reconciliation are novel to these readers. It suggests an openness in Abbie to extend care under all circumstance that may be tied to her lived experience as a nurse. It appears that she is drawing on prior personal experience and previously acquired knowledge to construct and interpret meaning from the text as Rosenblatt (1978) and Ross (1999) both posit regarding the experience of readers.

Rose shares a recent experience reading *Five Little Indians* by Michelle Good (2020), another Indigenous-authored book, and compares it to her experience reading *Celia's Song*. Abbie is curious about the stark difference in the two reading experiences and poses a series of astute questions. Rose, in response, critically reflects and identifies the factors that led her to assess one book as a better read than the other. She comes to an awareness that she enjoyed the other read more because the storytelling style was familiar. This line of conversation is a demonstration of validating discourse as both Rose and Abbie come to a deeper and richer understanding of what qualifies as a good read and why.

Again, Abbie tries to initiate a broader conversation based on their shared-reading experience. ... *the sad truth is that this stuff is all true. This is what happens*. She connects fiction with fact, aligning the narrative with now. *This is what we did to ... well, we did to, you know, the Native populations. There's [sic] communities up north that have had no clean water for over 25 years. How is that acceptable?* Abbie creates an opening for broader conversation regarding current issues related to equity, access, health, and justice. Her statement and question trigger simultaneous and, subsequently,

inaudible responses; an explosion of words, sparked by her question, infuses the discussion with new energy. The volley of inaudible responses carries an undertone of agreement. Abbie challenges the others in the group to expand their thinking beyond the narrative as she seeks to engage their perspective as her own awareness extends beyond the text. Abbie is demonstrating expanded awareness, critical reflection, and validating discourse in her participation in the discussion. This line of conversation is the outcome of their shared reading experience and would not otherwise have taken place. Attention to the narrative, a book she would not have self-selected, planted the seed. Abbie's overall participation in the group conversation extended and expanded discussion beyond the book into broader social, cultural, and historical connections.

Abbie positions the book as a fictional story that reflects reality as she draws connections between the text and her lived experience. As a mid-life, white woman, she reflects critically on a scene in the book where a group of western scientists are dismissive of Indigenous knowing and knowledge. ... *we as white people disregard the knowledge [of Indigenous peoples]*. Her comment suggests expanded awareness and critical reflection as she relates the fictional text to contemporary society.

Abbie comes to a new awareness through the narrative as a window onto a lifeworld that is unknown to her. *Yeah, I didn't expect the violence that is occurring in the book. The violence is amongst themselves.* Being reader-witness to violence within a family and community offered Abbie a new perspective on generational trauma. ... *but that violence has occurred because they endured the violence from the outsiders for centuries and it got them to that point. So, you're reading and it's, like, it's all brought on ...* . Abbie does not completely express her thinking as Rose interrupts. Rose is resistant to the perspective Abbie voices and adamantly disputes her assignment of responsibility.

As Abbie responds to the perspective Rose articulates regarding the establishment of the Indian Residential School System, she, again, demonstrates expanded awareness, critical reflection, and

dialogue that tests and challenges assumed Eurocentric beliefs. *It was supreme prejudice.* A clear, unequivocal statement sets the tone of her response. Rose believes the origin of the Indian Residential School System was benevolent and altruistic, albeit ignorant. Abbie responds by stating historical fact. *But they [Residential Schools] did function in our ... lifetime.* Her words have the effect of rippling through the group as the others agree.

Abbie uses a single-word label, *racism*, in response to Rose describing bias as innate. Abbie extends the conversation, ... *that's not something you're born believing. You know what I mean? ... you learn to be a racist. ... You weren't born that way.* Later, Abbie reiterates that *we're not born that way. We learn it.* There is group consensus that racism is learned. The conversation illuminates that these readers observe racism in other people presently, including family members and close friends, and that they acknowledge racist attitudes as the basis of past relations between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples. At no time in this discussion is racism identified in self. There is no discourse on how to become conscious of racism in oneself, how to unlearn racism, or how to address racism when it arises within one's relational sphere.

While it is important and necessary to arrive at this point of awareness to be able to recognize and acknowledge instances of racism, it is another thing altogether to become aware of and to recognize and acknowledge the inclination in oneself to think and act in racist ways. This is the essence of the inner work required of people of settler ancestry with respect to reconciliation, decolonization, and treaty relations. As a society and culture steeped in Eurocentric thought, governance, justice, and education, Canada as a diverse collective of individuals is making strides toward recognizing, acknowledging, and responding to the instances of racism. I believe, however, it is still the case that very few individuals of settler ancestry have gained awareness of their own inclination to think and act in racist ways. Racism is rooted in stereotypes. It is necessary to examine the stereotypes that we unconsciously and consciously lean into as comfort zones that act to self-restrict transformative growth

and learning. Transformation—the process of becoming aware, reflecting, critically self-reflecting, speaking up and speaking out, and, ultimately, enacting new ways of thinking and showing up in our lifeworlds—does not and will not happen from a place of comfort.

As Rose reiterates her perspective, Abbie makes another clear, simple statement in response. *We didn't enhance the[ir] lives.* The comment is made in the language of separation and difference: *we, their.* The idea of settlers as having a role to play in improving the lives of another group of people maintains the paternalistic and superior position of people of settler ancestry as those who determine and extend aid. It also disregards and dismisses the autonomy and agency of the people who are deemed to be in need of aid. Abbie follows with a statement regarding what is essential for Indigenous Peoples to heal. She tests and seeks validation for her perspective among this group of peers. Her belief is validated and supported. Once again, using language that denotes a dichotomy between us/them, the focus is on a settler perspective of Indigenous healing and how to facilitate it. No awareness is articulated regarding the responsibility and “response-ability” (Haraway, 2012) of settlers to listen, learn, and witness.

Donna Haraway (2012) conceptualizes response-ability as awareness of and active participation in the web of relations we find ourselves entangled in. This includes our relations with peoples, places, times, technologies, materials, and all manner of beings. Response-ability involves “staying with the trouble” (p. 313), and learning to tolerate the difficulties and uncertainties. For Haraway (2012), there is no space for innocence or denial and “the accountabilities are extensive and permanently unfinished” (p. 311). This suggests that being response-able does not mean solving, re-solving, or dis-solving the trouble, but rather, effecting processes and practices to move through uncertainty to create the momentum to flourish together in new ways.

There is also no articulated acknowledgement of the autonomy and agency of Indigenous Peoples, and the overall tone of this line of conversation is paternalistic. Overall, the conversation suggests passive (Boler, 1997) or pseudo empathy (Coplan, 2011) arising out of reader engagement with the text. This form of empathy falls short of critical reflection on complacency or complicity. It certainly does not produce the necessary action on social justice for “the return of Indigenous life and land” Nagy (2020, p. 221). As demonstrated here, this form of “empathy might provoke a misguided desire to ‘help’ the seemingly dysfunctional other, rather than challenging one’s own group as the source of the problem” (Nagy, 2020, p. 224).

Hazel reads from her copy of the book. *“Spirit food is what the original humans promised to feed him [the two-headed serpent] through their songs and ceremony”* [p. 27]. In response, Abbie comments that ... *they stopped all of that, right? They stopped all their singing*. It is a moment in which language can be viewed as a conveyance for underlying, unchallenged assumptions. Abbie articulates no awareness of the fact that dance, song, and ceremony were made illegal and punishable by the dominant colonial society. No other person in the group challenges the nuance of her statement. Perhaps, unawareness and ignorance scaffold a bid for innocence.

The conversation often focuses on attempts to understand the symbolism and significance of scenes in the book. Abbie and the others sense an importance in the words and, yet, they do not have the knowledge base to fully grasp, process, and synthesize the meaning. These readers are frequently confronted by their own ignorance. Abbie does not voice a sense of agency, intention, or even curiosity to find out more. It is a revelation in the final interview that she researched questions online as they arose during her individual reading experience.

Abbie is aware of Mink as an observing presence and witness throughout the story. ... *he [Mink] was observing*. Mink is not confined by form and so transcends time, place, and space. The insight of

mink as witness is the filament that runs through the story, stringing the parts together and illuminating the whole. This thread of conversation unravels in a tangle of inaudible voices and ends. It may be that everyone said what they needed to at the same time making it inaudible and, therefore, inaccessible to me as researcher-witness to the conversation around this reading experience. I recognize and acknowledge these gaps in audible dialogue as unknown and unfathomable depths of expression, thought, and experience.

*Individual Speaking Patterns.* Abbie usually uses simple descriptors and vocabulary. Her speech tends to be disjointed, fragmented, and vague. She often halts and hesitates to collect her thoughts and the words required to express them. When this happens, others in the group either insert words or pick up the conversation and carry it in another direction. At times, Abbie speaks in unison with the person who aids her search for the right words. For example, she voices her consensus as Hazel speaks, attuned to and in agreement with what she is expressing. It is as if Hazel found and spoke the exact words Abbie had been searching for. Sometimes Abbie's voice also joins in the flow of words spoken by another, weaving together individual stands of thought, emotion, and shared experience expressed in layered sounds and syllables.

Abbie shows deference to the group members by yielding to other voices and she speaks of her desire not to monopolize the conversation. At one point in the discussion, however, Abbie finds the way and the words to describe her reading experience. She speaks without hesitation, her words a fluid and uninterrupted stream of expression. Abbie shares that she consciously chose to allow the narrative to flow and unfold as it was written. This deliberate approach to the text resulted in an enjoyable reading experience. ... *when I just let go and just read it, it was a really, really, really good book. I really liked it.*

### Final Interview

*Interview Scenario.* I close the door to the office/bedroom and set up for this final interview with Abbie. The house is quiet and still with no one else present. The digital recorder and iPhone sit side by side, and

the laptop is open to a new Microsoft Word document. It fills the screen with a stark white, empty space that replicates a blank sheet of paper. The program will soon populate the void as purposeful space gives meaning to the ordered arrangement of letters and punctuation. It all begins with the touch of numbers on the cellphone call screen as I initiate this final contact 12 days after the book club discussion.

Abbie *probably will* seek out Indigenous Literatures for future reads. She *didn't know what to expect* with this first experience reading an Indigenous-authored book. Abbie turned to information sources beyond the book to *try and understand* elements in the narrative, a detail of her reading experience that was not evident at the book club discussion. ... *one thing that is very clear is my ignorance as to the diversity of the Indigenous people and their culture*. The book proved to be a jumping off point for Abbie, drawing her attention to an area where she lacked knowledge, and acting as a catalyst to forming a new intention to read Indigenous Literatures. Abbie used the internet to search for information on specific cultural practices, longhouses, the two-headed serpent, traditional territories, and names.

After this reading experience Abbie feels *well aware* that she *was ignorant about all the facets for the reasons for reconciliation*. She is grappling with the relationship between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples. *I find it mind boggling to think that so much negative was done to the Indigenous people ... I just can't wrap my head around it*. Abbie has not yet chosen the next book she will read, however, based on her experience reading *Celia's Song*, it is likely to be another book by Lee Maracle *just because I've been exposed to her writing and I really did like it*.

Abbie read *Celia's Song* because she committed to read it for both the book club and the research project. She does not believe that it is a book she would have chosen without a strong recommendation. *I am glad I did because I really did enjoy her writing*. Abbie found the reaction of the other members of the book club surprising *on a lot of levels*. She made a conscious choice early in the

read *not to get caught up in all the little details [just] because I don't understand. I found her writing [had] a flow to it that was enjoyable, even though some of the content was hard to read. Abbie was absolutely open to the flow of the story even though she found the element of time in the storytelling continually confusing.*

Abbie believes *the feeling and the essence of this book will stay with her like other significant reading experiences in her life. This is impactful for sure. What stands out in the narrative for Abbie is the way in which they decided to care for the little girl who was injured. ... they did it as a community and they extended the care to one of the perpetrators of the harm, recognizing that she needed to be healed as well. As an outcome of her reading experience, Abbie gained new appreciation for the origin and extent of the mistrust Indigenous Peoples express in regard to government agencies, institutions, and religious entities. What was to be trusted? ... [they] took everything away from them and instituted rules that really didn't work in their favour. ... It's like stripping away your identity.*

Abbie found the book *was kind of slow at the start. She struggled to predict the trajectory of the story and, yet, intrigued by Celia as kind of a different character, Abbie felt compelled to read on. By the time she was halfway into the volume, Abbie could see why it was necessary for a reader to sort of understand a few things before getting into the characters and the community at the heart of the story. At this point, Abbie felt compelled to continue. I did not want to read it, but I couldn't not read it. I had to. And, I'm a procrastinator and I finished the book an hour before book club. Abbie completely shifted speed at which she reads to finish the book in time for the discussion. She found the read hard in the beginning as she stopped and started to accommodate the journaling task. The necessity to document her reading experience sort of broke it [the story] up and made it less interesting. At the beginning, Abbie would read, stop, review, and journal. As a result, the story felt disjointed. That feeling dissipated when she stopped journaling.*

Abbie muses about different scenes in the book that *really stuck* with her in a way that suggests she is emotionally invested in the characters and imagines the story extending beyond the book. She also articulates a broad view of the events portrayed that intimates resonance with her lived experience. ... *you look at things and you see how you make the best decisions that you can, but they're not always the best decisions.* Abbie believes this reading experience is *hitting her a little deeper emotionally* than it did with some of the other members of the book club.

*I thought it was a very interesting story. I'm surprized the other guys didn't like it. And, what I'm surprized at is, I guess, ... I think we're all these white, privileged women and we've never ever had [to experience] prejudice. We've never had to experience anything that these people would have experienced and we kind of shrug it off, and we talk about the writing style, and the story, and [being] confused, and all this stuff. ... And, I don't know, I was just kind of surprized that they were critiquing the story. I don't know. I think I felt something a little deeper.*

Abbie marvels at the community of care extended to the injured child. She compares her lived experience of community to that portrayed in the book and specifically notes a sense of separateness.

*I just don't ever see anything like that happening in our own [settler] communities ... we just don't. We keep away from one another. We don't engage in just being with people and sitting around the table telling stories and explaining things in stories ... we're separate. We keep to ourselves.*

Abbie describes her reading preferences. *I like to read a well written, authentic story but I don't like obvious cruelty and gore or anything like that. ... There's enough cruelty in the world.* *Celia's Song* registered differently for Abbie, however, aware to a degree of what has occurred between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples and realizing there is still more to learn about *how certain people have suffered and are still suffering generations later.* For Abbie, it made this book an *impactful* reading

experience. Abbie sensed the truth in the fiction and was compelled to seek out other sources of information to lean into learning.

Abbie will recommend *Celia's Song* as a *compelling* read and sees value in the book as a potential conversation starter.

*I think people are quite ignorant about what's gone on and the only way you're going to learn anything is to start investigating and learn for yourself, you know. Ask the questions, do your own research, read more books, engage in conversations ... there's probably a lot of people out there that have a lot of information to share.*

The journaling task was at odds with her typical reading practice at bedtime or in the bathtub. Abbie can see now that allowing herself time to read the book and, then, reread it and journal might have been a better approach to fulfill the research request to document her reading experience. ... *I probably would have picked up on a lot of things.*

For Abbie, the book club discussion layered her own reading experience with the specific experiences the other readers and she continues to muse about connections and events in the narrative that were questioned and discussed.

*It was interesting because I go, oh, I never got that in that book. I must have missed that, you know, or I must just have not understood because they would pick up [and] comment on a specific statement and bring it to light and then, ... I kind of remember[ed] reading that, but it didn't have the same impact [at the time].*

Abbie is intrigued to learn more. *I think it's really important and there's so much to learn.* She takes particular interest in CBC Radio commentary and content related to Indigenous Peoples. Abbie also appreciates the value of a fiction book in layering awareness and understanding through a different

format and forum. For her, *Celia's Song* was a glimpse into one fictionalized account of an Indigenous family and community, *how they see things and how they problem solve and what they value*.

The book highlighted reconciliation as an imperative to Abbie. The following comment suggests that she views healing as a necessary process for Indigenous Peoples. It also implies that she is not part of perpetrating and perpetuating the harms of colonialism and, so, by extension, is not part of the need to heal as a person of settler ancestry.

*... it [the reading experience] generates more questions and makes you so aware of the need for reconciliation when you look at what communities have had to go through. ... they are the product of their generations and the taking away, the stripping away of things and trying to survive. How do you heal from that? What is the healing process?*

Abbie notes that she felt the first sentence in *Celia's Song*— “There is something helpless in being a witness” (p. 1)—was a *powerful statement. I have it underlined. ... there's helplessness anytime you become a witness and you're sort of left to do nothing other than observe when you want to do something to help*. With prompting, she considers the idea of herself as reader-witness to the content and broader context of the story. *Yeah, you could say that*.

For Abbie, the reading experience was *quite different* with *unfamiliar* elements and moments that were *kind of unclear*. The timelines and timespans created the most uncertainty and confusion for this reader. Regardless, Abbie found herself carried through the story by the words of the author. *I didn't find it difficult because I found her writing easy to read. It's easy. It's a nice flow*. Abbie found the descriptive prose in *Celia's Song* detailed and compelling. It revealed a deep connectedness between the earth and human and nonhuman beings that was new to her; an extension and multi-dimensional expansion of her own lived experience and relationship with nature. *It's like it blurs into one. It's all part of their life in every aspect, everything that they do*. Abbie *cried* at several points along the way, an

embodied response to the experiences and the events that impacted the land and the people. Abbie had a reading experience that differed from the other readers in the group. She was able to visualize the vivid descriptions, an indication of transportation into the story (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Johnson, 2013).

*... when you're reading it, you can picture things, but it's not a tedious thing. There was [sic] lots of descriptions, but it was nicely written. There was an easy flow to it. Yeah, I liked it. I liked the book. I was probably the only one that really liked it.* Abbie finds that it is not unusual for her to be the dissenting voice in this group of readers. It is not unusual for her to label a book club selection that everyone else enjoyed as *really dumb or annoying*.

The point in the story where the other readers in the book club all wanted to abandon the read seemed to have the opposite effect on Abbie. *Ohh, I couldn't stop reading it, like, as horrific as that chapter was, I mean, that just sort of sent me in[to] overdrive. Like, I couldn't stop. I couldn't stop reading it at that point. And, I just had to keep going.* Perhaps it was her years working as a health care professional that allowed for a different response. From my own lived experience, I know that there is something about being a nurse and witnessing health crises in all forms that enables you to observe rather than become absorbed in the physical suffering of others in order to deliver care. Abbie describes the two-hour discussion as *very typical for this very serious group of ... avid readers. ... there's always a very lively discussion and there's always a thousand book darts in Rose's book.* Abbie was surprised, however, at the prevailing *reaction to Celia's Song. ... they kind of trashed the book.* She wonders whether the *criticizing* can be attributed to a *lack of understanding*. Abbie read the book with no expectation that she would understand everything. She surmizes that the others may have been looking for meaning to be explicitly stated. *I'm the one that's ignorant as to the meaning of these things. So, it's not the writer's fault and it's not the book's fault. It's my lack of understanding.* She credits the author for a *really well-written book* that is *impactful* and *emotional*, and takes responsibility for her own lack of understanding and knowledge.

Abbie also chose to read the book in the context of broader historical and current events and *felt that there was greater meaning in it.*

*I didn't dissect the book for what it was. I read it in light of the whole picture of everything that's going on. I think that's how I chose to read it. And that's why it maybe had a different impact on me than the other members. ... I was surprised about the criticism about ... the confusion and the way it was written; critiquing when maybe it was just the lack of understanding.*

## Chapter 4(b): Hazel

### Initial Interview

*Interview Scenario.* We sit facing one another in a circular booth at the back of the restaurant beyond the stretch of daylight from the windows. Sounds and smells spill out of the busy kitchen as wait staff, laden with trays of hot food or dirty dishes, push through the swinging door next to me. Crumbs on the vinyl seat and dried ketchup on the rim of the laminate table are remnants of earlier diners. I use a napkin and the condensation on the carafe of steaming green tea to wipe down the space in front of me and lay out an iPhone, digital recorder, and lined notebook to capture every word. She lowers her mask to eat a breakfast of precisely ordered menu items augmented with gluten-free toast and herbal tea she has brought from home. The private and relatively quiet space are conducive to sharing a lifetime of reading experience.

### Reading Lifeworld

*Early Reading Experience.* Hazel is an educated, 55-year-old woman, a self-published author, and a self-employed integrated health coach. She also identifies as an empath. Recounting her early reading experience conjures memories of a 10-year-old self, hiding under her bed, the glossy pages of her older sister's magazines reflecting the beam of her flashlight.

*... hiding underneath my bed to read my sister's magazines and books and things because she was older than me ... it was all kind of secretive. ... reading the stuff you know you weren't supposed to read. ... she was going through puberty and reading about kissing and all kinds of good stuff.*

Tucked away out of sight to read in secret is an emotionally charged memory for Hazel. She stories a mix of excitement, independence, and rebellion as she explored beyond what her parents would have condoned as age-appropriate reading. Schoolwork was the only reading she engaged in openly under the gaze and guidance of others. Memories of books as objects in her home, and of her

experience of libraries, are neither clear nor strong. In retrospect, what stands out for Hazel is her experience reading things she knew to be forbidden. Perhaps her most vivid memories are tied to a jumble of strong emotions—the excitement of reading forbidden text and the fear of disapproval if caught.

Hazel can picture her mother reading magazines and uses words like *if, maybe, might, whatever,* and *little* to describe her mother as a reader and the reading material she typically engaged in. She credits her father as her primary parental influence as a reader and describes his reading life with words such as *avid, always,* and *everything*.

*My dad was an avid reader; always had a book stuck to his face ... You'd see chaos theory on his nightstand and then he'd be reading Robert Ludlum ... He was probably the person who influenced me more in terms of being a reader. ... It was his escape. You could tell. He came back from work, had dinner, sat down, you know, said hi to his kids, you know, if we needed him, he was always there and would put the book down, but otherwise his head was just buried in it.*

*Significant Reading Experience.* Hazel recalls reading the Dollanganger Series—a set of eight gothic novels by V. C. Andrews—when she was young, beginning with *Flowers in the Attic* (1979). She describes this significant reading experience as a *very hide-under-the-bed-and-read-it type of thing* even though, at that point in her reading life, there was no longer any need for secrecy. Hazel recounts the memory with a sense of awe.

*You couldn't wait for the next one to come out. Flowers in the Attic. Petals in the Wind. If There Be Thorns. You know, it was just this beautiful series. Like Twilight, right? I guess it was kind of the Twilight of its day. It's forbidden things.*

Hazel recalls discovering that books served as a passageway into a world of imagination and adventure.

*... [reading] was a way to broaden my horizons beyond my fenced-in yard, and to really use the muscle of imagination. I was forced to imagine myself here, imagine myself being that person, imagine myself in that situation. But, it was really all for the adventure of it ... things I know I would never do in my life ...*

As an adult, Hazel views books as safe places to experience compassion and other emotions as someone who identifies as highly sensitive. Reading, for Hazel, also serves as a trial run for real life.

*... as an adult, I [read] in order to have compassion in a safe way, right? I got to feel compassion for the person whose wife died without it having to be actually happening in my life. And, it kind of prepared you for it too, kinda numbed you for it, made you acclimated to it.*

It seems the emotional and embodied experience of reading-through an event does not overwhelm her the same way that living-through the event might. Perhaps this is because she can reassure herself that what she is reading about is not actually happening and, specifically, not happening to her. Readers can also, at any moment, stop reading, close the book, and put it away to physically disconnect from the text and discontinue the reading experience. There is also an awareness that the story will reach a resolution, in one form or another, within a set number of pages.

*Recent Reading Experience.* Hazel's tendency is to reach for lighthearted books to avoid emotional overwhelm and she notes a difference in the depth of the reading experience.

*I try to go for more lighthearted outcomes than not, but the writing seems to be not as clever with lighthearted books. I don't know why. It seems like ... that deep vocabulary that explains the human condition seems to only happen in books with sorrow and trauma and, you know, while there might be healing in it, it might end up ok, but through the telling of the story there's a lot more emotional depth there ... [a book is] just a very safe place to be.*

Recommendations from family and friends have always been a source for new reads for Hazel. Now she is also discovering new books by following specific authors like Canadian writer Lori Lansens. She describes the feeling of trust a reader can develop in an author who writes consistently good books, the loyalty that can result from the assurance of yet another good read.

*I love that I can trust an author ... if they have multiple books out, and I liked one of them, I trust them with the second one, I trust them with the third, and even if the fourth one wasn't quite as good, I'll go back and trust them with the fifth one.*

Hazel often reads in bed at night finding it to be a good way to wind down at the end of the day. Another favourite reading space is on her sofa next to a big bright window in her living room where the abundance of light makes reading easy on the eyes.

Hazel prefers print books and finds both ebooks and audio formats, especially library loans, limit her ability to earmark pages and jot notes in the margins. Her enjoyment of audiobooks is entirely dependent on the quality, tone, and cadence of the narrating voice. Hazel admits she would much rather read aloud to others than be read to, idealizing her own individual experience of a text as the truest way to engage.

*I do love listening to audio interviews, podcasts, [and] discussions, but not somebody reading to me. And, yet, I love reading out loud to other people. ... because I know I'm good enough to really bring you into the story the way that you should be brought into the story. ... I'll read it to you as I experience the story and I always think that's best [laughing].*

In the absence of regular book club meetings during the pandemic, Hazel did not read as much for pleasure. She read 10 books in the six months prior to the study, half of which were on work-related topics. Most of the books Hazel enjoys reading for pleasure are written by female authors although

author gender is not a determinant factor in her choice of books. She gravitates to fiction and, more specifically, to fiction with strong female lead characters.

*It gives me hope that I can be as strong, probably. Yeah.*

Hazel buys the books she reads for work to have the ability to mark them up with her notes. For pleasure reading, she turns first to the library, in-person and online, to find and access new reading material. When she receives a notification that a book is waiting for her, she walks to the library straight away to pick it up. Hazel has a felt sense of libraries as safe spaces and reservoirs of good memories.

*I like to walk to the library. Just walking to the library brings me peace and comfort, even if it is going to pick up a book. ... It's a safe place. Nothing bad is going to happen to me in that library. Only good things. Only good memories of libraries.*

*Shared-Reading Experience.* Hazel is a founding member of the book club. The idea took shape a decade ago when she, Rose, and another member met for regular walks together through the neighbourhood they lived in. When she moved several years later, she introduced readers from her new neighbourhood into the fold. For Hazel, the primary draw is interesting conversation with other women.

*... we're similar but different. I love that they're forthright enough that you know what they're thinking, but guarded enough to not know what they're feeling. I'm an empath and I love picking up on those subtle energies in the room of what's really behind the words; the feelings behind the words and, then, the needs behind those feelings. ... And, this group, this mix of women, is just the cat's pajamas for that, yeah.*

Overall, Hazel finds shared-reading in the book club enhances her individual reading experience. She will take mental note of the characters, themes, and passages that resonate with her, and ear-mark specific pages, to be ready to inject her personal reading experience into the discussion.

*I would read books, but I wouldn't enjoy it nearly as much if I didn't have someone to share it with. ... when you know you're going to share it with somebody you try and save those little tidbits of magic to put out there.*

There is little descension among the members of the group, according to Hazel who voices her opinion without hesitation and relishes the responsibility as host to select the next book club read.

*If it's a really good book ... you can tell because everybody will come with Post-it notes ... . Most of the time we either are on one side of the fence or the other; liked it, didn't like it so much.*

One of her selections, however, was received with unanimous disdain and led to a shared moment literally burned into the storied history of this group of readers.

*And, so one of the women threw the book in the fire at my house and pretty soon everybody was tearing up their books!*

*How Should a Person Be?*, by Canadian author Sheila Heti, was the ill-fated book. Hazel had chosen it based on the title and the cover blurb, and used Goodreads reviews as back up to justify her choice to the other members of the book club.

*I think that every one of those people [who wrote the Goodreads reviews] had to be a relative. It was false advertising ... I learned that I am completely drawn in by the potential of the book. That means the title, if there is a subtitle, the synopsis, right? Like I was completely drawn in by that. Oh, and the reviews, of course. But the reviews were more for my friends than for me. Like, if it didn't have a great review, I still might have gotten the book because of the little blurb. The title and the blurb drew me in. But I went with a book that did have good reviews so that I could at least say to them, if the book wasn't good, "Well, it had good reviews."*

The book-burning incident is an indelible, shared memory that seems to have strengthened the unity and identity of the group. And, for Hazel, all was not lost.

*I won't bash any author ever. No matter whether a book is good or bad you still learn something about yourself in the process of that ... And, of course, it creates good memories sometimes.*

*Reconciliation as Reading Context.* For Hazel, her limited understanding of the term *reconciliation* is largely based on the fictional CBC television series *Anne with an E* (2017–present), currently streaming on Netflix. Hazel, an American who resides in Canada, admits she lacks the historical context to view the storyline critically. She describes the narrative arc centred on a white schoolgirl acting against the dominant sociocultural norms of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hazel perceives the fabled main character, Anne, as rescuer to an Indigenous girl sent to Residential School by her parents.

*... the whole last series had this Indigenous girl who was Anne's friend whose parents sent her away to the school and then all these terrible things happened to her and Anne had to go rescue her ...*

Hazel shares her understanding of reconciliation in measured words and vocalized pauses before describing her reaction to disturbing images, situations, and circumstances—real or imagined—and her need to strictly limit her awareness of anything that might trigger a strong emotional response. She assumes a position as a person who has the option to choose to avert her gaze in order to remain detached, unaware, sheltered, and protected from the painful experiences that others live.

*I understand, uhm, here in Canada, uhm, the government, the people, uhm, with the Indigenous who were, you know, be it had their land taken away or with the schools that there is some type of, uhm, you know, my husband will say compensation or restoration or whatever. Uhm, I get the broad strokes of it but I ask my husband not to tell me details. ... And, it's not that I close my eyes to it. I close my eyes to everything. Like, if it's gonna be something that seeps into my system,*

*that's gonna put me in that fight-flight panic mode, or over compassion, over sorrow, or whatever. I'm sorry. All of you can handle it. I can't. It's not safe. It's just not safe.*

Hazel has no familiarity with, or concept of, the term *decolonization* stating, in response to the question, that she was not a good history student. Her response seems to indicate that she views colonization as a historical event rather than the basis of contemporary systems of governance, justice, education, and economy. Reading an Indigenous-authored book, as an individual or as a member of the book club, has not occurred to her as an option. Indigenous Literatures as a canon seems to be completely outside of her awareness and, subsequently, beyond the scope of her attention and intention.

*I don't feel I could relate. ... I don't feel any connection at all. Nothing resonates with the Indigenous people. It seems so foreign to me; like they're on another planet. Doesn't mean I don't have immense compassion and [get] angry for anybody being violated that way, you know, ... but [I'm] just not drawn to their stories.*

### Reading Journal

*Methodological Note.* Hazel submitted her reading journal as an email attachment. Her words are re-presented here in italics with my analysis woven throughout. Hazel did not include the dates and times of her reading. The journal text has been edited according to APA style. The original formatting, including bullet points and an emoji, were maintained.

*Chapter 1.* Hazel struggles to get into the story from the start and attributes her difficulty to an intention to confuse on the part of the author. The reading experience triggers a childhood memory imbued with emotion. I detect a sense of betrayal in her writing; of being *invited* to read a book that she *could not understand* with a fear of being *made a fool of* rising up as a result. She compares her experience of reading *Celia's Song* directly to a childhood experience of inclusion as a ruse for deliberate exclusion.

*I am on a plane to Chicago, one of my favorite places for reading. I had hoped to get pulled into the story immediately, but so far, I'm lost. Who is telling the story? I feel a bit like the author is trying to confuse me. It reminds me of when my sister allowed me to come along with her to the secret clubhouse (the little room under the stairs at her friend's house next door) and then spent the entire time speaking in 'pig Latin' so I could not understand what they were saying. It was sad not being invited along to places with my sister, but being invited and then made a fool of was worse. This is that.*

*Chapter 2.* Hazel perceives a shift in the writing style of the author in this chapter and notes a corresponding shift in her reading experience as she finds resonance with a scene depicting an element of nature. She continues to ascribe her confusion to the author rather than to her own in/ability to comprehend or to embrace a style of storying unfamiliar to her. Hazel quotes a line in the chapter that evokes deeper contemplation.

*I'm curious about the new characters. I feel relieved at least that the author has switched from 'pig Latin' to plain English. The part about the humming to free the whales ... that stirred up my 'nature body'. I know what that feels like to be one with nature, yet so many humans deny their connection and it makes me sad that I've come to deny it, too.*

*Also loved, "As scientists, we recognize our beliefs constitute a ball and chain" [Maracle, 2014, p. 19]. I think one thing western scientists have in common with the First Nations people is their curiosity about the land, nature, the elements. But one knows the truth by inner-wisdom and spiritual instinct while the other demands tangible, intellectual proof. That's definitely a ball and chain!*

*Chapter 3.* Hazel depicts her experience reading this chapter with words like *unpleasant*, *frustration*, and *exasperated*. She compares a scene in the story to her lived experience of an uncomfortable physical

condition and asks—me and/or herself—why she is reading the book. Hazel is seeking clarity and connection but is feeling frustrated as her curiosity succumbs to exasperation.

*Unpleasant feeling. The war between the serpent(s) reminded me of when I had bile reflux.*

*Sorry, Allana. TMI [too much information]? Seriously, it's like the story of the two wolves—only in this story, the evil wolf wins and man destroys himself. "Spirit food is what the original humans promised to feed him through their songs and ceremony. He plans to consume the spirit of humans" [p. 27]. Seriously? Why am I reading this again?*

*Ok, I'm sure all these metaphors and mystical allegory will unravel themselves before the end of the book (I hope), but for now it's causing me frustration. I don't feel connected—and I no longer even feel curious. Just exasperated.*

*Chapter 4.* Hazel singles the character of Steve out for a nod of approval. He is one of the few white characters in the book and I wonder if she relates to this character to a greater extent because of their common whiteness. Hazel begins to infer and predict as she feels *included in the story* for the first time. She assumes the mindset of the author. The idea that the book was written for *white folk* is a centring of self. Hazel places the onus on the author to create the conditions for her to *connect, understand, empathize, and respect*. It is as if she believes the only requirement for her in this engagement is to show up to the reading experience. Hazel reiterates the notion of *speaking in code*, a reference to the experience she had as a child that conjured emotions of exclusion, confusion, and ridicule.

*I like Steve. And I feel like Amos will have some significant role later on. At least in this chapter, I felt like I was included in the story—even welcome. But at the same time, I wonder if the author was thinking, "I'll dumb the story down a bit for the white folk." (Yeah, I know how judgmental that is. In my defense, I've not had that thought until now—about anything. Maybe that's because I approached this book with the notion that the author wanted me to connect and*

*understand, empathize or at the very least, respect what happened—what the white did to their way. But how can I do that when you're speaking in code?)*

*Chapter 5.* This brief journal entry feels flat and disconnected from the story; perhaps a reaction, or resistance, or a defense in response to not feeling safe.

*I have no feelings on this except that I think Celia is going to get herself sick over whatever demons she's carrying inside.*

*Chapter 6.* Hazel makes her embodied reading experience palpable as she describes the *heaviness of the story* and an *unsettling* sense that feels akin to foreboding. She qualifies her understanding as a spotty translation of an alien language. She seems to suggest that pain and angst are acceptable emotions for her as a reader if a satisfactory ending ensues.

*Love Amos for not washing! Ha! But the restless serpent and Amos—what's the connection? Restless and Loyal—I'm beginning to understand their place in the story (like picking up on a few words of 'pig Latin'). But the heaviness of the story, the characters, and setting are unsettling—mostly because (unlike many books that drag the read[er] through pain and angst), I don't think this story is going to resolve in a contended [sic; contented] way.*

*Chapter 7.* Hazel experiences a shift in her thinking and engagement with the story in this chapter.

*"We ran out of wood and they gave us the vote"[p. 64]. OMG [oh my gosh], that explains so much! They were a people of genuine communication, cooperation, and collective good. And while democracy promises those things, it's smoke and mirrors: voting is communicating, but silently and anonymously; and voting really asks the voter what they want for themselves as an individual. Anyway ... between the wood, the voting, the mortgages, my empathy is now engaged; and I feel a great sadness because—while I think these characters knew who they were*

*before the “invasion,” I don’t think they fully appreciated who they were until they weren’t that anymore. Maybe a better way is ... like someone came along promising that this tonic would make you lose weight and not only didn’t you lose weight, but your hair fell out, you went deaf in one ear and your right eye won’t stop twitching.*

*“He is terrified [that] he [has] killed [his] grandma. [I]n the middle of their talk ...” [p. 77]. I’m not getting a good read on grandma, but I sense that undercurrent of pain, regret, mistrust, and sorrow in all of them. Ancestral trauma it’s called. It leaves a hollow feeling in my lungs, like I won’t feel their pain if I hold my breath.*

Hazel paints a visceral image of her embodied reading experience. She is aware of holding her breath as a way to avoid, resist, or, perhaps, defend against the wave of emotions that threatens to break and wash over her. Holding her breath, skimming pages, skipping sections, closing the book, and laying it to rest on the nightstand are the means by which this reader, in this moment, evades taking in and taking on the pain of another.

*Chapter 8. Celia’s Song* is not a linear narrative and Hazel does not appear to appreciate the circular nature of this act of storytelling. Perhaps it is an undercurrent of dread in this chapter that has Hazel wanting to move forward. “The new bones have stopped singing. The old bones are getting closer. Soon they will meet. This meeting of the bones has never happened” (Maracle, 2014, p. 83).

*New bones, old bones. We’re back to that again. 😞*

*Celia—In one breath she is feeling overwhelmed with emotion and the next she is closing “the door to this first communion as a woman with her mother” [p. 85]. She makes me uncomfortable—maybe because I’ve experienced that pendulum of emotions?*

*These snippets made me feel split apart for them:*

- *“Two languages run along parallel tracks in Momma’s mind ...” [p. 86].*
- *“Though no one in the village suspected it, the flu reminded them of how little others cared for their survival” [p. 86].*
- *“... no one wished to face anything that required that they face themselves” [p. 94].*

Hazel conveys her reading experience with words such as *overwhelmed*, *uncomfortable*, and *split apart*, and pulls quotes from the chapter to illustrate. She also connects the emotions of the characters to the sway of emotions in her own lived-through experience.

*Chapter 9.* Hazel swings between distress, apathy, and amusement. She expresses feeling disturbed by parts of the story that, in her assessment, hold no value, and apologizes for choosing to *skip over* these sections of the book. She then finds herself laughing out loud at a depicted scene of racism and feeling moral anger. Hazel connects the scene to a similar event in her own life where she, as a witness, took action to support the one offended and chose not to confront the offender.

*I don't care for snakes to begin with, but the serpent in this story is disturbing. And I don't feel like I'm getting anything out of those parts of the story, so I'm going to skip over them. Sorry.*

*I laugh when Momma has the outburst in Kmart and feel angry on behalf of anyone who has been treated that way. I have seen it in real life and while I did not speak to the offender, I did offer an apology to the people who were being mistreated.*

*Chapter 10.* Hazel's notes feel like a staccato with each line a separate, disconnected, abrupt point. The shift in journaling style may signal an overall detachment from the story. Hazel swings on a pendulum of emotions in her reading experience. At times, the author's words resonate and, at others, Hazel describes feeling confused, unsettled and disempowered.

*I'm having to skip over some of the graphic language.*

*The “men are anchors” [p. 103] paragraph is so true! I feel validated reading this. She, the author, gets it. Ha!*

*I wish I could have heard all of Alice’s poem.*

*Not sure why putting the stone from Celia’s shoe in her pocket was important?*

*The interjection of the shapeshifting witness is unsettling. On one hand, it’s as if Celia has a relationship with it— but if that’s true, than [sic] why not make that more of the story? If not, than [sic] why have it in at all? As a reader, it makes me feel impotent to not understand what the author is trying to say.*

*Chapter 11.* Hazel places the onus on the author for the difficulty she is experiencing with the story. She describes her reading experience in terms of the author being *clear at times* and her, as the reader, *being allowed to see*. Hazel also perceives that the author *closes the curtain* or *plays the shell game*. She does not reflect on her role in the reader-text transaction. Hazel appears to have an expectation that the author assume the responsibility to meet her where she is. She centres herself in the reading experience and assigns blame for the disconnect on the author and her writing style.

*Page 110. I’m lost again. I know we’re not meant to comment on the author’s writing style [Note: this was not a stipulation of the journaling task], but the jumping around and speaking in metaphors really is off-putting. She gets clear at times, then just when I think I’m feeling something for the characters—a connection, an understanding—just when I think I’m being allowed to see them, she closes the curtain or ... plays the shell game so I can’t discern where the story is. It’s not enjoyable. And I’m not saying every book has to be enjoyable—I don’t mind uncomfortable. I don’t mind when the author makes me feel something I didn’t want to feel, but the feelings I’m having with this book are not about the story or characters—they are about her writing style.*

Hazel recorded aspects of her reading experience for chapters 1 to 11 only. At this point, she chose to put the book down and step away from the story until the week the book club was scheduled to meet. She then *skimmed through chapters and skipped others entirely* as preparation in anticipation of the discussion. Hazel did not resume journaling and, instead, seemed to focus on the writing style of the author rather than on the characters and storyline.

*I did not take any notes that last week and only made some marks in the book where I felt the author's turn of phrase was clever or a particularly poignant passage.*

Hazel delayed sending her notes to me until the day before we were scheduled to meet for the final interview when we were to discuss her individual experience of the book and of the group discussion.

*While I heartily enjoyed participating in the book club discussion, I could not (and cannot) bring myself to dive into the story again. That's been the primary delay in sending you my notes. I wanted to try and go back and finish the book and my notes properly, but every time I opened it, I felt a darkness rise up in me. I am not exaggerating when I say that stories like this can affect me deeply. I avoid violence, suspense, and cruelty—fiction or not—so for me to have done as much as I did on this project was surprising.*

Hazel's depiction of her experience suggests she felt some degree of obligation, as a participant in the study, to complete the book and to take notes *properly*. That she qualifies the extent of her reading and engagement as *surprising* also suggests that she may not have read and journalled to the end of chapter 11, nor picked the book up again to prepare for the discussion, had it not been for the fact that she was taking part in a research study.

Hazel describes a sense of feeling vulnerable and exposed as she read *Celia's Song*. It appears the narrative disturbed rather than disrupted her cognition, affect, and embodied sensing.

*If I had to sum up my feelings about this story it would be that I did not feel safe reading it.*

There is no indication that Hazel reflected on the reading experience with respect to either the text or herself as reader. Her effort to make sense of the overall experience leads her to fabricate another possible intention for the research rather than to feel the vulnerability of self-reflection.

*Allana, I am writing you this on Sunday, June 26<sup>th</sup>, just a couple days before you interview me about the book. After I finished that last note from Chapter 11, I put the book down for a while and came back to it the week of our book club meeting. It was hard because I brought my bad attitude into the pages. It was over the next few days as I skimmed through chapters and skipped others entirely, that I came up with the notion that you were not actually doing research on non-Indigenous people reading Indigenous literature, but some other sociological study involving how far people will go to fulfill a social obligation or some such silliness.*

### Book Club Discussion

*Approach to Book.* The book club discussion begins with readers sharing their individual reading experiences, specifically their approach to the book and their experience of the book. Hazel often reads in bed at night finding it to be a good way to wind down at the end of the day. This book necessitated a shift in her typical temporal approach to reading. *I could not [read at night]. I woke up in the morning [and read].* Hazel, Letitia, and Rose all agree that *Celia's Song* was not a story they were able to engage with at night, especially considering the requirement to journal.

Hazel found the journaling *hard*, agreeing with similar experiences shared by Abbie and Letitia. Hazel did not elaborate further on her experience with the journaling task. Commonalities between individual experiences seem to create a sense of belonging as an outcome of understanding and being understood. Shared experiences also seem to negate the need to explain further.

Hazel describes her reading experience as one marked by *dread*. The word is commonly defined as “a great fear especially in the face of impending evil; extreme uneasiness” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Hazel found a way to rationalize, self-soothe, and come to terms with a scene in the book that she found disturbing. She told herself the physical form of mink that was being skinned alive ... *wasn't really him or the spirit, that it was just the vehicle it was occupying ... I'm thinking ... that was just pretend ... just don't worry about it ... . I kept saying, don't worry about it.*

Coaching herself through the scene, repeating the phrase *don't worry about it*, and telling herself *that was just pretend*, enabled Hazel to calm the sensory perceptions that threatened to overwhelm her ability to continue reading. Through this act of self-soothing, Hazel sought and found shelter in the protective distancing fiction affords readers. This is something that Hazel spoke to in the initial interview when she described books as safe places to experience compassion and other emotions as someone who identifies as highly sensitive. An insight arising out of the initial interview is that this reader is able to reassure herself that what she is reading about is not actually happening and, specifically, not happening to her. The description of her experience reading this passage in the book is a demonstration of a familiar and practiced approach Hazel employs to mitigate sensory overwhelm.

Hazel adds that her husband observed that she *was kind of struggling* with the reading experience and recognized that as unusual for her. ... *normally I would be just saturated, especially if it was an assignment*. Her comment suggests she viewed her participation in the research study as an assignment. Hazel did not elaborate on what visual or sensed signals her partner perceived of her struggle with the reading experience.

*Experience of Book*. Several key words thread through Hazel's comments and capture the spectrum of her reading experience. These include *love, dread, confused, weird, spooked, difficult, and dark*. The primary reading experience for Hazel, however, is confusion. Hazel clearly and repeatedly states her

confusion. *I didn't understand any of that. ... I didn't get the cedar. I didn't understand it.* She acknowledges her lack of understanding and offers no reflective explanation for her lack of knowledge. There is no indication of an interest or a sense of agency to fill gaps in her knowledge. Hazel seems resigned to a state of confusion, uncertainty, and not knowing. It is as if she is embracing her state of ignorance.

Hazel and Letitia sift through their understanding of mink and arrive at shape-shifter. Although Letitia pushes for deeper understanding and questions whether the character represents something bigger, neither goes deeper than the label. Letitia seems exasperated. *I don't know. See, I'm ignorant to the culture.* Hazel agrees before taking the conversation in another direction. *Yeah, me too. I don't know.* They each corroborate a shared experience of being unaware without question or challenge. This is validation and acceptance of a lack of knowledge and understanding of Indigenous lifeworlds.

Hazel articulates her reading experience and participates in collaborative attempts at sense-making and meaning-making. Hazel and Letitia discussed the book prior to the book club session and questioned whether they had *missed something* as they read. Hazel recognized and acknowledged her inability to make sense of the story, asking Letitia: *Did I miss something?* This suggests that she expected the narrative to provide the answers, resolve uncertainty, and fill in gaps in her understanding and knowledge. It seems she held an expectation that, if she did not *get* something, the necessary information to figure it out would be found somewhere within the pages of the book.

Hazel found the element of spirits in the novel *disturbing. ... even though the human cruelty was difficult, I was very spooked by the spirit darkness.* She reads from a flagged page in her copy of the book—one of several instances she does so during the discussion—to make her point and to share her experience of the words.

*“Spirit food is what I need most anyway,’ he thinks. He isn’t too far off. Spirit food is what the original humans promised to feed him through their songs and ceremony. He plans to consume the spirit of humans” [p. 27]. And, like, that to me was disturbing.*

Hazel expresses a sense of confusion as to which character is speaking and thinking in this segment. Hazel did not connect the italicized typeface throughout the book with the voice and mind of Mink. Perhaps more certainty would have eased her sense of being disturbed. The uncertainty—the discomfort in not knowing—may have induced and/or heightened her sense of confusion and anxiety.

Hazel accepts her lack of understanding and positions what is unknown to her as unknowable. *Some of the stuff I just had to let go. Like, I’m not going to understand it.* She does not reflect on her lack of understanding, and expresses no curiosity, desire, or impulse to lean into learning. It may be that acceptance of ignorance is a means to avoid and, by default, maintain an existing worldview. Expanded awareness and critical reflection can unsettle, disorient, and disrupt. Hazel admits that, due to her American upbringing, she lacks knowledge of Indigenous peoples and the Canadian colonial context of their lifeworlds. She also requests that her partner not tell her about the Residential School System and other lived experiences of Indigenous peoples that may disturb her. Hazel, in essence, seeks support to avoid the realities and uncomfortable emotions associated with colonization.

Hazel makes an observation that a family tree diagram would have been helpful. Multiple voices agree and Hazel and Rose express a need for a family tree as well as a glossary of terms and cultural references to allay confusion over the number of characters, repeating names, traditions, and a timeframe spanning generations. These comments suggest an expectation that the book contain the answers to all questions, and that the responsibility to clarify, educate, and inform lies solely with the author.

Hazel finds the shifting timeframe from distant past to recent past to present very confusing. ... *I have no idea. All that stuff was so loosey goosey I just thought no one could know.* Hazel has a tendency to believe that her reading is the only right reading experience; if she could not understand, then no one would be able to. *No writer could have put that in any context.* Again, she seems to accept the unknown as unknowable, not just by her but by any reader of the book. No sense of agency to find out or figure out is evident in her comments.

Hazel, however, does sense a subtle power in the descriptive prose. ... *even though it didn't really mean anything it meant everything.* The writing fostered and facilitated her engagement with the narrative and the subsequent meaning-making and sense-making she undertook. *Like, if I had taken it out, would I have still understood their story? Yes, I would have, but it was hypnotic the way [the] language and ... the poetry of it kind of kept you in the story. It kept you there.* For Hazel, the words on the page had the power to grasp and hold her attention. Her use of the term *hypnotic* suggests transportation into the story (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Johnson, 2012, 2013); what Victor Nell (1988) describes as being lost in a book. Hazel attributes the poetic use of language with keeping her *in* the story, similar to Abbie's experience of being in the *flow* of the narrative.

Hazel further describes a sense a motion, texture, and colour in the language and writing style. *If she'd ... kept only the essential, what I need to know about the characters [and] what happened, it would be like a picture instead of a painting, you know? I mean, it would just be flat. It wouldn't move.* Her comment underscores the power of story to move a reader and Hazel articulates a shared sentiment: *There was [sic] some rich gems in here.*

Hazel expresses her appreciation of *how straightforward the author is.* She reads from her book:

*"Every relationship takes work," Celia had said. "Each one takes different work. What you need to decide is whether or not you want to put the kind of effort in to this one that is required." Celia*

*makes things seem so simple and so profoundly straightforward” [p. 194]. ... Like, that just really struck home with me. Like, oh yeah ... every relationship isn’t just the same and you put the same amount of effort and the same type of effort into them. Like they all take something different.*

Paraphrasing the words of the author, signals a degree of reflection and meaning-making as Hazel merges meaning arising from the text with her own lived experience. This is a moment of clarity when a reader re-members their own lived experience through the eyes, and the heart, and the mind of another. It provides a new lens, a new viewpoint, a new perspective on something lived. It expands and extends understanding of self in and of the world and, in this instance, in and of relationship with others.

Hazel expresses *love* for a passage early in the book that sparks a new perspective on voting as a democratic act. This new awareness arose out of a dialogue in the book that correlated acquisition of the vote to the entrenchment of colonialism. It came as a revelation to Hazel that voting—an individual act executed in silence and privacy—could be negatively perceived and experienced within communities that traditionally made decisions relationally and transparently. She reads the passage aloud to share the weight of the words before summarizing the scene. *They stopped talking to each other.* Hazel draws meaning from the lived through experience of the characters and integrates it with her own understanding to succinctly paraphrase the passage. This is a demonstration of expanded awareness and critical reflection leading to a new perspective.

At points in the discussion, Hazel connects the text to her own lived experience. This expands and extends the story beyond the book and creates a new level of awareness as she sees familiar experience articulated in new ways and in new contexts. *Hurt people, hurt people.* The statement suggests sense-making that extends beyond the book and draws on aspects of her own lived experience reflected in the text. Hazel demonstrates an openness and willingness to understand the actions of

another in the context of their lifeworld. She expresses an appreciation for these moments when the author conveyed lived experience in universal ways.

Hazel articulates an observation. ... *it's the disconnection. We feel that we're separate from nature and they [Indigenous peoples] know that they're not.* It is a distinction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people that is explicitly made and implicitly demonstrated throughout the book. This expanded awareness and critical reflection came out of Hazel's individual reading experience and, in sharing her experience, she voices a perspective that would not likely have arisen in conversation without the book as a catalyst and the book club session as a venue.

Hazel muses about the lived experience of author Maracle, as an Indigenous woman and as a writer.

*Was any of this part of her experience? ... What was her experience like? You know, we only had to live through 265 pages, right? ... Like, how that must affect a writer to be writing something so dark, even though it's beautiful in many ways, it's so dark in many others. I just can't help wonder.*

Hazel draws on her experience as a self-published writer as context for the writing experience of the author of *Celia's Song*. She is curious about the influence of Maracle's lived experience on story. For readers like Hazel, the creative process of translating fact into fiction provides a sense of safety in the distance between lived and storied. Perhaps fact becomes more palatable, digestible, relatable, and accessible as fiction because it temporarily suspends the separation an individual feels between themselves and another living and experiencing in and through a different lifeworld.

When Rose expresses her perspective that the Indian Residential School System was established with altruistic intentions, Hazel weighs in, joining Letitia and Abbie in challenging the beliefs held by Rose. Abbie labels the system as *supreme prejudice*. Hazel sums it as an attempt to *brainwash*. Letitia

states the intention *was to kill their culture not to generously help them fit in*. This is critical reflection voiced in a discursive venue that allows perspectives to be tested and challenged.

Hazel also adds her voice to counter a suggestion by Rose that biases based on race are innate. *We absolutely teach it [racism]*. She and the other members of the group participate in dialogue about racism, historical oppression, past harms, and wrongs perpetrated and perpetuated. These readers share their lived experience, including reading books addressing and storying racism, to try to make sense of something they individually and collectively perceive through a settler-colonial worldview. This is a group of white women talking about the experience of Jewish, Black, and Indigenous peoples, assessing material measurements of success and failure, and attributing much of it to skin colour and cohesiveness within various racial groups. There is no challenge, questioning, or critical reflection regarding their own positionality, point of view, or experiential awareness.

Hazel reflects on the historical treatment of Indigenous peoples. ... *we went about it the wrong way. We, meaning to say, you know, those who influenced went about it the wrong way and ...* She is interrupted at this point and does not express the whole of her thinking. In this instance, Hazel is sure to separate herself from wrongdoing and point to those in positions of power as the perpetrators of harm.

At one point in the discussion, Hazel expresses a sense of sadness and a need to avoid. *Ahh, that's sad. Don't say that*. As she does with her husband, she is seeking support to avoid. A little later, she leaves the room and walks alone through other more quiet and private spaces in the house. *I have to go do a cleanse. ... Too much heavy talk*. In stepping away from the group and the conversation, Hazel avoids participation and further exposure to the discussion. She attributes her tendency to avoid to her disposition as an empath and highly sensitive person.

Near the end of the discussion, Hazel concedes that she has had enough. *Sorry, my brain is starting to get a little, you know*. It is not clear whether she is indicating fatigue, overwhelm, cognitive

and/or emotional override. She is either struggling to articulate the feeling fully or believes that this group of friends will feel the same or, at least, understand what she means without the need for further explanation.

*Individual Speaking Patterns.* At one point in the discussion, Hazel jumps in to complete a statement started by Abbie. This is indicative of the familiarity and level of comfort among group members and demonstrates, at a minimum, an assumption of consensus and concurrent, cohesive group thought.

Hazel injects humor at several junctures in the discussion. When Abbie delves into conversation about violent events in the story, Hazel follows up by sharing experience that is self-focused and layered with levity. It has the effect of easing the dis-ease among the group members as noted in the relaxation of facial expressions and body language. She lightens the atmosphere by speculating on the real reason I asked them to read this particular book. Her imagined scenario is met with laughter. Although the exchange has the effect of dispelling discomfort it also shifts the course of discourse with an unspoken message that this reader has reached her limit for this line of conversation.

Several times during the discussion, Hazel begins to make a point and is interrupted, the point lost; a loose thread that may have been useful to weave into the conversation. Words unspoken are thoughts unexpressed; a voice not heard; an idea not acted upon. Often it is Rose who interrupts and, as happens, Hazel does not express the whole of her thinking. These are instances when the conversation may potentially have been enriched in deep and generative ways by drawing on the philosophy and tradition of a talking stick as a tool to bring intention and attention to speaking and listening (Joe Michael, Mi'kmaq Elder, Sipekne'katik, personal communication, July 21, 2019; see also Kearns et al., 2018, p. 240).

### Final Interview

*Interview Scenario.* I set up my computer, digital recorder, and iPhone in an upstairs bedroom to provide privacy for and from my COVID-infected daughter who is convalescing in isolation downstairs. Opening the window does not move the early summer air that already feels close and clinging. The conversation about to transpire is with a highly sensitive research participant and I feel concern for her well-being. I invited her on this journey she labels as *dark*; I asked her to witness what I now know to be something she actively avoids.

I ask Hazel to expand on her description of books as safe places in the context of her experience reading *Celia's Song*. Hazel stories a childhood sheltered from difficulty and diversity. She lived adventure in and through her imagination. *I found adventure in my backyard and it was beautiful.* Books afforded entrance into *beautiful young adventure stories where nobody got killed and nobody got raped and nobody had a child out of wedlock. It was a way to experience the world without being old enough to actually experience it.* When Hazel struck out to experience the world beyond her home she found it *awful and nothing like the books promised. So, I stuck with the books [laughing].*

Hazel identifies as an *empath* and *highly sensitive person*. She illuminates these terms and describes how this disposition plays into her reading life.

*... I'm highly sensitive, I'm empathic, and so in real life I can feel what you're feeling if I sit with you long enough, or sometimes it's upon first meeting. I can feel what you're feeling and a lot of people don't exude happy go lucky, you know, rainbows and unicorns types of emotions even if they do on the outside. An empath can tell what energetic states, you know, are happening underneath that and it's just like, I don't know, but walking into a room and being able to tell what the temperature is even though nobody else can. I don't know how else to describe it.*

Books enable Hazel to tap into and process the emotions of fictitious characters and, by extension, process her own emotional experience. Although she experiences emotions viscerally as she

reads, there is an element of control in the reading experience that she cannot access in lived situations. For Hazel, a story simply feels like a *safer* way to feel *the dark things* and *the drama that happens in life*. She does not *like feeling other people's anxiety* outside the pages of a book. Hazel appreciates the option to skip chapters, to close a book, set it aside, and step away, even to burn it as this group of readers has done once before. Hazel also exercises control through book choice based on authors she comes to *trust* and recommendations from *like-minded* readers. Hazel actively avoids uncomfortable emotions and even seeks the support of those close to her to do so.

When I make an analogy between her reading experience and a cocoon, Hazel quickly agrees. *It is. It is cocooning. Reading is cocooning. She is not an avid reader, preferring quality over quantity. I need to get something out of the story. I can't just read for reading's sake.* Hazel describes her ideal reading experience this way.

*The key thing is that I want to be expanded. I want to understand something about myself, about the world, about people that I didn't know before. Not learning so much, you know, not just facts and knowledge. I want to grow in some direction and be able to apply whatever it is I've learned through these characters or through this setting. I want to be able to apply that somewhere in my life and go, oh, I see a connection there.*

When I ask if this is what she experienced reading *Celia's Song*, she responds by saying, *I will be thinking about this book whether I want to or not. ... I think what I mostly learned is that I don't know a lot about their [Indigenous peoples'] inner culture ... their relationships with themselves and the earth.* Hazel reflects on the loss of *inner culture* portrayed in the book and attributes it to *what we did ... breaking their connection to the earth.*

Hazel considers articles she reads and movies and television programs she watches, particularly on APTN, to be representations of *outer culture* demonstrated through such things as food, dance, and

traditional practices. She shares her belief that Indigenous cultures are *highly empathic with animals ... but it came out in a weird way in this book just because of the whole shape-shifting mink and the owl and the serpents.*

Hazel *easily* articulates the difference between a book that is a hard read but a good experience, and one, like *Celia's Song*, this is just a hard read.

*It's one thing having misfortune. ... There's not anything intentional behind that. What happened in Celia's Song was intentional from start to finish and there is nothing, nothing worse than man being cruel to man. That, to me, is just the absolute hardest thing in the world to read. ... Being killed by the hands of my fellow man or, in the case of this story, raped and pillaged, and have your homes destroyed, have your way of life taken from you by another person on this earth, wow.*

Hazel related events in the fiction narrative to actual historic and contemporary events in Canada *and around the world.*

*... it is one of the reasons why you'll see that I petered out halfway through the book ... because of everything happening in the world. ... I said to my husband [that] I really feel like I'm going back into a depression like the kind I got when I first hit menopause, and it hit you really hard and it lasted for some years, and I said, like hell I'm going through that again. I'm not going through that again. So, every time I opened up this book I just felt this, you know, why are you willingly going into the dark? Why are you willingly doing this? And, I feel bad. I feel so bad. It took me a long time to reconcile and to be good to myself and to close the book and to say, you know, don't go back, don't go back, don't go back.*

Hazel has lived experience of depression; it is part of her lifeworld. The sense of plunging into depression as she read *Celia's Song*, felt familiar and she chose to end the reading experience to protect

and preserve her emotional and physical well-being. Her rapid repetition of *don't go back* sounds like a siren warning her to steer back to safety. Hazel considered several factors—*taking care of myself, feeling respectful, wanting to honor the commitment that I made, and wanting to be part of it [the research]*—before truncating her experience reading the book.

During the initial interview, Hazel shared that she did not gravitate to literature by Indigenous authors because she did not believe she could relate to Indigenous stories and storying. Reading *Celia's Song* tested that assumption. Hazel describes her reading experience as *so hard to get through*, and herself as *[not] prepared and tripping [her] way through the whole thing not really gaining ground*. She attributes her inability to relate to the story to the author's writing style and suggests that another writer, or starting the book at Chapter 4, may have resulted a better reading experience.

*... the first three chapters were so hard to get through with the bones ... and the serpents and ... just the whole, you know, metaphor and mysticism of it. I wasn't prepared for that and so it set a stage with holes in it and wobbly boards. And, so I was just kind of tripping my way through the whole thing not really gaining ground.*

Hazel turns to her journal to read an entry. *As a reader it makes me feel impotent to not understand what the author is trying to say*. The word *impotent* describes a state of being unable, helpless, or powerless and aligns with how she stories her reading experience; one in which she believes the stage was set for her to stumble through awkwardly and ineffectively. She exercised her prerogative as a reader to stop reading. As a reader, Hazel is “positioned in a relative position of power by virtue of the safe distance of reading” (Boler, 1997, p. 3).

Hazel attributes much of her reading experience to the author. *I didn't like being left out as a reader. ... If you really wanted me, as a non-Indigenous person, to understand more deeply your story, then you needed to let me in more*. She assumes the author's purpose in writing the book and centres

herself in that intent. Hazel seems to hold an expectation for the author to take full responsibility for charting a clear and certain path through the story and to ease the journey of the reader.

*So to make me work for it every chapter almost that was really hard. ... if the style of writing were a little bit more gentle on a novice reader of Indigenous works; if it were a little gentler ... maybe I could have really gotten into it ...*

Hazel focuses on language as a pivotal aspect of her reading experience. ... *I just kept wanting a little bit more of an understanding ... but the language just wasn't plain enough for me to understand a new culture.* Given that language shapes our understanding, it is important to note that it is Hazel who is *new* to the Salish culture, and not the Salish culture that is *new*. In articulating her reading experience, Hazel centres herself as the point of established culture, knowing, and understanding in relation to the narrative.

Hazel did find resonance with some passages in the book. ... *she [Maracle] really did have a way of talking about the voting that really got to me.* This is evidenced in her journal entries as well as in extended conversation with the other book club members during the book discussion.

*Did they know what was coming? That just by that one act of quote/unquote democracy, that they were going to lose their voice to each other? Oh, my god, that, again, is just, you know, man being absolutely thoughtless and cruel. ... not even taking time to ... get to know the people a little to find out how their democracy works. ... they felt like they made a decision together as a community and not as a bunch of individuals.*

When I ask if she learned anything in reading *Celia's Song*, Hazel critically reflects and responds in the affirmative. She questions her reflex to assume that she knows more or knows best in many situations. She describes a more thoughtful approach to understanding cultures that are new to her with openness and *respect*.

*Yes, absolutely. If I ever walk into a room with people that I don't understand their culture, I'm going to keep my mouth shut. I'm going to listen. I'm going to learn. I'm not just going to start showing them some trick that I know. And, believe me, I've done it before ... but I won't do that again. No. I will absolutely not think that I have a better way of telling you how to communicate. Thank you for asking that because I wouldn't have thought about that, but I will take that with me. ... when it comes to certain things I think I know best, and I'm not going to do that anymore.*

This exchange demonstrates the power of dialogue that questions and challenges one to reimagine, rethink, and redress. Hazel voices an intention to act in a new way that will be realized as praxis if and when the thought manifests as action. In the lifeworld of a reader, other points of praxis include choosing and recommending books. Going forward, Hazel intends to read Indigenous Literatures only when recommended by trusted sources, particularly *like-minded people with similar thresholds* for reading experiences. In other words, she intends to read Indigenous Literatures that align with her current mindset and emotional comfort zone; books that can support and maintain the sense of safety she seeks in her reading lifeworld.

Hazel reiterates that she did not feel prepared for the reading experience that unfolded with *Celia's Song*. In her opinion, the back cover blurbs hinted at the story, not the storying. ... *if I knew that when you open this book you're going to be taken into a completely different style of story, I might have been better prepared.* This book caught Hazel off guard with an atypical reading experience that caused her to feel confused, uncertain, and vulnerable. It seems that feeling prepared for a reading experience—by way of a trusted author or a recommendation from a trusted source—is required for her to locate the sense safety she seeks, and has come to expect, in books.

Hazel finds that *coming together [in the book club] always deepens* the reading experience. She identifies this session in particular as *actually the most serious discussion we've had*. Hazel explains why

she needed to move away from the clamour of conversation to find silence and solitude in a quieter space in the house at a certain point during the book discussion.

*I was getting a little full up of everyone's emotions towards the end of the discussion so I went outside [the room] for a while. ... it was starting to just be too much ... My body simply knows that it has to get up and leave ... all the sudden I'm feeling overwhelmed and I had to go stand next to the [potted] tree and unload some of that.*

Hazel ventures that a group of empaths like herself would have engaged in a completely different level of discussion.

*We would have recited passages. We probably would have sat in a circle and started channeling some Indigenous spirit from somewhere to help us understand what our role was in this storytelling, in this plane, in this particular lifetime that this book has come forth to us, and how do we honor that, you know, now in our energy, in our hearts, and our thoughts, and our prayers. ... we would have been asking; What am I to do with this? What am I to do with this? And, it would have been hard, but in a room full of me we would have known how to support each other and really turned it into something and not just a matter of fact recount of what we thought about this, what we felt about that, you know. ... this book would have gone to a much, much, much deeper level and it would have been, in some way, brought to life in our acts moving forward; whatever that may be, whether it was even just writing the author a letter or volunteering somewhere.*

The description of how she envisions a discussion of *Celia's Song* among a group of empaths exemplifies transformative learning. The imagined scene includes expanded awareness evoked by the text, critical self-reflection prompted by the question, relational discourse in a supportive environment, and reflective action as an outcome. The readers who participated in my master's thesis research

(Bartlett, 2017) did not identify as highly sensitive or empathic yet they experienced learning that transformed as they began to think and act in new ways following their individual and shared experience reading *Indian Horse* (Wagamese, 2012). I observed that new awareness garnered from the book combined with reflection on personal experience to culminate in moments of critical reflection reflexivity in the book club discussion. For some participants, the book both signaled and mediated change (Long, 1986), and the social forum of the book club became the epicenter for cultural work enacted as prosocial behaviour in their daily lives (Bartlett, 2017).

In response to my prompt to elaborate, Hazel reiterates that a group of empaths would have *read every word and drawn from the story a lot more deeply [and] ... something would have come to life out of it. It would have carried on through us in some way.* When it came to the group discussion, Hazel simply says that she did *not want to do that alone. ... It's not appropriate. ... It's not that kind of group. ... It's like speaking another language. It's just a different emotional level.* During the two-hour discussion, she influenced the tone and topic of discourse by focusing on her experience of confusion and critiquing the author for making the reading experience difficult. Hazel does not explain why her engagement as an individual reader did not resemble the experience she describes above. She encapsulates this reading experience as one in which she simply *did not relate to the writing style* although she *can see that [Maracle is] a great writer.*

Hazel, an American citizen, acknowledges her ignorance with respect to Indigenous peoples. *I never met one. They were kicked out of [Midwest state where she grew up] long before I got there ... . It's not that I didn't have any compassion, it's just ignorance. [I was] completely ignorant about it.* Since moving to Canada she has been more exposed to both historical and contemporary commentary regarding settler and Indigenous populations. Hazel learned much of what she knows about the Residential School System by watching the fictional television drama, *Anne With an E.*

*... only when I got here and watched Anne of Green Gables did I know what happened here in Canada. Keep in mind, I try to think the world is unicorns and rainbows and [that] people treat each other well as much as possible, and when I find out that they don't it's heartbreaking. So, I don't go looking for it. And, I don't care if someone says, well, you're burying your head in the sand. That's fine by me.*

As we speak, Hazel begins to sense a shift in her emotional and sensory experience of the book. She articulates it as a *transition from resistance to honouring*.

*Well, you know, oddly, as we're talking I'm feeling lighter. I am feeling lighter because the ... resistance that I felt in these pages, toward the words on these pages, now is transitioning to kind of like honouring. Right? It's honouring. I'm holding it [the book] and I'm flipping through the pages the whole time that we're talking and I don't feel quite the fear that I did when I was reading it. Like, it can't hurt me now.*

I offer her the concept of witnessing as a way to make sense of and find meaning in her experience of the text. Hazel immediately draws new connections to and through the story. *Isn't that ironic? That is in the book. I mean, that's it. They use witnessing and the mink was witnessing her [Celia] witnessing, you know?* The first line in the book reads, "There is something helpless in being a witness" (Maracle, 2014, p. 1). I have come to look at that handful of words as Maracle preparing the reader to act as witness to the story contained in the pages poised to unfurl. Perhaps it is that our cognitive, emotional, and embodied reading experiences can coalesce in such a way that resistance keeps the obvious just beyond the purview of synapse, sense, and sight.

Our conversation evokes another reading experience that resonates with the concept of witnessing and Hazel shares the memory. The research process provides access to this moment that sees new understanding arise. Hazel is linking a past reading experience to a recent one in a new way

that creates expanded awareness of both. She seems excited by the connection between two books and two reading experiences that she had previously assessed and labelled very differently. The comparison is to *The Crimes of Hector Tomas* (Colford, 2012), a book Hazel found *very difficult* to read.

*... it had sexual stuff, it had murder, and it had torture, sexual torture. It was terrible, but, the whole time he [the author] never let you connect with any of the characters. He just kept you at arm's distance and it made me feel like a witness. There was something about his style. I don't know how to describe it except to say that you did feel helpless ... and the word witness resonates.*

Hazel credits the writing style of author Ian Colford for her ability to successfully maintain a sense of detachment with the characters in his novel. She elaborates on her experience reading *Celia's Song* to articulate the difference between the two; for me as well as for herself as new understanding emerges as the sound of syllables spoken.

*That was first time I ever read anything like that and I certainly didn't feel that way about this book and maybe it's because I resonated with some of the characters and their mental instability and, like, just the whole can't sleep and the memories force you to know things, and the memories move you to dream, and just some of that, you know, volatility that goes on emotionally and mentally. But yeah, you are giving me a lot to think about.*

In one reading experience, Hazel felt protected by the arm's-length distance and lack of connection to the characters. In the other, she felt vulnerable in the reflection of her own lived experience of *mental instability* and the *volatility that goes on emotionally and mentally*. Hazel demonstrates the importance of context as she finds new understanding through the context of her reading lifeworld and a past reading experience. The experience of reading *Celia's Song* is now understood more deeply in relation to her experience of reading *The Crimes of Hector Tomas*. The

connection becomes obvious through dialogue that provokes, evokes, and invokes new insight about her lived experience. Hazel realizes the existence of unity in the duality of these two very different reading experiences.

Our conversation closes on the concept of witnessing. Hazel states clearly that she does not believe her role in life is as a witness.

*... what is the truth if there's nobody to hear it? I just will say I do steer clear. I'm not saying that I'm denying it. I'm not saying it's not worth witnessing. But, I'm just saying that I don't think that's my role on this planet.*

## Chapter 4(c): Letitia

### Initial Interview

*Interview Scenario.* The big-box store and parking lot dominate the landscape, perched atop a windswept mound of gravel and stone. Royal blue backgrounds gigantic yellow letters—IKEA. The cafeteria is a convenient location to talk reading, reconciliation, and research. The soaring height of the ceilings inside echo the ambient sounds of conversation, crying babes, clinking dishes and cutlery. A tall, stainless steel, rubber-wheeled, institutional-styled cart clanks as it rolls by laden with food scraps, soiled napkins, and dirty plates, adding to the cacophony. Warm smells of Swedish-inspired comfort food waft triggering awareness of an unacknowledged appetite. Everything in this space feels oversized; the floor to ceiling panes of tinted glass, the suspended, domed light shades, the duct work augmenting the air temperature and quality. Outside, the barely-spring landscape is grey and bare, still in hibernation. The lake is black where it lies still, undisturbed by a biting March wind. The conversation is warmer and more inviting than the cool, grey day spread out below, even though blue medical masks muffle voices, steam glasses, and half-hide expressive faces. Welcome sunlight filters through a brief break in the cloud cover.

### Reading Lifeworld

*Early Reading Life.* Letitia is an unemployed consultant in her sixties actively seeking one final job in her field to wrap up a successful, international career in marketing that included earning a doctorate in business administration. Her earliest recollections as a reader are of reading comic books and then gendered book series when reading was the only rainy-day activity during summers at the lake. With no television to watch, or friends nearby, reading made it to the top of the list of things to do and a shelf full of books suddenly held some appeal.

*I do remember early days, at the cottage, no TV, reading Nancy Drews and Trixie Beldens. Like, those were my first books that I really feel that I got into. ... Two months at the cottage with our*

*mother and you just had to entertain yourself. So, yeah, there was a whole shelf of Nancy Drews, and you just kinda worked your way through The Secret of the Old Clock to The Secret Staircase.*

For Letitia, her high school years were also an influential period in her early reading life when she *fell heavily in love* with books assigned as required reading in English class. She credits *The Chrysalids* (Wyndham, 1955) with jumpstarting her early adult reading life as she worked her way through the full collection of science fiction works penned by the author before moving into the catalogue of C. S. Lewis books.

*I loved The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe and going through the wardrobe to be in a forest where the animals talked. Oh, my god, that was just like so great. So, yeah, that was my early falling in love with fantasy and series. ... Nancy Drew and the Trixie Belden series predestined me to be a series girl!*

*Significant Reading Experience.* Letitia is affected by books. Reading *A Map of the World* (Hamilton, 1994), the story of a woman whose life unravels after a few minutes of inattention leads to tragedy, triggered such sorrow and despair that she fell into a depression that spanned two weeks. Another book club read, *Little Bee* (Cleave, 2008), had a similar emotional impact and caused her to shut down rather than talk about the story or her experience of it.

*Little Bee, I still can't even talk about. So, I now try to not read those [type of books]. ... my husband laughs at me and calls me a rainbows and unicorn girl. So, there is a little bit of protecting myself. Usually in the book club, lighter ones will be the one I will recommend. ... because sometimes we read some of the deep ones and it's like, ok, we're going down this hole.*

*Recent Reading Experience.* Letitia is an eclectic reader. She follows a variety of authors and loves engaging with business and marketing books as reading material she can easily jump in and out of. She

also enjoys self-help books and autobiographies like the recent offering by Rick Mercer. Humour is a thread that weaves through many of her book choices.

*I will often do that [read a variety of genres] because I get frustrated by fiction. If I'm not intrigued in the back cover I won't [read it]. And, that's what's good about a book club; it forces you to read books that others are reading as well, so you can talk about it.*

Letitia often reads sitting up in bed before she falls asleep at night. At times, the problem is simply staying awake and, at other times, she will read into the wee hours of the morning, especially when she is *into a book*. Letitia sits in her living room and uses reading to ease the transition between daytime and evening activities.

*I don't cook. So, if [my husband is] cooking and doesn't need my help, that's kind of a good time for me to separate, you know, whatever I've done during the day and evening time.*

Print is the format Letitia prefers but, although she feels she does not read as well on an ereader, she will use one when she travels or if that is the format that is available through the library.

*Sometimes I like to mark it up or go back, you know, did I fall asleep? Did I miss something there? Or, is the author just a bad writer and let me down? Or, was it my engagement? Was I, was it something nebulous in the plot that threw me off?*

Letitia likes to have a visual and tactile sense of where she is in a book as well as the ability to leaf through the pages to choose a good place to stop reading, or to assess where a boring, or disturbing scene might conclude.

*I hate that [I can't easily tell where I am in an ebook]. I don't like to deal with percentages. I like to know where the end of the chapter is. I like to flip ahead and say, "Ok I can stay awake for four more pages."*

Letitia has listened to audiobooks on long drives but does not enjoy when the arrival at a destination dictates where in the story she must pause her engagement.

*We've only gotten into [audiobooks] a few times when we've been doing long drives ... I know a lot of people like them ... I can't stand it if you reach your destination and you turn it off in the middle of an important part, right? ... I like to be in control when I start reading and when I want to stop.*

Letitia guestimates that she has read 10 books in the six months prior to the study. This volume of reading was typical when she was working full-time. Now that she has more time available she also finds herself more distracted. For her, living through a pandemic has been like living in a fog, and less travel for work has meant less reading time on airplanes and in hotel rooms.

*It bothers me recently because, I mean, I don't know if it's an age thing, or the distraction of this not [being] how I wanted to end my career kind of weighing on me. I really have to work harder to read now than I used to. ... there's a concentration thing, an ability to sit still and read a book, that somehow has been lost in the pandemic.*

Letitia both buys and borrows books, and tends to discover new books through recommendations from family and friends. Wandering through a bookstore and following specific authors are also ways she finds new books to read.

*Shared Reading Experience.* Letitia, a member of the book club for more than six years, rarely misses an opportunity to get together, and scheduling is flexible to accommodate busy schedules.

*We try and schedule them so everybody can be there. So, we're flexible. ... It's important to us that we all can come.*

She enjoys the female companionship and the balance between serious book talk and relaxed conversation about life and lives as lived. Letitia is intrigued, and sometimes pleasantly surprised, by books she would not have chosen for herself *in a million years*. The scope of the book discussion pivots entirely on how it was received by the group.

*Yeah, the joke we made, we are a drinking club with a reading problem. So, it's a nice easy bunch of ladies and the premise is we are going to talk about the book we all read ... we discuss the plot, we discuss certain sections, ... if it's beautiful writing some of us will read it out because we just felt the cadence, the beauty of the phrasing ... So, it depends, some nights we get more into the book and that leads to another discussion. Some nights, if none of us really loved the book, we move onto other things.*

Letitia recounts the book-burning incident when the group met to discuss *How Should a Person Be?* by Sheila Heti (2010). It took place at the first book club session Letitia participated in with her acting as instigator. She was adamant that the *horrendously awful book* be relegated to ashes so no one else ever need suffer through a reading of it.

*I hate when all my favourite books I lend away to people, and then all I have left on my shelf are crappy ones. So, I didn't want anybody to walk into my house and pick up this book and say, "Should I read this?" and I'd say, "I can't remember." So, I came to the book club, and I said, "I'm ripping this up so that none of my friends read this and hate the experience as much as I did." ... So, that was a memorable night. ... they all pretty much agreed with me. It was pretty bad. It was a bad book.*

In addition to ripping up and burning books, Letitia also, and more routinely, marks sections she finds moving, pivotal, or revealing as reference points for discussion. She looks forward to sharing her

individual experience and is receptive to the perspectives of others in the group and enjoys that there is no pressure of persuasion to reach consensus, unlike in business negotiations.

*Sometimes people really like a book, and I won't, and vice versa. So, it's kinda interesting.... it's great to hear different perspectives when you're not trying to influence it. You're just chatting about it, right? ... there doesn't need to be conflict resolution. It can just be that we agree to disagree.*

Letitia attributes the pressure to choose a book club read to accessibility and, specifically, the availability of library book club kits. The book club membership necessitates choosing books that are available as loans to alleviate the financial strain for some, and with an audiobook version to accommodate the reading ability of another. When it is her turn to host and select a book for the group to read, Letitia usually gravitates to lighter fare to avoid taking herself and the others to a dark, emotional place.

*... sometimes we read some of the deep ones and it's like, ok, we're going down this hole.*

*Reconciliation as Reading Context.* Letitia does not seek out Indigenous-authored books to read on her own or with her book club. Indigenous Literatures do not seem to have registered in her awareness as a reader.

*I don't try to avoid them, but I don't really seek them out. ... Not to be exclusionary, but I just haven't.*

On further reflection, Letitia acknowledges a sense of vulnerability when it comes to stories that are disturbing in some way, including accounts of Indigenous lifeworlds. This may be one reason why she has not embraced Indigenous Literatures to date.

*... there is a little bit of protecting myself. I've been totally blown away by all of this information about the schools and what Canada did ... I just, I'm horrified by it.*

Letitia describes herself as an unaware Canadian and very naïve. She admits she had no concept, or even awareness, of the term *reconciliation* until the discovery of unmarked graves at former Residential School sites breached her state of consciousness. Her awareness emerged as events unfolded and were covered in the news media. Letitia had no prior knowledge, understanding, or perspective of the historical basis from which the events were unfolding. She recounts growing up in a large urban setting in central Canada and having no cognizance of Indigenous communities, and no contact with Indigenous people. There is a sense of total separation between the lifeworld she experienced and Indigenous lifeworlds.

*I don't know if I was living in some kind of [city name] bubble ... [or] I was working too hard and just not paying attention. ... It's different, I think, for Atlantic Canadians because there was some prominent schools that people were aware of, or lived near, but, in [city name], where most of the Reserves are away from southern Ontario, they were more in the north, so, yeah. Call that naïve, or whatever, but yeah. ... It didn't touch me as a kid, or growing up, or in my 20s and 30s.*

It seems that Letitia attributes her geographical location as a primary factor in her awareness and perception of social, cultural, and economic issues that pivot on race. When she moved in the mid-90s to pursue career opportunities in the United States, she encountered and became viscerally aware of racial disparities in the workplace as well as the ethnic and economic demographic markers that characterized and segregated communities.

*I grew up in [name of city] where in my public school I was the minority. ... so it was just, I felt like I was colour blind and then I went to the US, and I became more aware of how deep seated issues are and how it sets into the society.*

Letitia struggles with finding a path forward at individual and institutional levels, and questions how to address and redress past harms. It seems the sheer scope of the topic is paralyzing for her.

*I don't know how you reconcile any of the atrocities of the past. We're all probably related to people who in the past did horrible things to human beings. I mean, how do you ever reconcile and undo a huge wrong? I don't know. To me, is there going to be anything that would even come close to what the word reconciliation means? Which is a place where you both walk away, you know, in a new, with a new agreement, and in a new place. I don't know how we do that. I would not want to be the government official that tries to figure that out. ... It's hard to reconcile. ... you can't undo the horror of what those people lived through as children. How do you help them get beyond it? I think, give them lots and lots and lots of support and help, but it can't be undone. What do we do from here forward? Horrible things happened. What do we do now?*

In response to a question about her familiarity with the term *decolonization*, Letitia laughs uncomfortably.

*I hate looking stupid in your eyes. But, that's what we're talking about? Decolonization. We all leave? I don't know.*

Her extreme, singular view of what decolonization entails has an essence of blame shifting; positioning those who call for decolonization as unreasonable and unrealistic. I wonder if thinking along such impossible lines has the effect somehow of absolving settlers from the responsibility of finding and following equitable and achievable paths forward. It is obvious that she is grappling with understanding what reconciliation and decolonization mean at individual, institutional, and societal levels when she relates a CBC Radio interview she listened to on the morning of our interview. Two Indigenous women spoke about their enduring Catholic faith despite the atrocities committed by the Church.

*That type of loyalty to that institution, Catholicism, I don't even understand. I don't know how you can accept their spiritual message when the actual physical things they do are atrocities. ... And, going to the Pope and asking his forgiveness, again, there's no undoing of the bad. Maybe that does help with reconciliation, but, I don't know. Even that Pope is not responsible for what had happened back then ... I have difficulty understanding anyone being that forgiving.*

Letitia describes her lack of interest to date in issues related to reconciliation and decolonization. She expresses gut-wrenching horror over the treatment of Indigenous Peoples and, yet, how she sees herself engaging going forward is rooted in a need to shelter and protect herself from emotions she fears threaten to overwhelm her.

*It [reconciliation and decolonization] has not been a big interest to me, you know. Shoot me now, but it just hasn't. But, again, if this book opens my eyes, I always like that. I like to be turned onto new areas and new learning. So it's a possibility. Will I [take an interest] just because of what I've read and heard and seen on the news? Not so much because I'm so horrified by it. I find it so, so horrible to think what, what horrible authority figures were doing to break up families and tear down traditions by teaching them our way. Uck. It just horrifies me. So, I have a bad case of Monty Python run away, run away when it's that horrible. Right? Like, I've never read the diary of Anne Frank [Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl, (Frank, 1947)]. ... I'm too horrified by the thought of it to want to read it ... what humans can do to other humans just is overwhelming sadness and I can't, I can't immerse myself in it.*

### Reading Journal

*Methodological Note.* This document is transcribed from hand-written notes collected at the book club discussion. The physical journal is a small, coil-bound notebook with lined pages. Each new line in the notebook is replicated by a new line in the transcript. The dates indicate the reading experience

spanned four consecutive days ending on the day of the book club session. Words in italics are those of the participant. The journal text was edited according to APA style.

*Tuesday, June 7 [Day 1; pp. 1–108]*

*Chapter 1.* Letitia notes a feeling of *dread*. The journal entries convey an underlying sense of vulnerability, of being exposed to something unwanted and outside of her control. She infers, predicts, and questions as she reads.

*The rotting longhouse full of bones.*

*Great.*

*I am dreading where this is going to go already*

*I figure out it is an animal before “paws” make it obvious. But when it turns into a bird, now I think is it a spirit calling Celia to it?*

*I am intrigued that Celia gets so many of these visions and if she can’t figure them out she just goes on paying her bills and sorting her mail.*

*I am filled with dread on how dark this book may get. Already.*

*Ick.*

*Chapter 2.* Continuity and clarity are lacking in the reading experience for Letitia.

*Mystery*

*I don’t know how C[hapter] 1 relates to C[hapter] 2*

*I don’t know who the first person narrator is.*

*Chapter 3.* At this point, confusion does not appear to inspire reflection or self-reflection in Letitia, and feelings of dread and confusion seem to squash any ability to enjoy the reading experience.

*Very confused now on who the spirit is. Not enjoying this read yet.*

*Chapter 4.* Letitia meets a character she can relate to in this chapter but does not identify the character nor the reasons for her/his relatability. This does not increase her engagement nor lessen her confusion.

*Great. Clear cutting. At least there is now a character that I can relate to. Otherwise I am not yet engaged. Mostly confused.*

I assume the character she relates to is Steve, a white man introduced in this chapter. He is portrayed as someone who is aware that what he is doing is wrong but who feels powerless to do differently. “He is against logging; his conscience nags him. He has been kept awake nights, trying to think of other ways to earn his tuition. ... Steve hates this feeling of guilt and helpless acquiescence” (pp. 29–30). Steve personifies what it is to benefit as a cog in the mechanics of power and oppression. He is complacent and complicit in service to his own aspirations.

*Chapter 5.* Letitia is uncomfortable with her inability to infer and predict; to find and follow the thread of the story. Her dis-ease with the intangible and uncertain aspects of the story leads to self-recrimination, or, perhaps, sarcasm, as she describes her desire to read for enjoyment as *shallow*. She acknowledges the writing is, at times, poetic but this does not seem to balance other elements of the book she finds *frustrating and not enjoyable*.

*Big 2-headed serpent fight. Celia dreams of Steve and has a visit from the ghost of her grandmother Alice.*

*The tangible bits are eclipsed by the symbolism and spiritual. This is no light read and probably the first book in a while that I have read where I have no frigging idea where it is going.*

*Interesting how frustrating I find it. I don't enjoy the lack of sense of story*

*I read for enjoyment—how shallow.*

*Not enjoyable so far except the writing can be quite poetic*

*The “friends” secret of Stacey and Steve was funny. Page 36.*

*Chapter 6.* Letitia seems to want the feeling of certainty that comes with being able to predict what will happen next. Perhaps predicting is a means by which she exercises a sense of control over her reading experience, a way to prepare and protect herself from a story she anticipate is *not going anywhere pleasant*. The confusion, discomfort, and frustration she experienced in previous chapters culminates in a feeling of annoyance.

*The snake is on the prowl and killing people.*

*Not sure where this is going and pretty damn sure it is not going anywhere pleasant.*

*Too much turmoil in my own life to find this weirdness in a book entertaining or even thought-provoking. Just annoying so far.*

*Chapter 7.* Letitia finds enough resonance in two lines in this chapter to copy them into her journal. She reflects on the first, imagining a state of sadness arising from a life lived confused and hollow. Letitia does not expand further on the relevance these words hold for her.

*“Maybe we can’t cope with [the insult of] living at the edge of survival” [p. 69].*

*How sad it would be to live confused and feeling hollow at the centre.*

*Long chapter and full of Celia’s mind running from past memories of 2 deaths—her grandmother and son.*

*“How did we get so tired of living?” [p. 69].*

*Chapter 8.* Letitia has either moved beyond or has fallen beneath feeling at this point in her reading experience. There is a sense of resignation, of reading simply to read-through. In this, and the journal

entry just prior, she uses the term *long* to describe the physical space of the text as well as the expanse of time being portrayed in the story. The word evokes and, in its repetition, layers a sense of Letitia tiring of the read. Perhaps not feeling at all is another form of centring and protecting self.

*Momma and Celia have a reconciliation, very disjointed and [a sense of] uncomfortableness amidst the family. A long discussion on why the “family” is so disjointed, why Celia moved out to her grandmother’s place.*

*No feelings really. Just trying to keep up at this point, the history of these bad relations is long and complicated.*

*Chapter 9.* Letitia records snippets of the story with no note of feeling or reflection. She is demonstrating the statement she made in the previous entry: *No feelings really. Just trying to keep up ...*

*Trip to Kmart*

*Momma hates being talked down to—first for being Indigenous now for being old.*

*She gets feisty*

*Chapter 10.* The *hunger for clarity* Letitia senses in the characters resonates with her own desire for clarity in the storyline. Clarity cuts a path for certainty, confidence, direction, and purpose; elements missing for Letitia in this reading experience.

*Jacob and Celia go to Alice and hear her poem.*

*I want to walk along with eyes wide open and see the world.*

*A hunger for clarity*

*The lack of clarity in this book makes me want it too.*

*Wednesday, June 8 [Day 2; pp. 109–152]*

*Chapter 11.* Letitia notes the dark nature of the narrative and conveys a sense of foreboding and resignation with respect to the trajectory of the story.

*Jacob goes to the old snake's cabin and thinks he sees a dog hide and a girl and woman being raped by 2 men*

*Just keeps getting darker and darker.*

*Chapter 12.* Letitia summarizes the chapter in quick succession; like a flat stone skipping across the surface of a lake, avoiding the murky depths. Letitia touches on *secrets*, things *revealed*, *bonds formed*, and *trust*; significant elements left unexplored; unarticulated, at least in this journaling task.

*The men go fishing and Jacob shares what he saw.*

*His grandfather interprets it and gives him some relief.*

*They want to keep it from the others.*

*Celia gets a flash of it while showing her mother her paintings*

*Secrets kept*

*Old art revealed*

*New and deeper bonds formed based on sharing and trust.*

*Chapter 13.* Fragmented words suggest fractured thoughts and frayed emotions.

*Martha and Celia find Shelley and Stella*

*Horrible*

*Awful foreshadowing?*

*Different location ...*

*Thursday, June 9 [Day 3; pp. 134–196]*

*Chapter 14.* Letitia paints a picture of each character's emotional status with broad colourless strokes.

Journaling is an unfamiliar and uncomfortable task for Letitia. Her sense of obligation and commitment to the research means she is lingering in the story longer than she would likely have otherwise.

*I like Ned's electricity analogy (p. 135)*

*Interesting how everyone reacts to saving the child.*

*Celia has no reason to live because of her son's suicide.*

*Judy—guilt*

*Ned—shuts down*

*Jacob—peripheral and feeling guilt*

*Celia—taking charge*

*Jimmy—comes to the call for action; family over his wife's religious rituals*

*Chapter 15.* Letitia alters her approach to reading and journaling to skirt the disturbing tack of the story.

*Skimmed this*

*Too awful*

*Chapter 16.* Letitia takes a stoic approach to duck the rise and rampage of emotions that threaten.

*Stella cleans her house with Ned and Jim watching*

*I keep my emotions in check because the misery of this story is so big.*

*Chapter 17.* Letitia engages more deeply, copying quotes from the chapter and injecting her own thinking, questioning, and predicting. She interprets a flash of light in the dark as a momentary lull in the storm. Letitia seems to be preparing herself for what she senses is still to come.

*“Humans love ritual. Love is ritual. Hate too” (p. 179).*

*Ritual is order in chaos*

*The snake unleashed chaos when it was neglected?*

*Evil is always available if you invite it in*

*“Love is not enough. It takes a lot of elbow grease to accept someone else’s way of being” (p. 182).*

*Stacey and Steve making a commitment is a happy commercial in the middle of a shit storm*

*So you just can feel that it won’t last*

*I propose that Celia is happy because her plan is to kill the men that hurt Shelley and go to prison.*

*Just like a ritual a plan like that.*

*Friday, June 10 [Day 4; pp. 197–269]*

*Chapter 18.* Letitia resists the spark of optimism she feels for fear it will inevitably lead her somewhere unwanted. She does not trust the feeling in the context of this story.

*The Northern Lights and the singing*

*The acceptance of Steve*

*The optimism that Shelley might live*

*I feel like I am being set up.*

*Chapter 19.* Letitia records a staccato of names and nouns. Her *big relief* is, perhaps, evidence of some level of emotional investment in the characters and their well-being. Or, possibly, it is a more general investment in the well-being of all people who endure.

*Sam and the gun*

*Celia and Alice and poems*

*Big relief that Sam doesn't shoot anyone and Jacob makes it down the mountain*

*Chapter 20.* Letitia seems to be engaging in sense-making in an attempt to understand relations and revelations.

*Alex = Jimmy's father*

*More secrets revealed*

*The men vs the women; they follow their lead*

*Strange these two clubs.*

*Chapter 21.* Letitia expresses sympathy for a character without expanding on its origin or connection to her own life experience. She copies a quote from the last page of the chapter but stops short of elaborating on its relevance to her as a reader. Again, she searches for predictability in the storyline.

*Jimmy's burning ceremony.*

*Poor Alex—sideswiped*

*Came for one reason and walked into another.*

*the story of the lake and the two men (p. 242)*

*"Sometimes to move ahead, you have to go back to the beginning" (p. 242).*

*<When are we going to get to finding the bad guys?>*

*Chapter 22.* Letitia copies a single quote without elaborating on its significance to her and lists key events. The journal entry does not indicate reflection or sense-making.

*"As long as each of them holds onto [some] bitter thread, they cannot really give life" (p. 244).*

*They (Jacob and Celia) find Amos.*

*Jimmy has a pregnant girlfriend*

*Jacob finds Amos first and befriends him and with Celia entice[s] him back to the village. He*

*[Amos] is a product of the Residential Schools.*

*Chapter 23.* Four question marks and a declared need for a decoding device is more evidence of the confusion Letitia continues to experience. She notes a sense of confusion beginning in her Chapter 1 journal entry. Letitia has not been able to find the thread of the story nor predict how it will unravel.

*Longhouse? Smokehouse*

*The old man → Elder? Chief?*

*The serpent kills the boy who kills the cat?*

*I feel like I need a decoder ring.*

*They 'kill' Amos and friend and the baby is born.*

*Is this going to not end in total misery?*

*Chapter 24.* Letitia writes a disjointed list of story elements; fragments of life and death, division and reunion, things paved and glossed over.

*Quickie wrap-up to the 2 murders*

*Steve comes to "the rescue"*

*The town becomes more divided and his testimony eventually reunites them.*

*Young Celia is 5! That was quick.*

*Momma dies. Years later, Ned dies.*

*Road is paved.*

*Mink spirit goes away for now.*

*Summary.*

*So that was a strangely quick wrap up and certainly a much more upbeat ending than I ever imagined during the first few chapters*

*Change of pace always throws me off*

*Easy reconciliation also unexpected*

*What happened to the little girl? And Stella?*

*I don't journal*

*I have never journaled a book—this was a strange journey externally and internally*

*I am not used to sharing feelings on something in process or on demand and there were several places where the best thing for me to do was rush.*

*I can get overwhelmed by the cruelty of humans to other humans in life and in books*

*So it was quite a relief to have this book end somewhat optimistically.*

Letitia repeatedly attempted to predict the storyline in this reading experience. It appears that anticipating what might happen next affords a sense of preparedness regardless of accuracy. This journal entry also indicates that a steady pace has a stabilizing effect on her as a reader.

The questions Letitia poses in this *Summary* entry suggest she prefers storying capped off with a resolution; dots connected, loose ends tied. She qualifies the ending of this story as *somewhat* optimistic. That she finds this to be *quite a relief* implies that self-protection and her own well-being are central to her reading experience. Letitia gravitates to lighter reads as a way, perhaps, to avoid engaging in topics she perceives as outside of her ability to influence or control. The words of Maracle (2014) resonate with Letitia's reading experience: "There is something helpless in being a witness" (p. 1).

Journaling is not a form of expression Letitia employs to share her feelings. This provides context for the quick, sharp facts that punctuate her reading experience from Chapter 9 onward. The journaling task, paired with a novel she would not have chosen to read, let alone finish, culminated in a reading experience that unfolded as a *strange journey externally and internally*. Hastening her reading experience left no room to reflect or absorb the nuance of the story. It was, perhaps, an attempt to protect herself from an unwanted emotional and cognitive reading experience.

### Book Club Discussion

*Approach to Book.* Letitia read the entire book during the week of the Friday evening book club session. She cites two reasons for the timing. First, to make sure her memory of the story and her reading experience were fresh. *If I read it, like a month ago, I'd forget.* Second, she got an inkling from a group email that the book would be a difficult read. ... *you guys had written an email saying this is pretty heavy stuff and I thought I'm going to have to dive in and do it. If I dabble, I won't make it to the end.*

Letitia is very clear that she would not have continued the read had it not been for her felt obligation to me and to the research endeavour. *I would just like to say, I would never, never in a*

*thousand years would I have continued to read this book. I get too agitated by these books. I get really mad. I will burn books that I get mad about.*

Letitia describes her journaling process as a summation of each chapter rather than a reflection on and documentation of her cognitive, emotional, embodied reading experience. Her journal is a compilation of sparse hand-written notes summarizing each chapter in a small, coil-bound and lined note book. Her self-deprecating description of her journal as *the worst journal you've ever read in your life* seems to suggest that she viewed the activity as an assignment that would be judged and marked rather than a generative exercise to support a reflective/reflexive mindset. Journaling is not a form of reflective expression that Letitia has ever drawn on and she found it to be *disruptive*. It seems that, for Letitia, articulating and documenting her cognitive, emotional, and embodied experiencing was an interruption to the flow of the reading experience. The journaling process was not an effective means to prompt a deeper, reflective experience of the text through for this reader.

*Experience of Book.* Letitia compares her experience reading *Celia's Song* to other similar experiences of reading through a constant state of apprehension. *I kept on reading and then I found I was just waiting for the other shoe to drop.* Letitia depicts the story as dark and her reading experience as one filled with apprehension. Her inability to predict the storyline left her feeling unsettled and vulnerable. *Like, all I can think ... of is all the possible dark endings. How far is she going to take us down this dark hole?* There is a sense of a loss of control over her reading experience. Letitia seems to assign the responsibility for her reading experience to the author who she views as someone who is *setting us up for a fall* and *taking us down this dark hole*. Letitia further blames the author for making her *mad*, assigning responsibility for her emotional reaction. *She would make me mad when she would do, like, the three-page chapter, you know, or three or four of that length and then there was a 25-page chapter.* Letitia found that the varying length of the chapters *affected [her] ability to absorb*.

The book contained 26 chapters ranging in length from three to 40 pages with eight pages being the average chapter length. Perhaps this was an issue for Letitia partly because of instructions to journal at least once per chapter. It may be that this stipulation focused attention on the length of each chapter. Letitia may have hesitated to start or end her reading time part way through a longer chapter and/or journal more than once per chapter.

Letitia seems at odds with the author again later in the discussion. She shares her assessment of Restless, one head of the two-headed serpent, as an always present, opportunistic evil that invades a person uninvited. Letitia describes a scene with Restless as *half a page of evil* inserted in the middle of the story, isolated and without context. In this instance, she positions the passage as a calculated attempt to *shock* the reader.

Letitia repeatedly describes the book as *so dark and heavily spiritual*. This impression of the narrative remained until one third of the way into the text when the *emphasis shifted considerably* and she recognized a storyline emerging and unfolding. Letitia adds this experience to her overall experience of the book. *So, again, that's why I get disappointed with an author*. She directs a question to the author to emphasize her frustration, *Why do you do that to us?* Letitia seems to blame the author for her own lack of understanding to the point of feeling offended. She describes herself as *trying to get into the flow* of the story and accuses the author of sabotaging her efforts. In expressing the emotion of feeling *disappointed*, Letitia appears to blame the author for her own confusion, lack of understanding, and lack of knowledge. She places the onus on the author to inform, educate, and fill in gaps in her own understanding. Letitia does not express any sense of agency, responsibility, or response-ability to gather and gain knowledge. Letitia's experience of the book is marked by confusion, apprehension, uncertainty, and gaps in knowledge. She points to a lack of cohesion in the narrative and depicts a reading experience that was a frustrating jumble of confusing characters (human, other than human, nonhuman), settings, and timelines. *And, I'm like, ok, [laughing] you have to be watching for the signs or*

*you'd miss the turn. Yeah, there was a lot of jumping around.* In addition, Letitia finds the transitions from one timeframe to another and the uneven spans of time throughout the story to be *just so confusing*. At times, Letitia finds it difficult to follow the storyline, describing one scene early in the narrative with several characters that did not reappear in the remainder of the text. She is unsure of the significance of this scene to the broader story, marking it as another point of uncertainty for this reader.

Letitia takes issue with the inconsistent pace of the storytelling. ... *to go from that certain pace and that emphasis on spiritual to this dark, dark story in the middle and then this wrap 'er up in three chapters at the end where ... ten years go by in three chapters. I just find that takes away from the beautiful pace of the book.* She questions whether the editorial process interfered with the creative writing process. *Things [in the story] just condense and collapse.* It is not clear whether Letitia was looking for more description, more explanation, or more demonstration of how human beings move through inhumane experiences to survive and thrive. Letitia also questions the choices the author made in the telling of the story. *How could the other man who was also guilty of the same crime be so invisible? Why did they name one and not the other? I didn't understand.* Her frustration with her inability to make sense and meaning of the story was palpable and evident in her body language, facial expression, gestures, and breath.

Letitia points to an onerous number of characters as a contributing cause for her almost continuous state of confusion. She counts the characters to confirm the number and to punctuate her point. *I had a hard time because there's a lot of characters. There's like 15 characters. I was just trying to count them.* During the read, Letitia was not able to track who was who, when and where they lived, even the form they took (e.g., shape-shifter, spirit, ancestor). Letitia frequently raises questions during the discussion about the characters that, by and large, go unanswered. *Is it one of the sisters? And, then there's another sister who's house they'd never been to who was planting the potatoes. ... How can you never have been to another cousin's house? That seemed very bizarre.*

At one point in the discussion, Letitia and Hazel sift through what they understand the character mink to be and arrive at shape-shifter. Letitia pushes for deeper understanding of mink and questions whether it is representational of something bigger, broader. She seems exasperated, frustrated, stymied. *I don't know. See, I'm ignorant to the culture.*

Letitia: *It's not a mink spirit. It's a ...*

Hazel: *No. I know. It's a spirit that's inhabited a mink.*

Letitia: *No, I understand.*

Hazel: *A shape-shifter. Right?*

Letitia: *Right. So, what ... ? Is that what it is, a shape-shifter, or does it represent something else? Is it, you know, the spirit of all animals? Is it the spirit of ... I don't know. See, I'm ignorant to the culture.*

Letitia is endeavouring to derive meaning from the narrative. She is uncertain, unaware, unknowing, and her questions are an attempt at sense-making. Letitia acquiesces to her own ignorance, fully accepting her lack of knowledge. She seems resigned to not understanding and makes no expression of agency or ability to gather or gain knowledge. Letitia does not critically reflect on how it is and why it is that she is *ignorant to the culture*.

Letitia reiterates her perception that *there was [sic] a lot of strange, little quirky, quirky little episodes*. Experiencing the text in this way added to her confusion, the need to be attentive, and her sense of losing the thread of the story, or that there were pieces of the puzzle missing or overlooked. Letitia also struggled to get a sense of when the story took place. *I couldn't get a sense of when [the story] was set ... there's no kind of timely reference ... so you kind of have no idea of when it's set and then they run through 10 years at the end ...*. The other book club members also experienced confusion

and uncertainty around the timeline of events. In an attempt to discern the timeframe, the group identifies clues that imply a specific era—a scene at Kmart, the little girl having a cellphone to call her grandmother, no mention of Wi-Fi—with no consensus reached. Letitia seems to need to place the story in time as a concept and a context she recognizes as tangible and familiar. Perhaps, situating the story in time and space provides a reference point within the context of her own lifeworld for her to understand, comprehend, and join the flow of the story.

Letitia reads another quote from the book and expresses appreciation for the perspective of one character regarding an event that is brutally violent and is very disturbing to her and the other readers in the group. The perspective of the character is a catalyst to expanded awareness facilitated by a willingness to test a different point of view.

*“As a young man, Ned had left this village and headed out on the open road. He learned things on that journey, things about electricity, about positive and negative, about grounding and shorting out. He thinks about it now. It tells him something about humans. Humans are charged or they are not. They are grounded or they are not. They are transmitting or receiving, or they are shorting out. The dust, the gravel, the hard work, the mountain climbing, the fishing, the berry picking, all this keeps the villagers grounded. The hard work and the mountain climbing wore out the charge. Someone had lost connection to his ground wire; two positives had collided, shorted out, and aimed the force of the charge at this child” [reading from pp. 135–136]. So, that was Ned’s way of, you know, kind of talking about it. But, I thought it was interesting, you know, positive and negative, and, you know, once things are out of kilter, you know, it’s hard to bring them back. I thought that was kind of interesting.*

This engagement with the narrative demonstrates a willingness to try on a new perspective, to see the events anew through the eyes of a character in the story. Letitia takes in the words on the page

and summarizes the excerpt. ... *once things are out of kilter, you know, it's hard to bring them back.* This process is, in effect, a way of weaving the narrative into her own way of thinking and perceiving. *I thought that was kind of interesting.* The word *interesting* does little to qualify or illuminate her reading experience. She does not elaborate further and no one tries to elicit further explanation of her experience, or pick up this thread of conversation as an invitation to go deeper and/or add their own experience.

Letitia experiences confusion regarding specific structures described in the book called longhouses and smokehouses and their significance and purpose in ritual and daily life. *I was confused because they talked longhouse and then smokehouse and they kind of switched back and forth and I didn't know if that was two buildings they built or the smokehouse is what the longhouse turns into when the ritual's going on.* There is no indication that Letitia, or anyone else, sought an answer outside of the text. No initiative to find out or figure out is noted in the discussion. The initial interest and curiosity did not lead to self-directed learning and, therefore, confusion remains and questions go unanswered. This, perhaps, is indicative of a colonial mindset that shifts the onus to inform and educate onto others; in this instance, the author. A lack of knowledge is met with acceptance and there is no articulated desire, inspiration, or sense of obligation or agency to learn.

Letitia is surprised that so few Salish words were written into the text and multiple voices sound agreement. She then launches a discussion about an unfamiliar word that appears in the book twice and created confusion in her. She focuses on a specific scene and asks Rose for confirmation, embarrassed that she may be interpreting it wrong or reading more into it than the author intended. She asks Rose to read it to herself first, which instigates a moment of levity in the group. After multiple voices weigh in multiple times, there is no consensus on the meaning of the word. Letitia offers a possible explanation: *I thought, ok, maybe I just don't ... maybe that's an Indian [Indigenous] reference.* Her unawareness led her to consider a possibility for the origin of the word. The discomfort she and others experience with

respect to not being able to define the word, with or without the context of the narrative, suggests they are unaccustomed to standing in a position of ignorance. Letitia concedes that *there were very few of those. Like, there was only one or two other kind of odd words that I couldn't figure out*. Here, Letitia seems to dismiss, diminish, and devalue the word by qualifying it as *odd*. Her comment also serves to centre the English language as the dominant and normative language by which other languages are understood and valued.

Letitia reads two more quotes from her copy of the book and, again, demonstrates a process of expanding awareness. Paraphrasing the words of the story is a process of merging lived experience with the experience of the text in an attempt to structure sense and meaning from both.

*Humans love ritual. ... Love is a ritual. Hate too [p. 179]. And, then, this ... "Love is not enough,' [she whispers to herself]. It takes a lot of elbow grease to accept someone else's way of being" [p. 182]. I thought that was a really good turn of phrase. You can love a person but you gotta just slug through the other stuff.*

In response to a comment regarding historical and contemporary impacts of colonization, Letitia is inspired to pose a question. *What's the plan to move forward? What are the steps now?* This suggests awareness that action is needed, as well as an openness and a willingness to move toward something new. There is a sense that she is looking for direction in the form of concrete steps to enact change. A background in business and a strategy-based mindset may influence her approach to challenges; set a goal, define the steps to achieve the goal, and measure the outcome. Her questions, however, hang unanswered.

Letitia turns her focus to the writing style of Maracle. *There were lots of beautiful turns of phrases; really brilliant pairing of lines and thoughts*. This is eloquently stated praise for the writing style and depth of prose, and her words validate and expand on other expressions of appreciation and

acknowledgement of the writing quality. Letitia views this work by Maracle as a brilliant expression of thought, feeling, and experience through words arranged on the pages or, as described by Rosenblatt (1978), “the ordered symbols of the text” (p. 12). Letitia is aware of the writing style and the language, and of its influence on her engagement with the story. She labels these moments as *little tidbits* that led a reader to *become enamored* with Maracle’s writing style.

Letitia describes her response to finding out about the Indian Residential School System and attributes her ignorance to not being exposed to the physical presence of a Residential School. She does not critically reflect on her lack of awareness beyond the fact that no Residential School was located in or around where she grew up. *I’m horrified that some of the horrible colonialisms and brainwashing happened as late as they did. I mean, that was just kind of a stunning shock to me because I wasn’t exposed to it by driving by one of those schools or any of that ... [inaudible due to multiple voices]*. Letitia does not address how it is or why it is that she is shocked, nor does she express a sense of responsibility or response-ability to rectify her lack of knowledge. Rather, she accepts her lack of knowledge. Embedded in her statement is a sense that a state of ignorance absolves her of responsibility and accountability. Letitia seems incredulous that she was unaware of Residential Schools growing up and, as an adult, attributes her ignorance to the fact that Residential Schools *must just not have been anywhere near me*. In using terms such as *horrified*, *horrible*, and *brainwashing* she is acknowledging historic harms as recent and within her lifetime. She demonstrates expanded awareness and critical reflection leading to a resistant stance that is accepting of the status quo as inevitable.

Letitia participates in a discussion on the establishment of Residential Schools, offering a counter to the perspective voiced by Rose who positions the schools as a benevolent act. Letitia expands the discourse to include dissent and disagreement. *That was not out of generosity. That was to take away what they had*. This clear, direct statement counters the perspective articulated by Rose. Abbie

and Hazel join Letitia in challenging Rose to rethink her position. This is a demonstration of critical reflection and discourse aimed at more open, just, and justifiable perspectives and beliefs.

Letitia shares her ancestry and initiates a discussion about colonialism as a historical movement that precludes personal, present-day accountability. Her comment suggests that she believes the historical nature of colonization absolves her of accountability, responsibility, and involvement in colonization as a series of historical actions and events during an era of discovery and domination.

*I'm WASPy [White Anglo Saxon Protestant] through and through; British, Scottish. And, you know, I had nothing to do with colonialism ... me, personally. And, really, all of the European empires did horrible things to people around the entire globe. ... that's what rich countries did then.*

Letitia follows up by stating, *I would want us to rectify real wrongs that are still wrongs*. It seems that she absolves herself of past wrongdoing but is willing to be accountable for current harms and responsible for playing a role in addressing and redressing contemporary issues; expressing a desire to do the right thing. She then shifts to position any rectification of wrongdoing as logistically impossible. *But, we can't, you know, in today's economics we can't give back land, we can't, like, recreate the past.* Letitia speaks using us/we rather than I/me language. She accepts failure as inevitable. There is a sense that defining reconciliation as an unattainable goal absolves responsibility. It also seems that, in characterizing redress as impossible, it then positions the seeker as unreasonable.

Letitia introduces the concept of colour blindness into the discussion as she talks about her 11-year-old self who loved the television series *Star Trek*. She perceived the cast as blind to the skin tone and distinct physical features of one another. ... *the team on the bridge, they were colour blind, right? And so was I because they were, right?* This can be viewed as a way of centring whiteness by dismissing

and invalidating racial difference rather than respectful, curious, open acknowledgement that allows for other voices to tell, teach, and lead the transformation that is necessary.

Letitia likened her experience reading *Celia's Song* to her experience reading *Little Bee* (Cleave, 2008). She asked herself the same question in each reading experience. *What is the point of reading this?* If her purpose for reading fiction is amusement, entertainment, and feeling uplifted by a happy ending then she would struggle to see the point of reading something that challenged, disrupted, disturbed, and unsettled. If reading is conceived of as a temporal, spatial, cognitive, and emotional escape from reality, then it is understandable that a reader may not elect to enter an alternate reality that is harsh, violent, unsettling, and unfair. *I think it's [Celia's Song is] an interesting book and it was a challenging book, but I didn't like it because I don't like to be shocked in books. That's not why I read books.* Letitia read the book out of a commitment to her reading group, to me, and to the research process.

*Individual Speaking Patterns.* Letitia poses a question to the group for their consideration, inviting ideas about what everyone thought the mink spirit was. It is an open-ended, inclusive, generative question that evokes multiple responses. She remarks on the serpents being a consistent element throughout the book. ... *they were, to me, just evil. They were ...* Her next words, which I assume were going to expand on her statement, were cut short by Rose clarifying/correcting that, in fact, one serpent was good and one was evil. They were not both evil. Such exchanges between Letitia and others are typical of the conversation style of the group. Often, the person speaking will be interrupted by one or more people adding to, clarifying, or correcting what is said.

Letitia does not hesitate to state her opinion, even when it was contrary to that of other readers in the group. Letitia points out that Amos was *a product of Residential Schools*. Her statement invites conversation and, perhaps, compassion for the life experience of the villain as Letitia attempts to make cognitive and emotional sense of the narrative. By adding details about the early life of the villain, she is,

perhaps, grappling to understand how a human being can become untethered from his humanity. She does not, however, concede *pity* for Amos based on his early life experience. The details of his early life do not stoke a sense of empathy in Letitia for his actions and the harm he perpetrated. Boler (1997) finds empathy, as an altruistic emotion, sits on a spectrum with sympathy and compassion, and terms like *pity* and *sympathy* evoke a sense of power imbalance between those who feel pity or sympathy and those viewed as pitiful or pathetic. The term Letitia uses is *pity*, not compassion, not understanding, not sympathy, not empathy. Her choice to use the term *pity* rather than empathy may also imply a sense of contempt. It is evident in this exchange that word choice weaves nuance in and through communication adding texture, tone, and tenor. Perhaps her words convey an underlying belief that is beyond her current awareness.

When the book talk turns serious, Letitia often injects humour, the others laugh, the atmosphere lightens, and the discourse shifts course. In one such instance, Letitia, who admits to having little to no knowledge of Indigenous cultures and traditions, introduces some levity. It comes on the heels of an exchange between Abbie and Rose on the violence occurring within the community and relational sphere of the characters. Letitia introduces some levity into a very serious, heavy, sensitive, potentially explosive topic by laughing at the idea of families trying to live in harmony under one roof [of a longhouse]. Here, humour serves to deflect the discomfort, contain the confrontation, ease the dis-ease. And, again, when the discussion delves into the poignant backstory of Celia, Letitia, interjects comic relief, offering a point of humour to pivot to calmer emotions and circumvent reflection. It seems that Letitia has a low tolerance for the discomfort that can arise out of difficult conversations.

Letitia, again, uses humour to lighten a disagreement among the group members regarding the intent of the Indian Residential School System. She is unwilling to allow this line of discourse to unfold further and shuts down the conversation in an attempt to ease the dis-ease and dispel the discomfort. She steers the conversation back to the content of the book by referencing a character and his

assessment of men as, in Letitia's words, *not deep thinkers*. In doing this, it seems that Letitia circumvents the momentum and trajectory of the discussion on Residential Schools to settle the unsettling discourse, mitigate the disagreement, and return to the book as a form of entertainment. Letitia's bid to shift the course of discourse is met with laughter that lightens the atmosphere in the room. It is a signal to the others to move on from this topic that inspired contentious discussion. Laughter and more banter ensue, and the conversation does not circle back at any point to the Indian Residential School System.

### Final Interview

*Interview Scenario.* As I assemble the tools to capture this final interview with Letitia, I realize the recorder is too low on charge for the anticipated hour-long conversation. We agree to move to the Skype platform and, so, voices and visuals punctuate this exchange. Long sections of the Skype interview were not picked up by the Microsoft Word dictation function which only transcribed my voice near the microphone on my computer. It did not pick up Letitia's voice on the other end of our electronic/digital/auditory/Wi-Fi connections across the ethers. The record feature on Skype served to capture the full conversation.

After this reading experience, Letitia is *more likely to seek out* Indigenous Literatures for future reads. ... *I never assume that one book or one thing of anything is representative ... so, yeah, I'd be curious to find other authors.* She would like another reading experience to *contrast and compare* to Celia's Song.

*So, it's a relationship with another book that I'd like to experience so I can say I liked this one better than that, or, this one approached storytelling this way and this one was totally different. ... I just think it would probably add more value to the experience if there were more than one author to experience in that genre.*

Letitia would not select another title by Maracle to extend her reading experience with Indigenous Literatures. ... *some of her writing I found very poetic and very engaging, but I'm not so enamoured with her writing style that I would jump in and read anything she wrote. I would rather do a different experience.*

The book offered Letitia a glimpse into the lifeworlds of characters who identify as Indigenous and the reading experience conjured an *intangible sense of loss of continuity ... between the current culture and society, and the one that was disintegrating in the forest.* She found the historical element in the book *a little bit cryptic, ... more remnants of a culture, right? ... the more ancient culture was never fully fleshed out, it was just the remnants of it, so I never got a sense of what that culture was like.* Letitia believes that is *exactly what she [the author] was trying to communicate to us.*

Letitia is a reader who can fall in love with a book and she shares her reading experience from that perspective.

*... it was not love. ... if I had to put it on a scale, it was not as horrible as many of the books I've read, and because of the writing style I would give it more like a six and a half out of 10. But, I didn't find it an enjoyable read because I get very uncomfortable with scenes of abuse and rape, and, you know, people descending into horrible stages of their life. I don't enjoy reading about that. So, that is what takes away from it being an enjoyable reading experience. I go out of my way to not do that and I kind of tolerate my way through it when it does happen.*

It is typical for Letitia to wait to read a book club selection until a few days before the discussion. She read *Celia's Song* over the four days leading up to the session. Letitia went *full on, full in* with this reading experience under the expectation that she would *not find this enjoyable* after an email exchange among group members *mentioned that they had found it a little dark.*

*I knew I wanted to read it in a chunk, and once I started to read it a little bit, I thought, yes, it would not be easy for me to read a little, put this book down and pick it up two days later because when it gets to the dark points, if I put a book down, I won't pick it up again. I will just say, I'm done with that.*

Letitia expands on her reading style to clarify that she approaches books she loves in the same way. ... *when I'm reading a book that love I do the same thing. Like, I'll stay up until 4 a.m. and read. ... I'm not a very good dabbler. I like to jump into all books pretty much.* Her inclination is always to finish what she starts and this applies to her reading. *I hate it when I don't complete things. ... I felt good about getting to the end of the book because it was a somewhat more happy ending.* She found the ending *awkward and bumpy, however, and not in keeping with parts of the rest of the book.*

Letitia shares that she did not find that she *engaged with the characters* and, therefore, *did not get emotionally invested. I don't think it [the story] will stick with me.* Emotional investment in characters is a signal of transportation into a story. Although Letitia does not describe her reading experience in a way that denotes transportation, her journaling suggested that she was emotionally invested in the well-being of some of the characters. She expands on her journal entries and clearly articulates a sense of concern and relief, not for the characters as much as for herself. Letitia avoids being reader-witness to experiences she finds emotionally intolerable.

Letitia goes on to describe her perception of a moral and ethical dilemma faced by one character as a *struggle* for her as a reader. ... *how do you reconcile that in your head? ... So, yes, there was a degree of engagement with the characters but not so much that if there's ever a sequel that I'd be interested in finding out what happened.* She does not wonder about what happens next in the lives of the characters. She does not imagine a story beyond the last page of the book. This is another indication that transportation was not experienced by this reader.

Letitia found that Chapter 4 signaled a shift in the story and storying away from the inner experience of images and spirituality of the character Celia, and toward, what was for Letitia, ... *just a real story* and ... *finally some character I relate to*. She copied passages she found significant in her journal and did not mark up her copy of the book. For Letitia, marking in a book means *you're thoughts are all over it now*, and she typically refrains from doing so in anticipation of lending her books to others.

Although Letitia found *Celia's Song* to be an *interesting blend of spiritual and real story*, she *does not think it's for everyone* and does not intend to recommend the book.

*I didn't love it. I'm not a person who recommends books to others readily. So, no, I wouldn't be recommending it. But, you should take that as less a reflection on this book and more of just a reflection on me not recommending books too often.*

The media coverage and commentary regarding Residential Schools airing as she read the book provided her a context for the loss of culture she perceived in the narrative.

*... this sense of loss of culture, which had it not been for the schools being in the media, I would not necessarily have known enough to attribute some of that loss of culture to that phenomenon. So, that makes it all the more sad that the culture wasn't lost; the culture was being broken, or attempted to be broken by the Canadian government. So, that's my take away, but it doesn't make me have a burning desire to read more about it because it's so sad and awful. Like, don't I sound like a sissy pants? But, it's just so sad and awful that it breaks my heart to think of what was deliberately done to children.*

Letitia places limitations on redressing and addressing the harms perpetrated and accepts the constraints imposed by the sheer complexity of it all as inevitable and determining.

*What happened, happened and we can't change the past, but what can we do to fix broken bits in the present, that makes sense in the present rather than trying to unravel history. [It] is a complex issue and I would like there to be some resolution but nothing can ever be fully resolved because it can't be undone.*

For Letitia, the book *did not really draw a straight line; it was a dotted line to the Residential Schools. It [the book] was more, to me, representative of here's where we are today with a little bit of context.* She believes the next steps are about *figuring out how to live together in this world regardless of how we all got here, and, figuring that out and honouring each other's past and honouring that past but moving together in the future.* Letitia perceived the book as offering *little in terms of how we resolve things. ... It was the story of real people in today's environment.* The book contained a few messages for Letitia, including a sense of *hope that we can all learn to get along a bit better. There was the spirit world that was known to the Indigenous cultures, [and] is out there ready and willing to be reengaged.*

Overall, Letitia has a sense that there was no space for lightness in a story that was so heavy and dark. She also notes many points of confusion in her reading experience, especially *over characters and when [the author] would jump back and forth in time.* Letitia acknowledges that in finding a way through confusion, a reader is prompted to engage more deeply in a story, an experience corroborated by Lemieux (2020).

*I got a feeling in that book that she [the author] wanted us to be confused. The way she told snippets, she wanted you to try and stitch it all together and maybe even have gaps. I mean, maybe that's the whole point. ... I would like to think that smart writers are writing to confuse you. You're not feeling confused because it's bad writing. And, there's a difference.*

Letitia agrees that she likes to predict what is going to happen in a story, a hangover from reading mystery novels and watching who-done-its. She enjoys being *able to guess where it's going and*

*still delighted when it [her guess] is wrong.* Letitia agrees that her inclination to try to stay one step ahead to see what is coming is also a way that she prepares and protects herself from unpleasantness. Her tendency to skim through parts of a book and rush through other places are additional reading adaptations she practices to avoid being reader-witness to experiences that she finds intolerable. *It's too graphic. I don't want to know it. I visualize, I guess, as I read and I have no desire to visualize certain things. So, yeah. That's just a self-protection thing.* Letitia avoids transportation into a narrative through visualization and through emotional investment in the characters. In reading experiences such as this one with *Celia's Song*, she is not able to observe the pain and suffering of another without absorbing it.

Journaling about her reading experience was *definitely odd* for Letitia. It is not a familiar activity or one she feels inclined or compelled to do. She *stuck by the rules* of the journaling task as if it was a school assignment. Journaling was neither a familiar nor comfortable way for her to document her reading experience, and the inconsistent pace of the book did not align with how she would *process a story*. Letitia tended to summarize the content of the book in her journal rather than her cognitive, emotional, and embodied experience of it. She consumed the book as *a speed reader ... doing it over four days*. Letitia found that the journaling, *that kind of compartmentalizing, ... made [the read] a little bumpy*.

Letitia found that the book club discussion was *pretty comparable* to those the group regularly engages in.

*... we kind of talked big picture, then little scenes we liked, and then we asked for clarity; What happened here? What did she mean when she said that? What does this word mean? And, that's pretty much how it goes. And, it was comparable to other books in that we did not just all say we loved it because you were in the room. Like, we all said whether we liked it or hated it. You usually get a range for every book that we read.*

For Letitia, a former marketing executive, all reading experiences are about the return on investment (ROI). She finds that she is *probably more highly critical because I think to myself, OK, I've invested time in this book, I wanted it to have been worth my while. Celia's Song* did not provide a reading experience with a high return on investment for this reader. Letitia would have stopped reading if not for a sense of commitment. *I was very unhappy with how dark it was getting and I was concerned it was going to continue to get darker and darker and more people were going to do more bad things to characters that I was starting to like.* She clarifies that the commitment she felt was to the research project and not to the reading group. *There have been books at book club that I've stopped reading because I don't like them. The ROI wasn't there. That's what I meant by it being a laid back book club.*

The book afforded Letitia a glimpse into lifeworlds that are unknown to her; lifeworlds she perceives as *a mix of spiritual and struggle*. She does not position her reading experience and opinion of the book as *the be all and end all*. *A range of reactions is an expected part of the dialogue* in this book club. The reading experiences shared by others in the group did not challenge, expand, or otherwise influence her perception and reception of the story.

## Chapter 4(d): Rose

### Initial Interview

*Interview Scenario.* I sit in my car facing the Halifax skyline. It is a calm, clear, blue-sky day, and the early spring sun easily warms the interior of my black-topped Jeep. The surface of the ocean sparkles and winks like sunlit glitter. I dial the number on my cellphone capturing the ringtone on the digital recorder propped on the armrest between the front seats. I focus on the moment to ease the heaviness in my heart and the aching sorrow that, very recently, displaced the pain, confusion, anger, resentment, and disappointment that had blanketed my being for far too long. Sorrow, for me, carries with it a sense of accepting what is, and acceptance, it seems, acts as a catalyst to agency. Of course, none of this has anything to do with the conversation I am about to engage in when the ringing of the phone ends with “Hello!” Goodbyes and hellos, endings and beginnings, disconnections and connections; life is/as/in continuous motion.

### Reading Lifeworld

*Early Reading Experience.* For Rose, a love of books blossomed early in her reading life. She reminisces about her earliest recollection of reading, an event tied to a person and a library on wheels that rolled into her neighbourhood with regular frequency.

*Oh, I remember going to the bookmobile with my aunt and getting books out ... I love, always loved, books ... I still remember it was fabulous, this bus full of books!*

The mobile books, a satellite operation of the bricks and mortar library downtown, gave the preschooler access to a continuous flow of books growing up in the suburbs. Fond memories of visits to the book bus with her aunt underpin reading as a relational event in Rose’s early reading life.

*Significant Reading Experience.* Eleven-year-old Rose was gifted a copy of *Anne of Green Gables* (Montgomery, 1908). It remains her favourite book and one that Rose estimates she has read at least

200 hundred times since. The treasured book is a valued artifact that is on display and within easy reach as we talk.

*I still have it, my original one. ... It's right here. ... My mother gave it to me. Still got its little paper cover.*

Her love for the characters, especially *feisty* Anne with her *wild imagination*, has evolved into a life-long relationship with the story and the beloved book. Rose is not able to articulate what inspires her to reread the same narrative over and over again, nor whether each engagement is nuanced with new understanding or layered with a sense of deep, nostalgic familiarity. Perhaps it is possible that a story and a reader can grow and evolve in tandem.

Rose critiques the three television series based on the book and reserves high praise for the third iteration, a CBC Television production currently streaming on Netflix.

*The latest one, Anne With an E, was amazing. ... they go places that the book didn't go ... they really tackled the big social issues like her friendship with the Native child ... it's very well done, and again, the main threads of the book are there, but they go deeper into the experiences, right? Yeah, it's an awesome series.*

The series, according to Rose, stays true to Montgomery's original characters; a testament to how authentically the production extends the characters into new scenarios that reflect issues relevant to the current sociocultural climate. It is an example of a cherished literary classic being used as the framework to explore social issues through a cast of familiar, trusted characters. Rose finds the series thought-provoking but there is also a sense that the white characters are imbued with a level of humanity and integrity more than what could reasonably be considered historically accurate.

*Recent Reading Experience.* Rose is an avid reader with lovely reading spaces throughout her two-story home. Her typical time of day to read is at night before she retires. With a good book, however, she will read morning, noon, and night. It appears a book may be her first and last thought of any given day.

*I do an awful lot of my reading when I go to bed at night ... so, sometimes I don't get very far because I fall asleep ... and if I wake up in the morning, or even in the night, I'll pick up my book and read it. And, if it's really good, I have a hard time putting it down.*

Rose gravitates to fiction for the entertainment value and especially enjoys the writing, tone, and humour of British authors. She rarely gives up on a book part way through, choosing instead to trust the narrative will improve as it evolves. As an avid reader, she borrows most of her reading material from the library. Space is an issue for collecting and storing the sheer volume of books she reads back to back.

*... if I had a huge house, I'd have a library and then I could buy as many as I want and keep as many as I want. [laughing] ... I literally put a book down and then I pick another one up and I start reading.*

Rose discovers new books by following trusted authors and is often inspired to read a book by the title and blurb alone. She is not a fan of the reader review site Goodreads after being disappointed by books she selected based on glowing reviews. She enjoys dialogue over description and is drawn to books with strong characterization and female friendships that span the years. Rose shares her distaste for lengthy description, labelling it as *verbal diarrhea*.

Rose is a voracious reader, consuming nearly a book a week. She has an inkling that she may be shy of that estimate during the last few months. Rose keeps a reading journal in which she records the title, the author, a brief synopsis, and rudimentary evaluation of each book she reads. She turns to the

notebook to confirm an accurate count and finds her recent reading volume is just slightly more than half of her typical quantity.

*Interestingly enough, in the last two or three months I've been playing on my stupid iPad games, and I notice I've been reading less. I don't really like that, so I've got to put down the device and pick up the books again. ... Yeah, and I'm only up to six books so far this year, which is very bad for me.*

Rose characterizes herself as being a *voracious reader forever*, and describes a consumptive style of reading. Consumptive reading is typified by little or no reflection before moving on to the next narrative; swirling eddies of words, pages, and stories never still long enough to pool in memory. Rose does not attribute her reduced reading volume to pandemic life but rather to the lure of her iPad. Attention to the question leads her to recognize and acknowledge a significant shift in her reading lifeworld that she qualifies as *very bad*. The image of herself as an avid reader has been an unwavering aspect of her reading identity since early childhood. I sense a momentary flash of embarrassment as she answers my question, and admits to herself, that she is prioritizing gaming over reading. Rose places value on reading and value is afforded to her as an avid reader within her reading peer group.

*... it's weird for me that I would be reading less and playing more, right? I'm not sure why that is. And, I realize I want to get back [to reading]. I enjoy reading and I've been kind of missing it.*

Rose notes that the book she is currently reading is a romance novel, a genre she terms as *fluff*, and something she injects into her reading repertoire to balance heavier, more impactful narratives.

*I discovered I have to be careful about what I read because I read at night. If it is kind of disturbing ... well, I can't put it down sometimes ... [and] I think I dream more. I think it has more of an impact on me ... so, if I find that I've sort of hit a bad spot, [I'll say], "Ok, I better get some fluff." Right? So, I might read, like, you know, a romance story or whatever.*

Rose never listens to audiobooks. She prefers the weight and tactile sensation of a print book in her hands but will use an ereader for convenience when she travels to alleviate the need to overstuff her suitcase with books. Rose does not turn down the corners of the pages in her books, nor does she mark a book up with a pen or highlighter. She likes to keep her books like new and uses book darts to reference pages and passages for book club discussions.

*Shared Reading Experience.* Rose is part of the quartet of neighbourhood walkers who founded the book club a decade ago. Her recollection of the history and longevity of the group aligns with what others in have storied, as does her wry description.

*... we're a drinking club with a book problem.*

This comment is bandied about by Rose and others in the book club. The shared joke speaks to the social, relaxed nature of the group and the focus on comradery and cohesion. Rose describes the group as *interesting, nice, and good*, and explains how they make every effort to accommodate the individual needs, schedules, and locations of the members so that everyone can participate. During periods of pandemic restrictions, Zoom became the virtual alternative to gathering in the same physical space.

*... it was hard during COVID. We did a couple virtually. ... it wasn't as good as being together, but at least it was fun, you know, nice to see people's faces ... It's not as good [as] coming together, you know, and being in a room together.*

For Rose, the social nature of the book club is the most enjoyable aspect, followed closely by the *amazing book selections* they get to read and discuss. Amazing books, that is, with the exception of one that is burned into the storied history of the group; a coalescing moment.

*And, sometimes, well, I think you heard, we actually burned one. It was so bad. That was one of those goddamn Goodreads recommendations, oohhh!*

The book, in fact, was torn up and thrown into the embers by just one person. An extreme gesture of distaste applauded by those who witnessed it, in a group where the right to speak up and be heard is supported but, ultimately, lies with the individual.

At first Rose responds in the negative when I asked if she takes a different approach to reading a book for book club. As she speaks, she comes to the opposite conclusion. She describes how she pays closer attention when she reads for book club, looking for points of discussion and things that resonate with her as a reader. Using her book darts exclusively in anticipation of the book club discussion is a tangible indication that she reads book club selections differently.

Rose finds the group discussion is typically marked by both agreement and disagreement as individual experiences and perceptions are shared. She and the others agree to disagree when there are dissenting opinions and individual perspectives are encouraged and accepted. At times, the discussion will influence her perception of a book, and cause her to rethink how she understood something or point out something she missed altogether. Rose enjoys that the book club, which meets every six to eight weeks, expands her reading repertoire and helps her to find a fresh perspective.

*It's nice to be with people and have a mutual enjoyment of reading, right? And, it is fun to be exposed to new books and have discussions about it because most of my reading I simply read it and I write a little something about it, and that's it. I move on to the next one.*

*Reconciliation as Reading Context.* Rose does not draw a link between reading and decolonization and reconciliation. She does not seek out Indigenous Literatures to read as an individual or in her shared-reading group. It seems that Indigenous-authored books do not register on her reading radar through recommendations from family and friends, nor in her library or online searches. In responding to the

query, her speech becomes disjointed as she appears to reconsider her answer. Reading Indigenous Literatures seems to be something she has given no thought to prior to the question being posed.

*Not that I wouldn't be interested. I just, uhm, it just isn't a normal genre that I have read, so ...*

Rose acknowledges the complexity and scope of the historical and present-day issues, actions, and events that require the need to reconcile the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

*Well, there's a lot to it. I mean, I guess the first thing you think of is religion and churches. ... the Residential Schools were a real horror story and, you know, [the] intergenerational pain as a result of it, you know, is pretty bad.*

Rose is aware that treaties were signed. She does not articulate an understanding that treaties signed in the past stand as current, actionable documents, nor that she has rights and responsibilities as a treaty person. Rose attributes her lack of knowledge to a gap in her education. She gives no indication that she intends to fill the gap through self-directed learning. Rose's admission and acceptance of her lack of knowledge is a tangible indication that treaties are inconsequential to the social, cultural, and economic aspects of her lifeworld.

*I have mixed feelings about the notion of the land, you know, that the land all belongs to the First Nations. [sigh] I don't know what you do with that, or how you, I mean, what does reconciliation look like around that. I don't know, I don't know, that's [pause], uh, you know, the white man took it over and, I don't know. Honestly, I don't remember much about that actually, and probably we weren't taught much about it, the actual history of how it all happened. ... you know, treaties were signed. Did that give white men the land that we are on, or [pause] I don't know. I don't know enough about it I think. I could certainly understand the need, particularly reconciliation with the churches for sure.*

Rose shifts her focus to the failures of, and harms perpetrated by, the Catholic church, as an institution, and the Pope as its head. Redirecting the conversation from individual accountability and responsibility to criticizing actions and responses at an institutional level is, perhaps, a way to divert, distract, or separate self-recrimination from blame aimed at an institution over which she feels no sense of agency to invoke change.

Rose is exposed to the term *reconciliation* in the news media.

*I mean, it's almost daily and there's a lot [about], you know, the Truth and Reconciliation [Commission] committee. That was something that was really shocking to me, [that] it wasn't until those bodies were found, and, you know, the Truth and Reconciliation [Commission] group said, "We told you this," and it took the discovery of those bodies to finally make people pay attention ... that was shocking to me. ... how do you reconcile that?*

Rose describes the horror she and others felt as the news unfolded. The evidence of the atrocities at Residential Schools, however, did not lead to conversations about decolonization or reconciliation among her family members, friends, or colleagues. Rose notes the biases that exist in human beings. She acknowledges double standards, prejudices, and racism are evident in what is said and done, but also in what is not said and not done.

Rose struggles to articulate her thoughts in a clear and focused way as she tries to define *decolonization* and what it means in actionable terms. She acknowledges the complexity and scope of the concept and cites that as the reason for her lack of focus. She calls government support *a double-edged sword* and uses words such as *terrible* and *awful* to describe current systems that impact Indigenous lives. Rose also points to dysfunction and corruption in Indigenous communities.

*There's just a lot of issues. So, decolonization I suppose, you know, would be, first of all, it's like everybody being treated equally. You don't have special status. ... I don't know the answer to that, Allana.*

### Reading Journal

*Methodological Note.* Document received as an email attachment. As a practice, this participant writes in a notebook as she reads. For this journaling task, she created a Microsoft Word document and re-typed her notes. Words in italics are those of the participant. To improve clarity and readability, obvious errors in spelling and spacing that did not alter the context were corrected. The journal text generally, and quotes from the book specifically, were edited according to APA style.

*June 2, 2022 @ 1:30pm*

*Chapter 1.* Rose is intrigued by the word *witness* in the opening sentence and questions who is witnessing what. She does not consider taking up a stance as reader-witness to the story about to unfold, nor more broadly as witness to Indigenous life experience. Rose articulates an assumption about Indigenous cultures without questioning its validity. She notes feeling *shocked, surprised, and anxious* as she reads the first chapter. Rose notes a sense of confusion early on, describing her reading experience as *a bit of a struggle*, underpinned by a hope that *things become clearer soon*. Although the style of storying does not sit well with Rose, she does find observations made by the author *interesting*; perspectives unexplored prior to this reading experience.

*The first thing that caught my attention was the word "witness" in the first sentence. Who is this person and what did they witness?*

*Feeling shocked and surprised that people would have died in the longhouse. I think of longhouses to be same as a sweat lodge.*

*Page 4 - Confusing. References by the mink are to both above ground and below the sea ... very unsettling.*

*Page 8 - Interesting observation re rent and mortgage. Celia doesn't understand. The amount is the same but renters had their homes fixed for free but mortgagors had to pay their own! Also that men used to build their own homes so neither rent nor mortgage was required.*

*Celia also notes that the only people who bemoan poverty are those who have not experienced it. Interesting point ...*

*Page 9 - Celia seems to have a vision. I'm hoping the book takes on a more "real" feel and is not so full of metaphors that are not always easy to understand.*

*Page 10/11 - Dismal, bleak description of the land. Hoping things become clearer soon. A bit of a struggle to read.*

*Page 13 - feeling unsettled and anxious. Reference to small panties and possible rape?*

*Chapter II.* Rose does not elaborate on how she defines an *actual story*. She expresses a sense of relief, however, as the storytelling begins to resemble more closely what she is accustomed to reading. Perhaps, her lived reading experience determines what she perceives to be a *real, actual, or true story*. Rose describes the circular storying style as *frustrating* and states a preference for the clarity she finds in a linear story line. In noting this, she is pinpointing an essential element of Indigenous Literatures that distinguishes the canon from western literature. Rose also notes, based on a scene in this chapter, that Indigenous Peoples have knowledges that connect them to the land and sea in ways that go beyond western scientific understanding.

*Page 14 - Relieved that an actual story is beginning ...*

*Page 16/17 - Belief vs science. Finding the book weird and a bit frustrating.*

*Page 18 - Fascinating that the Inuit are able to "hum" the whales to safety when "science" failed to accomplish the feat. Really shows the connection of the Indigenous to the land and the sea.*

*Page 19 - Circular argument - belief/disbelief. Frustrating - I prefer things to be stated more clearly than going in circles.*

*Chapter III.* Rose questions the trajectory of the narrative arc out of a sense of restlessness and frustration she attributes directly to the story. She finds the term *restless* an understated name for one half of the two-headed serpent. She makes a point. The *benign*-ness of words does not dilute harm. Take the term *complacent*, for example. It, too, feels benign when one considers the consequences that can unfold when a person and, by extension, a society, is complacent about the mistreatment of another person or group of people. Which begs the question: Does the act of othering by emotional, linguistic, intellectual, or physical means somehow release one from the responsibility to stand as witness and to act if/when/as necessary?

Rose describes her reading experience as *hard slogging*. This is reading that challenges her to think and perceive differently and appears to push her to *another level* of sense-making. It is, perhaps, analogous to the western scientists who were challenged to acknowledge the ability of the Inuit to talk the whales, trapped in the Arctic ice, to safety.

*Page 20 - Serpent heads - Loyal and Restless. This book is making me feel restless/frustrated.*

*Where is it going?? Also Restless is very benign term for the evil that it inflicts!*

*Page 22 - Arguments - neither is wrong, just points of view. Good point! The mink thinks that arguments about right and wrong are funny creatures, like whitecaps that are not really waves.*

*Again, hard slogging to understand though at another level the observations make sense.*

*June 2, 2022 @ 2:30pm*

*Chapter IV.* The vividness of Maracle's (2014) description of clearcutting evokes an embodied experience in Rose. She acknowledges the process of clearcutting as *awful* and leading to *devastation of the land*. Rose is *touched* by the experience of Steve who encounters a felled tree as an animate being. She is moved by the connection between human and plant. Her reflection leads me to wonder if clearcutting is conceived and perceived, planned and practiced in a state of disconnection. I recognize a state of disconnection that allows for complacency in my own perception, awareness, and inaction with respect to clearcutting.

*Steve's dilemma - hates clearcutting but needs the money for university. Felt tense while reading about clearcutting which is an awful process.*

*Vivid description of clearcutting and its subsequent devastation of the land.*

*Page 31 - I was touched by Steve thinking he hears the tree scream. "He felt [feels] like a criminal held hostage by his dreams"[Maracle, 2014, p. 31].*

*Chapter V.* Rose, unnerved and unsettled, focuses again on description and its embodied effect on her. I sense a longing for a writing style that is more familiar, direct, and transparent; storytelling that would translate into an easier, faster reading experience. Rose notes her perception of the disparity between the life experiences of an Indigenous character and a white character.

*I find the description of bones and serpent unnerving and a bit hard on the head. The author has many thought provoking observations about life but I struggle with the lack of clarity in the story thus far.*

*I can feel the tension between Amos and Steve; the former has lost his past and the latter has it all because he is white.*

*We learn of the connection to clearcutting and the longhouse filled with dead people.*

*Page 38 - Gramma warns Celia of serpent's hunger. Again, very unsettling ...*

*Chapter VI.* Rose finds the descriptive prose *creepy*. She acknowledges a sense of anticipation of *something horrific*, unable to predict the storyline. Rose notes the *darkness* of the narrative, singling a particular passage out as *horrendous*. She describes *Celia's Song* as *not an easy book*.

*Creepy description of the serpent putting evil into Amos. You feel like he is going to end up doing something horrific.*

*Page 41 - Restless sees the men drinking booze and beating their women. More darkness. Not an easy book to read. Then one murders his woman and chops her up and feeds her to the pigs.*

*Horrendous!!!*

*Chapter VII.* Rose questions character relationships and tries to map the familial and experiential connections between characters. She states once again that she finds the book difficult to read describing a specific passage as *horrible* and containing *a lot of brutality*. Her reading experience oscillates to interest in the funeral traditions depicted in the story as a *powerful* act of community support.

*We find out that Jimmy is gone - hanged himself and that Jacob wants to know why.*

*I am wondering who Stacey is - gone for five years. Is she Celia's sister?*

*Page 48 - Horrible story of a mink caught in a trap and being skinned alive with young Celia watching. We learn it was Mink and he reappears as an Owl - the trapper freaked. A lot of brutality ... very hard to read about.*

*Page 49 - Interesting about gramma's funeral and the traditions. Powerful to have the community support the grieving grandfather as he joined in the song of farewell.*

*Page 53 - We learn of McKilty the priest talking to Celia's grandfather about giving the girls Christian names.*

*June 3, 2022 @ 4:05pm*

Rose experiences a mix of humour and sadness as she reads the passage depicting a conversation mired in linguistic and cultural difference that foreshadowed *the beginning of the end* of a way of life.

*Page 55 - I love the conversation between the priest and grandfather and the failure of the interpreter though in the end it seems grandpa knew exactly what was being said and asked. It was give us their names in return for medicines to cure diseases brought by the white man. Both a bit funny but mostly sad. The beginning of the end – baptism ...*

*June 4, 2022*

Rose finds resonance between the story and her own lived experience of *wonderful kitchen smells* and the familial ties they invoke. She notes how past ways of living, as described in the story, were connected to nature in a way that *makes perfect sense*. Rose is unable to predict the trajectory of the story and feels unsettled. The uncertainty is infused with anxious anticipation she articulates as feeling *a bit anxious, unnerved, tense*. Rose is intrigued by a new perspective on democracy and considers the changes and challenges the characters experience as they *give up their old ways*. Much of the journaling reads as a point-form list of events in this chapter.

*Page 57 - Smells used to show women's devotion to their children and men. No longer there. Now their kitchens smell of cleaning agents and air fresheners. Reminds me of my childhood and the wonderful kitchen smells and my aunt and grandmother.*

*Page 58 - Interesting to learn how they used to cook with the sun. Eating times changed with the seasons. Makes perfect sense and shows the connection to nature.*

*Page 59 - Kitchen is only half like in a white woman's house. Needs to be an Indian kitchen with a woodstove or white kitchen with matching plates.*

*Page 60 - Cedar frond is trying to tell Jacob something but he is fighting it.*

*The book is unsettling - where is it going??*

*Page 62 - The Mink observes that the women need to reconcile their new life with the old ways.*

*The book so far makes me feel a bit anxious, unnerved and tense.*

*Page 64 - The smells stopped when they ran out of wood - due to clearcutting? But the government gave them the vote in response. Having the vote meant no more talking among the people. The vote meant lack of community collaboration. It silenced the village. (Very interesting perspective on democracy!).*

*Page 65 - Cedar was used to create smoke that took away tension.*

*Page 67 - Cedar smoke calms Jacob. Wood was still there but had to be paid for now. We learn that Jimmy most likely hung himself from rope given to him by Ned.*

*Page 69 - Jimmy's funeral is different. The women did not lean into each other. There was no story telling.*

*Page 73 - There is talk about giving up the vote to start talking again. Ned says you don't have to give up anything. Ned accepts Judy as "one of us."*

*Page 74 - For Judy to become "one of us," there must be a ceremony and witnesses.*

*It seems that Ned's wife might have some dementia - "doesn't know what day it is."*

*Ned says, "Silence kills hope" [p. 74], which is probably true.*

*Page 75 - Momma has trouble liking Jacob. She loves him at some level but does not like him.*

*Page 76 - Momma says her early life was about giving up and so much hard work it was easy to give up their old ways in exchange for a house where she would not have to work her fingers to the bone. In theory life was easier having a white man's house.*

*Page 77 - Gramma faints when there is some question that is too much for her. She will dream about it and have an answer tomorrow. (She is very in touch with her own knowledge of their old ways and her own knowledge.)*

*Page 78 - Who are the Indians that the white women [are] trying to talk to? Chilling future they had.*

*Page 80 - Reference to Vancouver - a village where people step over women, no one cares.*

*Probably aptly describes the East End where there are so very many deaths and so much pain today.*

*Chapter VIII.* Rose, again, finds the reading experience *unnerving* and *confusing*. She notes that a specific passage in the story is personally relatable without elaborating further on the connection to her own lived experience. Rose feels *empathy* and *sadness* for a character and is touched by an emotional exchange between two characters. Once again, she finds resonance with a *keen* observation made by the author.

*The talk of old bones is unnerving and confusing.*

*Page 85 - Her mother tells Celia that she misses mothering her and Celia misses not having been mothered.*

*Page 88 - Pivotal moment when as a child, Celia draws a picture of her mother canning peaches. She wants her mother to look but she just shoos her outside. Celia stops drawing after that. We learn that Momma did see the picture and it had given her the idea for her garden.*

*Page 89 - Momma is heartbroken to realize she had hurt her child. She had sent Celia to live with her grandparents when the epidemic hit and Celia had stayed there till she grew up. Celia came over every day but was not part of the family unit with Stacey and Jimmy. I could relate to that personally.*

*Page 91 - There are resentments between the two girls though Momma does not understand that Celia did not want to be sent away. I feel empathy and sadness for Celia. Touchingly the mother still has the long ago painting. Celia is amazed and admits to having other paintings. Her mother wants to see them.*

*Page 94 - Keen observation - "... no one wished to face anything that required that they face themselves" [p. 94].*

*Chapter IX.* Rose does not comment on why she records specific passages in her journal. I can only assume that something in the words, scene, or context resonates with her in some way.

*Page 99 - Momma is frustrated that when she was young people thought she was stupid because she is Indian, now they think she is stupid because she is old.*

*Chapter X.* Rose finds the descriptive prose *aggravating*. She spoke in the initial interview about her distaste for an overly verbose writing style and that she preferred a more direct, transparent approach to storytelling.

*Page 102 - Back to the church. Celia's observation that despite the baptism, the epidemics, conversions and medicines did not stop us from dying.*

*Page 106 - Descriptions are aggravating - candles, life "I want to see" [p. 106] - Celia reacts to Alice's poem as does Jacob. Celia says they are personal power songs.*

*Chapter XI.* Rose connects a scene in the story directly to a vivid memory of her own lived experience and links an event in the book to a current event that is trending in the news. Rose continues to try to predict where the story is going and questions the motivations of a character. She is *biting [her] nails furiously* as an outward, physical expression of anxious anticipation she articulates as *fear of what comes next*. Rose is horrified by the story at this juncture. She feels the reading experience in her body as a racing heart. Rose uses multiple question marks and exclamation points to signal the emotional nature of her reading experience.

*Salmon swimming upstream – "This swim will carry them to death whether or not they experience the ecstasy of procreation" [p. 109]. I vividly remember watching salmon battling their way home to spawn and die in BC many years ago.*

*Reference to smallpox. Strange that we now have Monkey Pox which is a derivative of smallpox.*

*Page 112 - Reference to an old shack, a snake and three boys who visited the snake. Abuse??*

*Page 113 - Creepy. Jacob hears a little girl whimpering and a man's voice. Why doesn't he do something?? Biting my nails furiously. Oh my, I feel like I know what is going to happen and fear what comes next ... the little girl is being hurt. The old snake has a dog hide hanging. Oh dear God, horrifying to read what the man has done. Heart is racing. Horrific!!!!*

*Chapter XII.* Rose summarizes events in this chapter without reflecting or elaborating on the reading experience.

*Jacob is praying the river is not angry at his silence of not telling what he saw.*

*Page 123 - Jacob tells Jim and his grandfather what he saw (he says he is not sure if he dreamt it or if it was real). He confesses to hurting little kids but not like the snake. We learn that Jacob used to make up stories until at nine years old he stopped then his meanness came forward.*

*June 6, 2022 @ 3:55pm*

*Chapter XIII.* Rose is fitting reading time into other activities and feeling *rushed to finish* before the book club discussion in four days. She shifts from noting that the read is *getting better* to finding it *horrific*.

Rose feels the reading experience viscerally as *tension* in her *solar plexus*.

*Just finished a bridge game. Feeling rushed to finish the book. Think it is getting better.*

*Celia and Martha are racing to Martha's granddaughter who we think is in trouble. Shelly is only five years old and called her grandmother. They find her nearly dead, burned, bleeding - was she the child in the snake house? Horrific!! I feel tension in my solar plexus. Did the mother (Stella) hurt her?*

*Chapter XIV.* Rose described the reading experience as *horrifying* in Chapter XI, characterized the story events as *horrific* in Chapter XIII, and, in this chapter, perceives the emotional response of one of the characters, Ned, as an attempt to *understand the horror*. She notes Jacob was a witness to the *horror* and I wonder if she perceives herself, as a reader, to be a witness. Rose labels Jacob's guilt as justifiable. He witnessed and did not stand up and step in to intervene. At what point does complacency turn into complicity? Is Rose asking this question of herself? Is it simply easier to assign guilt to an individual rather than to a society at large?

*Ned is trying to understand the horror. He thinks people are grounded by hard work or they sort of have a loose connection to their ground wire.*

*Stacey talks to the cedar tree as a way to help with her medicines.*

*The horror - Jacob had witnessed this terrible thing and is now justifiably wracked with guilt.*

*June 7, 2022 @ 4:35 pm*

Rose notes a specific passage and depicts it as a *visceral description*. She expresses utter shock at the *sickening* nature of the story. Rose questions the choices made by the characters while acknowledging the *love* and *care* involved in the actions taken. She demonstrates some investment in the well-being of the characters and the outcome of the story. Once again, Rose finds resonance with an observation by the author, calling it *brilliant*. Perhaps her questions indicate an increased level of engagement in comparison to chapters where journaling amounted to a synopsis of story events.

*Pages 142-143. Visceral description of Celia's revulsion of what happened to Shelley. Her body almost turning on her. She hates her fat, seeing how emaciated little Shelley is.*

*Utterly shocking to read - there are so many wounds, and the child is unlikely to make it.*

*Sickening to learn she has been burned (did her mother do any of it?). She was raped, burned and beaten.*

*Not taking her to hospital is a risk they are taking. Would it make a difference?*

*Page 143 - Shelley is in terrible pain. Is she better off with the women and their potions than in a hospital? She would not have more love or care there.*

*Page 147 – "We need to have [some] grave doubts, not about what we are doing now, but what we have been doing" [Maracle, 2014, p. 147]. (How did our people create the monster who did this?).*

*Page 149 - Momma wants to kill the man. "White people's laws are crazy; they starve the innocent and feed the guilty." (Again a brilliant observation). Celia wants to understand her grandmother's laws. "She has never tried to cross the two languages in her mind before."*

*Celia learns that there is no Indigenous word for torture. They are contemplating revenge - torture the torturer.*

*Page 151 - Jacob and Jim are going looking for the guy.*

*Chapter XV.* Again, Rose uses derivatives of the word horror to describe the life of one character (*horrible*) and the violent end of another (*horrific*). She labels the descriptive prose as *vivid* and finds the passage a litany of human *degradation*. Rose seems to be very disturbed by the storyline as she journals *poor, poor baby* and questions how the child survived her circumstances. She finds it *terrible to read of such utter neglect* and describes the treatment of the child *horrific*. She feels the need *to stop reading for a while* and puts the book down to take a break and get some separation from the story as is her prerogative as a reader.

*Page 154 - Horrible description of Stella's life. She is Shelley's mother. She lost her first two children to their father. She hit the skids and turned tricks. She met Frank who wanted to work so she could quit. He ended up hanging himself. We learn it took a long time for him to die as his neck didn't break. Did he change his mind? A horrific end.*

*Vivid description of the shit that was all over her room. Her "trick" beat her, raped her then left her to clean up the room. The degradation goes on ... "Nothing [seemed] too terrible for her. She only felt [alive] when she was in pain" [p. 155].*

*When she was five months pregnant she thought about going home and leaving her terrible life behind but didn't go. "Between bouts of alcohol consumption and turning tricks she would clean and feed her" [p. 155]. "[Sometimes] she came close to playing with her" [p. 156]. But her talk was drivel (p 156). She wouldn't let the baby cry - would put her hand over her mouth. Poor, poor baby - completely un-nurtured. When she learned to talk her mother would backhand her. She kept quiet. How did she survive? Terrible to read of such utter neglect ...*

*Stella met Rob. She hated that he gave attention to the little girl. She ended up heading back to the rez (p 157). She hitchhiked and the man who picked her up did the horrible thing to the child. She lived in a shack and he would come and have sex but not pay except food and booze. The child would talk to her grandma when she came by and helped clean the shack. The man only brought food for her and not for the child. They both beat the child and he began sexually abusing her. He made a “wife of the child” [p. 158] - Horrific!!*

*Page 159 - Almost unbearable to read of the cruelty of both the mother and man. Have to stop reading for a while ...*

*June 8, 2022 @ 11:00 am*

Rose returns to her reading experience, continues to record story events, and includes comments that indicate the story resonates with her in some ways. Rose perceives *a connection to nature and a natural order of things* in a specific passage. Rose copies the precise quote from the book in which a character states how wrong it is to make and break deals. As a reader, I saw this as a reference to treaties—deals made and broken with Indigenous Peoples—but Rose did not or, at least, did not journal about it. She notes the wisdom in the words of a character and finds a question posed by another character to be a *good question!!*

*Page 160 - the man beat Stella with a hot poker until she was unconscious and we know what he did to the child (what Jacob saw). When she woke she remembers her mother and others coming. She is forced to remember. “She was wrong. She knew she was wrong. ... This shack, this [life,] this dirt, [this child,] this torture, this hunger—[it was all wrong]” [Maracle, 2014, p. 160].*

*Page 161 - Goat hair for spinning. Grandma doesn’t do it anymore because you are supposed to mix it with dog hair. White men killed the dogs but the goats kept coming back to leave their hair. Grandma doesn’t spin it. “Because it would be wrong, we made a deal and it would be*

*wrong to break it” [Maracle, 2014, p. 161]. (I think shows a connection to nature and a natural order of things).*

*Page 162 - Gramma’s wisdom “When we love we scale mountains for our loved ones. When we don’t love, we [wallow] in the shit on the valley floor” [Maracle, 2014, p. 162].*

*Page 163 - Stella has the DTs. Offers herself to three men for a drink. The men are Ned, Jacob and Jim who came to make her sober up.*

*Page 164 - Jacob – “How come everyone who has ever done anything Indigenous talks in riddles?” [Maracle, 2014, p. 164]. Good question!!*

*Page 165 - Jacob cannot watch Stella. Ned is enraged at what Stella has done and allowed to be done to her child. Jacob is tortured as to whether or not he saw what had happened. If he saw it, is he as perverse ... He heads for the mountain.*

*Chapter XVI.* Again, Rose notes the words of a character as being *very wise*. She *sense[s] a glimmer of humanity* as a character reaches a turning point. The comment suggests Rose felt the inhumane actions of the character made her inhuman. Her journaling does not indicate compassion or empathy for this character.

*It takes two and a half days for Stella to get sober.*

*Page 169 - Stacey asks Jim why he never wonders about anything. “Doesn’t help. ... You don’t need to know why anything happens. You only need to know what to do is all” [Maracle, 2014, p. 169]. Very wise ...*

*Page 170 - Jim is pragmatic about Stella. He knows the future is what counts.*

*Page 173 - Jim waits for Stella's "breadcrumbs" [Maracle, 2014, p. 173]. They begin when she realizes her dress is filthy. She finally washes and hangs every dirty thing. Do I sense a glimmer of humanity in her?*

*June 8, 2022 @ 3:35pm*

*Chapter XVII.* Rose journals about a couple who live in separate worlds divided by a river and by race; she is Indigenous, he is white; she lives on the reserve, he lives in "white town" (Maracle, 2014, p. 184). This same sense of separation surfaced as a theme in the lifeworlds of the participants in the initial interviews.

*Jacob is on the mountain and meets Alice - his Gramma's gramma. Is she real or a vision? He is asked to eat, wash and clean himself.*

*Page 184 - Stacey has Steve in her life but she keeps him at bay. He divorced his wife and has paid off all debts and his daughter has a job. He does not have much money now but a medical practice (He is a white Dr.). He has been waiting for Stacey (again) and wants her forever. She wants him on her side of the river, not on his white side. With Steve she thinks she would have to have ["]a separate world and a together world" ([Maracle, 2014,] p. 186).*

*Steve suspects he will never fully understand her or her people and their painful history. He does not want to go forward without her. Her heart and body wants him but she needs to talk to her mother. We find out that Steve has been Stacey's "secret lover" but Celia and Jacob both know so not really a secret!!*

*Chapter XVIII.* Rose notes and reflects on another *interesting observation* by the author about Indigenous men recognizing the intelligence of Indigenous women while white men do not recognize the same in white women.

*Page 203 - Interesting observation about smart women. The Indian men know their women are smart. The white men don't think theirs are. (Recognition of the wisdom of Indian women and ego/arrogance of white men).*

*Chapter XIX.* Rose feels confused and plans to reread sections of the book to try to pick up the threads of Celia's story. Rose acknowledges *the importance of song to life* and recognizes the *painful* effect of song forbidden to four generations. She accounts for it as *part of their painful history*. There is no indication that Rose reflected on who forbade the singing, why they did so, or how. There is a sense that she does not feel in any way implicated in the *painful history* as a person of settler ancestry. Rose comments on the universality of an observation the author makes that resonates with her.

*Stella has cleaned and organized the shack. Jim and Ned will build cupboards and windows, and shelves.*

*We learn more about Stella's tragic past. She had a good man in John but does [did] not realize it. They have two girls but she cannot give what they need and was in fact jealous of them. She wanted "softness" but decided it was not for her and went looking for hardness ... she thinks she deserves to die ...*

*June 9, 2022 @ 11:0am*

*When Stella tried to kill herself at her father's place, he becomes a warrior for her survival. In seeing Sam's love for his daughter, Momma realizes she has betrayed her own father's love in not bringing Celia home (I am confused and will have to re-read Celia's story). The knowledge makes Momma relax into herself for the first time in years.*

*Page 215 - The importance of song to life - it "... can heal the sick, raise the dead, and encourage the living ... . Without song, the body cannot rest, cannot rise again, cannot face tyranny, cannot*

*look at itself, cannot see, think, or feel” [Maracle, 2014, p. 215]. (We learn that four generations have not been allowed to sing ... part of their painful history).*

*Page 216 - Jacob sees the collapsed longhouse from the mountain and sees a spiderweb and each strand that connects to some aspect of the crisis everyone in the village is tied to. “He intends to ... unravel the whole damn mess” [Maracle, 2014, p. 216]. He also plans to destroy the snake.*

*Page 217 - Celia - “I spend most of my time imagining life, instead of living it” [Maracle, 2014, p. 217]. (Perhaps we all do to an extent.)*

*Page 218 - Celia and her mother are not bonded. She aches for a swing and the men say they would do anything for a pretty girl like her (creepy and we are not sure if something else might have happened). This scares her and she stopped interacting with people after that.*

*Page 221 - Celia can’t bear to eat so much after seeing the child’s hunger.*

*Chapter XX.* Rose returns to journaling a synopsis of the story rather than about her reading experience. She does not elaborate on why she makes notes of the events that she does in this chapter. Perhaps it is a way to detach. Perhaps she is caught up in the movement and momentum of the story and is less aware of her own cognitive, affective, and embodied experiences.

*Alex calls Celia twenty years after they spent a weekend together (he was a handsome, Indigenous leader at the time). Is he Jacob’s father? It turns out he was Jimmy’s father. [Jimmy] was raised by a stepfather till he was six years old. He left when Celia confirmed that Jimmy was not his son.*

*Page 227 - She invites Alex to come by, telling him to wear a good black suit. He will learn about his dead son. We find out that the stepfather had told Jimmy he was not his son and about his father.*

*Celia decides to tell her family and says that is when she stopped drawing (when Alex did not come back after their weekend together).*

*Momma is sad to realize how lonely Celia was for her mother and family.*

*Page 229 - Celia had kept the photos of Jimmy's suicide and means for his father to see them before she burns them. There are also baby pictures and other things.*

*Page 234 - Jacob wants to build a longhouse - he will ask the man who is coming to burn Jimmy to help him.*

*Chapter XXI.* Rose continues to record story events rather than her reading experience.

*Alex arrives and Celia takes him to the graveyard. He figures it out. The stepfather comes and apologizes to Jimmy for telling him but not letting him know he did love him though he was not his own. A young woman appears at the graveside with other mourners.*

*Chapter XXII.* Rose conveys a synopsis of this chapter without elaborating on her reading experience. It appears that she is no longer trying to predict the story and she is no longer journaling about feeling uncertain or unsettled by the story. Perhaps, at this point, she is simply trying to get through the book to be prepared for the discussion and through the journaling activity she feels committed to as a study participant.

*Page 244 - We find out that Jimmy freed himself from becoming a negligent father like his own was, by hanging himself (the young woman at the graveside was carrying his baby). Celia tried to fill her own loneliness with Jimmy.*

*Jacob meets Amos in a bar ... we find out he is one of the abusers.*

*Page 249 - The snake cannot get inside Jacob, the mountain is there.*

*Chapter XXIII.* Rose highlights a theme in the book when she copies a quote in her journal. She does not articulate if or how the words are meaningful to her although I assume the action of handwriting the text indicates some level of resonance. Rose does not indicate that she identifies choice as a theme in the novel. Again, Rose uses the word *horrid* to describe an image depicted in the book. This time, she expands on the label and adds *so cruel and inhumane*. Rose celebrates the death of a polarizing character with an exclamation; *thank God!!*

*The old man builds the longhouse and shares his knowledge. Jim and Jacob enter first. Ned is not ready. We learn that Amos is the perpetrator and Jacob has told him what he saw and that he plans to dance him into his comeuppance.*

*Page 253 - Stella and Shelley survived. Stella has fixed up her shack and Shelly is in school and Stella is going to college.*

*Alex comes back to visit the gravesite. He is also at the opening of the longhouse.*

*Quote from Old Ella "You are never free if you have only one choice" [Maracle, 2014, p. 252].*

*Six men and two women are to be initiated into the longhouse.*

*Page 253 - Horrid images of the snake entering the boy dangling the cat and then cutting off its tail so that it falls to its death and then the boy falling to his own death. So cruel and inhumane*

*...*

*Page 254 - Amos is dancing and processing memories of being abused as a little boy by a priest, being hungry, being bullied then the shame of his own bullying. He begs for his ancestors to take*

*him home. Steve pronounces him dead. The moment Amos dies (thank God!!), Jimmy's baby is born.*

*Chapter XXIV.* Rose writes, *Hear, hear I say!!*; expressing ardent approval of the manner with which Amos passed. She describes a passage as *powerful* and notes her agreement with Celia's soulful monologue. Rose characterizes this as *one of many pearls of wisdom found throughout the book*. In the book club discussion she calls them gems—pearls and gems; things with illuminating essence, objects of value, emanations of the natural world. Rose ends her reading experience on a note of hope that the *knowledge will grow and the stories they have will be shared*. I wonder whether this positive uptick at the end of the book helps Rose draw a line under the reading experience so she can move on to the next.

*The police believe that Amos's death was murder. We find out another man (a friend of Amos's) also dies. The village is torn between the Christians and their own culture.*

*The charge of criminal negligence causing death was laid and implicated Steve (the Dr). Steve said he was going to testify on behalf of the longhouse. The cops came for Ned, Jim and Jacob and the old man (he was dead on arrival having slipped mysteriously out of his handcuffs). The judge dismissed the case. Dancers were not forced to dance and could quit at any time.*

*Page 260 - The longhouse became a place of healing stories. Momma heard of the terrible things that had happened to her grandchildren.*

*Page 261 - Jacob is devoted to "our ways" but is going to college. Stacey can't understand the dichotomy. Steve explains it is about belief - Jacob believes in the longhouse.*

*Jimmy's baby is named Celia after Jimmy's mother.*

Page 262 - Before she dies, Momma tells Jacob she knows what he did to Amos "Good for you[, son]" [Maracle, 2014, p. 262]. Hear, hear I say!!

Page 263 - "Nothing just now is okay ..." Powerful summary from Celia. I agree with her. Also ... "figuring out who we are is our only obligation to those kids out there" ([Maracle, 2014,] p. 265). (This is one of many pearls of wisdom found throughout the book).

Page 267 - Judy, Rena, Stacey and Celia were being forced to become elders as the elders are dead or soon would be. They only had scattered songs but you feel like their knowledge will grow and the stories they have will be shared.

*Summary.* As she types her hand-written journal into a word document, Rose realizes much of it is a synopsis of the story rather than a record of her reading experience. This aligns with my analysis especially with the last few chapters. She articulated intense feelings of horror repeatedly as well as feelings of uncertainty and confusion. In this brief summary of her journaling she is still trying to predict how some characters will fare moving forward beyond the scope of the book. I interpret this as an indication of emotional investment. Her statement about *trade-offs* is interesting in that it connotes choice. I am not sure that changing to "*white ways*" was a decision made by choice or that there was any expectation of *happiness, health or freedom* as a result. To assimilate is to be absorbed into wider society or culture. To absorb is to take control of (a smaller or less powerful entity) and make it a part of a larger one.

Rose assesses the book as *not an easy read*, unlike those she can easily read in a week. She regrets not allowing *more time to absorb it* and I wonder if that would have made any difference to her reading experience other than she would not have felt as *rushed*.

*As I typed this journal from hand-written form, I realize it is more of a summary of what I was reading but does contain my reactions and acknowledgements of insightful observations and learnings.*

*There were many horrific references and much sadness though thankfully there was also some redemption. We finally see humanity in Stella though we wonder how Shell[e]y will ever recover from her horrific childhood experiences ...*

*Very interesting to see the trade-offs made for “white ways” that did not bring the expected happiness, health or freedom.*

*Overall, not an easy read. I was sorry that I did not allow more time to absorb it. I can usually easily read a book in a week but this one was very dense and challenging and I felt rushed to complete.*

### Book Club Discussion

*Approach to Book.* Rose found it hard to journal about her embodied experience. Perhaps she is unaccustomed to directing attention to this level of experiencing and, therefore, typically unaware of bodily sensations related to cognitive and emotional phenomena. Of this journaling experience Rose comments, *I found it harder. Like, you [indicating me] were asking about how you felt in your body. I didn't do much of that. I did find it ... there was a lot of, like, anxiety or ...* . The ellipses here indicate pauses in her speech that often lead to a redirection in thought. Rose does not elaborate on how the anxiety presented and entered into her awareness.

When Rose was immersed in reading the book, she experienced the narrative as being *all over the place*. The journal, as an artifact of her reading experience, offers up unexpected insights and a new sense of cohesion within the story as she re-engages with her handwritten notes for the first time during the discussion. *I hadn't looked at my notes since I'd done it [sic] and so there were things that, by having*

*the journal, things made sense to me that I had missed when I was reading.* The journal becomes a pivot point for Rose's participation in the discussion as she reads from it repeatedly and shares revelations as they coalesce. Often this means interrupting another speaker, snipping the thread of conversation, and shifting the course of discourse.

Rose expresses that she found the book *difficult*; an atypical reading experience for this avid reader whose experience of a book is usually fast and fluid. Given her atypical reading experience, it is not surprising that Rose identifies the book as the source of difficulty and does not reflect on the assumptions and expectations she brought to this reading engagement. Rose likes to predict where a story is going; something she does repeatedly while reading *Celia's Song* as noted in her journal. She wrote often about the uncertainty and anxiety she felt at not being able to predict the storyline. Rose reads another excerpt from her journal where she wrote about Restless, one head of a two-headed serpent, entering the character Amos. *You feel like he [Amos] is going to end up doing something horrific.* In this instance, her sense of an imminent, *horrific* event was a precise prediction.

Overall, Rose describes her experience of the text as hard to predict, hard to get into, laden with metaphors, and very slow; a note of exasperation is embedded in her words. *Like, where's it going? I had a hard time getting into it. Like, it was very slow. And, all the metaphors and the ... whaaat?* Her inability to predict the trajectory of the storyline is a source of discomfort for Rose, and it seems that in continually questioning the direction of the narrative her capacity to be drawn into the story was stymied.

Rose waited until a few days before the book club session to begin reading to be sure that the story was fresh in her mind; a strategy she and Letitia ascribe to. *I always have to read it close to the book club date.* In this case, Rose found herself rushing to finish, unable to read this particular text at her typical pace. Rose agrees with Letitia when she describes the journaling as *disruptive*. There is no doubt

that, for Rose, the journaling task was a factor in her reading pace, and that her proven approach of timing book club reads to coincide with the discussions did not work in this instance.

*Well, I just finished it yesterday and I was kind of rushing because I thought I had enough time, because I'm usually a fairly fast reader. It doesn't take me too ... but this one was, like, oohhh. And, also, most of my reading is in bed at night. This one, there's no way I could be in bed, read, journal.*

She compares *Celia's Song* to *Five Little Indians* (Good, 2020), a book she picked up based on a recommendation and read *in three or four days* the week before. Rose states she preferred the latter book and Abbie poses a series of questions. This evokes a reflective response from Rose who becomes more aware of the qualities of each reading experience, what appealed to her and why, as she responds. She liked that the characters in *Five Little Indians* were more defined and easier to relate to and that the story took place within a limited timeframe and along a linear timeline. The questions from Abbie challenge Rose to reflect and become aware of her reading experiences and the reasons for her stated preference. The content did not make *Five Little Indians* an easy read but the storytelling was more familiar and more aligned to her expectations of reading. Difficult subjects in this narrative were more implicit than explicit.

*... the characters you could get into, right, and you knew who they were ... it didn't go back and forth generations. ... I wouldn't say it was easy to read in one sense because some of the things ... but they didn't dwell, like, they didn't spend pages and pages saying what awful things, but you knew. The implications was [sic] there that things had happened and you could see where people ended up and it was like, oh man.*

The conversation that flows from her response leads Rose to become more aware of the style of storytelling that appeals to her the most and that she is most accustomed to. *Celia's Song* fell outside of

her usual, comfortable literary repertoire and, as a result, did not lend itself to her typical reading pace and approach. The conversation speaks to the expectations this avid reader brings to her reading experiences. Rose concedes that the book, as well as her experience of it as a reader, did improve once she recognized a familiar storyline. ... *it got better. Once you realize, ok, there's a story, there's something I can ...* . Her words trail off here, leaving her thought dangling incomplete. Another member of the group asks whether any reader in the group would recommend *Celia's Song* and Rose responds without hesitation and categorically. *No.* I interpret this as a tangible form of resistance to the story and storying.

*Experience of Book.* Rose reiterates in the discussion that the book was *so hard to get into*. It is evident that she engaged cognitively and emotionally as she strived to make sense of the narrative and, at times, empathized with the storied experience of the characters. At one point, she notes a string of empty, failed, broken, and unfulfilled promises collectively experienced by the community at the centre of the story.

Referring to her journal again, Rose notes: *I just thought it was wonderful, you know me, some of these quotes ... "the only people who bemoan hunger and poverty are those who have not experienced it"* [Maracle, 2014, p. 8]. The irony resonates with her and she laughs. She describes such observations by the author as *interesting, wonderful, and another viewpoint. I liked a lot of the observations about, well, the difference between the two societies [Indigenous and settler] but, also, just about life in general.* Rose specifically notes the description of an Indigenous kitchen versus a white kitchen, the smells that once signaled the devotion of a woman to her family, and the practice of cooking with the sun and based on the season.

Rose's perspective of the democratic act of voting expands based on another scene in the book. This is significant as she has extensive work experience as an Elections Canada official. Reading about the impact of accepting the vote in the community offered a completely different perspective on

something she had not questioned as being anything but positive. *Interesting perspective.* The discourse, prompted by the storyline, delves into the impact on the community of agreeing to participate in the national voting system and accepting the option to own their homes. This serves as a catalyst to expanded awareness by offering a new perspective on assumed and accepted social, political, and economic systems that go unquestioned and unchallenged as normative aspects of settler society.

Rose recognizes the distinct voice of the shape-shifting mink and the character's role as witness early in her reading. She does not trace this theme through the remainder of the book, nor does she extend awareness of the role of witness to herself as reader of the narrative, at least she does not articulate this awareness in the discussion. It appears that Rose takes the text at face value.

Rose comments on a father's love for his daughter despite the path she had taken in life and the consequences for her and her child. ... *the thing that's unbelievable is, in the end, Stella's father loved her. And, I mean, she would have been like the least lovable person. I mean, when you think of what she did to her child and the life she led ... somewhere she got lost in the world.* The book offered a perspective of parental love that was incongruent with her own lived experience. The book triggered expanded awareness in Rose by exposing her to new points of view, ways of being, and perspectives through descriptive prose, dialogue (internal and external), events, effects, actions, and reactions. *It was interesting and that was very much another way of thinking.*

Rose expands on her observation by extending beyond the book and musing about the response, responsibility, and response-ability to a similar event within settler society. *Like, ... somebody in our society, if their daughter had done this horrific thing what would our response be? Would it be phone the police, or would we go back ... I mean, they spent days sobering her up and then knowing that she had to learn, you know, that she had to clean herself and she needed to do something with that shack and that she came around.* Rose expresses a sense of awe of the family and community and their

ability to maintain a sense of the humanity in a person given the inhumane acts she perpetuated and perpetrated, was complicit to and complacent of. *So, you kind of, at a certain point, see that she had something in her. She wasn't all evil ...* . This expanded awareness tips into critical reflection as Rose recognizes and, then, questions the difference she perceives in how the family and community storied in the book responded to events versus her projection of how settler families and communities might react or respond under the same circumstances.

Rose was an active participant in the discussion, alternating between posing questions to clear confusion and fill gaps in understanding, and injecting her own perspective and reading experience into the collective sense-making. She sought explicit answers, uncomfortable occupying the unfamiliar space of not knowing. Throughout the discussion, Rose reiterates her experience of confusion, lack of knowledge, understanding, and awareness, as well as her inability to predict the storyline.

Rose repeatedly mentions her difficulty sorting out family lines and ties in the story with characters that spanned generations and shared the same or very similar names (e.g., Jim, Jimmy, Jacob; Stacey, Stella, Shelley). Other characters transcended time, space, and physical form. At one point, Rose directs her exasperation over the names and number of characters at the author saying, *give us a break!*

Reading again from her journal, Rose quotes Celia musing, "... no one wished to face anything that required that they face themselves" (Maracle, 2014, p. 94). She laughs and the quote garners a response from Hazel that the book contains *some rich gems*. The astute and ironically applicable words do not evoke further discussion. I attribute this lack of dialogue to unawareness or, perhaps, an unwillingness to apply the sentiment to themselves as readers. Ultimately, it is a demonstration of truth in the words.

Rose reads her last journal entry aloud, a mix of quotes from the final chapter and her response to it. She describes a monologue by Celia as powerful and notes her agreement. For Rose, these words

resonate as truth. She captures and expresses the weight of the monologue in a vocalization rather than words; *Woooooh*. Sometimes a vocal sound can convey more than words alone. This is an embodied expression, a heavy out breath carries the sound in an attempt to release the emotional weight of the words of the author.

Near the end of the discussion Rose makes it clear that if it had not been for her commitment to me and to the study she would not have continued the read. In other words, her choice to continue was not based on the book. She is glad, however, that she stuck with it to the end and did not miss the reading experience. *When it [the story] finally picked up, like, and it was a good ways in, but when it did pick up, it was oooh ...* She ended her statement on another elongated utterance punctuating her reading experience.

Rose often makes comments such as *I don't know* or *I have no idea*. Another point of confusion for Rose was the timeline of the narrative as expressed in the multiple generations of the family. She tries to piece together a timeframe based on events and elements in the story.

Rose is confused about a passage in the book that contains a word that she and the others are unfamiliar with. They are unsuccessful finding a definition or reference in a Google search. *It made no sense to me. I had no idea what it was so I was, like, yeah, well, whatever.* Rose seems to consider the word with a mix of ignorance and arrogance. There is a sense of discomfort at not being able to recognize or define the word or understand it in the context it is used and she eases the dis-ease by being flippant. Her comments carry a note of dismissiveness. This is the only time during the discussion that these readers seek an answer in a source other than the book. Letitia offers the possibility that it was a word from the author's language, and no one concedes that the context for the word suffices and mediates the need for a dictionary definition.

Rose offers what she knows of the cultural significance and traditional use of sweetgrass as a way to explain the burning of cedar in the narrative to those unfamiliar with the practice. In doing so, Rose injects her lived experience into the discussion intent on creating shared understanding of a repeated element in the book. This is another demonstration of the link between sharing reading and sharing lives as well as the value of group discourse to expand individual awareness and understanding.

Rose, again, reads a quote from her journal: *"You don't need to know why anything happens. You only need to know what to do [is all]"* [Maracle, 2014, p. 169]. Laughter and wholehearted agreement from two other group members (*Exactly; It's very true; That's very true*) suggest this statement resonates as another *gem*. It is a shared truth that expands awareness and facilitates relational processes of sense-making and meaning-making that centre on the narrative and extend beyond the bounds of the book as it is woven into the lived experience of these readers.

At one point, the flow of dialogue between Abbie and Rose suggests a shared reading experience and shared understanding of the narrative (on p. 209) as Rose, with precise accuracy, completes a thought Abbie was in the process of committing to words. Abbie: *And, Then she was confronted with every man that just abused her to the point where she became ...* Rose: *She became hard and then she only wanted hardness.* A moment such as this, when two or more members of the group are in sync cognitively, emotionally, and verbally, forges connections, solidifies, and makes tangible the group experience. It is a meeting of the minds; a moment of having a personal, individual experience validated relationally and collectively.

At another point in the discussion, Rose counters Abbie and the others as she resists considering the perceptions and understandings of other members in the group as valid. In defence of her position, Rose points to federal money allocated to Indigenous Peoples and communities, as well as corruption within communities. *But, there's also, I mean, the other side of that is we've also spent millions and*

*millions of dollars and there's been a lot of corruption within their own people where the chiefs are living in mansions ...* . She is resistant to the concept of generational trauma to help explain some aspects of contemporary Indigenous experience. Rose points to the aftermath of generational trauma to deflect, divert, mitigate, or share responsibility for historical and contemporary experiences of Indigenous Peoples. I suggest that resistance, defence, and blame are indicative of a closed mindset, one that is not open and available to think and act in new ways.

Rose continues to stress her point of view and is adamant that Indigenous Peoples *had their own issues within ... they had abuse of power within their own people*. Rose is unaware of her mindset as one that is based in colonial ideologies. She is adamant that Indigenous Peoples bear responsibility, at least in part, for their lived experience. Rose is resistant to critical reflection and is not open to considering other points of view on this topic.

Rose presents her understanding of the genesis of the Indian Residential School System as an ignorant yet benevolent attempt to ... *give them education, ... give them a future. Because they're looking and they don't see any value in that life at all, right? They can't see. They just think they're savages. Well, they weren't savages ...* Rose is unwilling to consider a different perspective. She continues to mitigate the actions of colonizers and position the establishment of Residential Schools as altruistic. ... *but the white man couldn't see that there was anything to it, so they said, "Ok, we're going to at least give the kids [an] education and help them ...* Rose is resistant to another perspective and is fixed on positioning colonizer and colonizing actions as warranted, justified, and understandable. Rose is expressing her perspective in a forum where it will be tested and questioned. As a thought is translated into words—voiced and received as series of syllables strung together with tone and tenor imbued with emotion—it is held out to be dissected, examined, questioned, and confronted. That which goes unspoken, goes unchallenged. The comments voiced by Rose provide an opening for the other group members to counter her perspective.

Abbie: *It was supreme prejudice.*

Rose: *Oh yeah, absolutely.*

Letitia: *That was not out of generosity. That was to take away what they had.*

Abbie: *Yes, exactly.*

Hazel: *To brainwash them.*

Letitia: *Yeah, to convert.*

Hazel: *Yeah, convert. That's a good word.*

Letitia: *But, I think it was to kill their culture not to generously help them fit in.*

Rose concedes to the validity of the comments of the other readers before reaffirming her point. *Well, yeah, I don't disagree with that either. But, I also think they [the crown, government, and church leaders] thought that the young people [Indigenous children] wouldn't survive if they just carried on like they were living ... . If they didn't have an education they couldn't go get jobs. ... I don't think it was malicious.* She goes on to infer that involvement by the church provided a measure of altruistic integrity. Rose capitulates to voices countering her perspective and, then, reiterates her belief undeterred. In doing so, she demonstrates resistance to other more equitable and just perspectives and a commitment to a colonial perspective.

This testing and challenging of perspectives is part of the process of coming to new understandings that hold the potential to be more equitable and just, and lead to new choices. That the potential is realized is not a certainty. Rose shares that she attributes racism to an *innate bias* suggesting it is natural and something we are born with. She adds the term *unconscious* to the discussion as multiple voices render the conversation inaudible.

Rose and Abbie participate in a dialogue about violence within Indigenous communities. Abbie states: ... *that violence has occurred because they endured the violence from the outsiders for centuries and it got them to that point.* Rose, then, uses linguistics to argue that when a word for something exists then it can be assumed the thing itself existed. *But it wasn't like they [Indigenous Peoples] were all sunshine and flowers because they had words for men who beat their women. They had words for people that, you know, beat their children. They had words for people that ... but they had no word for anybody that tortured in their language but it did suggest, you know, that it wasn't all sweetness and light even within their own culture. They had issues too.* Rose is resistant to the perspective voiced by Abbie and takes a defensive stance in assigning shared blame and responsibility for violence that takes place in contemporary times.

Rose and Abbie discuss the idea of rereading the book. Rose wonders whether reading the book again without journaling would afford a different reading experience. ... *it might be interesting to now read it and see if, because we have journaled, whether it will make more sense. ... because the people will be more familiar, because certain things jumped out at us [during the discussion]* ... She is articulating the notion that familiarity with the characters and, perhaps, the style of storying and prior experience with the timeline might enable her to pick up new threads and weave new patterns through the narrative. This notion of rereading a book is interesting given her experience reading *Anne of Green Gables* (Montgomery, 1908) repeatedly.

*Individual Speaking Patterns.* As in the initial interview, Rose's pattern of speech is disjointed with incomplete sentences and shifts in thought dangling like loose threads. I use ellipses in her transcribed speech to capture pauses and redirections in thought. She shifts the conversation to a scene in the book—the tangible text of their shared reading—before opening up the discussion to seek the views, perspectives, and experiences of the other readers. As demonstrated above, Rose repeatedly shifts the course of discourse by referring to her notes and quotes copied from the text. Often everyone speaks at

once in an inaudible torrent of voices; moments of insight lost in the tumult. The balance between speaking and listening in any conversation is delicate and determinant.

Rose did copious journaling. *I've got lots of notes.* She is a notetaker and, at a minimum, writes a brief synopsis of each book she consumes as a reference and reminder of what she has already read. It is typical for her to jot down notes and use tabs to mark specific pages and passages. She took more notes with this reading, interpreting the journaling task as an assignment. Rose had not read her journal until the discussion and, as she references it, things she had missed during the reading experience begin to make sense. It is a process that echoes through this iterative research process of reading, writing, reflecting, re-reading, and re-writing.

*What was interesting for me was journaling. I'm like you [Letitia], a lot of it was kind of summarizing what I'm reading, but it was so interesting today. I hadn't looked at my notes since I'd done it and so there were things that, by having the journal, things made sense to me that I had missed when I was reading because it [the story] was all over the place.*

The act of journaling and, then, reading her journal notes during the discussion affords Rose another level of sense-making that is specific to her own reading experience. She makes a new connection between scenes from different points in the narrative, suggests it as an overarching theme, and opens this concept up for discussion. Trying on new perspectives and new points of view is a step toward transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000, as cited in Lawrence & Cranton, 2015, p. 68). The audible discussion that follows does not lead to critical reflection. It is possible, however, that critical reflection took place and was inaudible as multiple voices sounded simultaneously.

This record of her reading experience is a catalyst to expanded awareness for herself as well as for others in the group. *Oh, my god! I just realized something. ... Holy shit!* Rose resorts to expletives to convey her shock in realizing a significant detail in the story that she had missed. The realization, drawn

from her journal entries, connects dots that would have remained disconnected and scattered loosely about without the notes. It launches her into rearranging her understanding of the story based on this newly discovered connection. Rose, and this group of readers, benefit from the overview and details of the story Rose chose to document in her journal as she read the book. It is routine for her to make notes of her reading, so this task was within her repertoire of writing skills. Her attention was not divided, therefore, between journaling and the process of journaling; the writing practice felt familiar and natural. New understanding and clarity emerged out of her journal and this speaks to the potential for new reading experiences to arise out of subsequent readings of the same text; something Rose has intimate knowledge of through her repeated readings of *Anne of Green Gables* (Montgomery, 1908).

At many points in the group discussion, Rose takes the helm and sets a new course as she alternates between reading silently and reading aloud from her journal. In the moments when she reads silently, she seems wholly unaware of the conversation circulating around her. One such shift closes a discussion on the overall themes and ending of the story, and opens a discussion on a scene from the beginning of the book. The scene stories an encounter between a priest and a chief at the time of first contact. The narrative leads Rose to expanded awareness around actions taken by early colonists and the context within which choices were made. Rose extends her sense-making beyond the book to a historical context, bridging fiction and lived experience. Rose finds humour in the way the author presents the absurdity of an exchange that relied on gestures and scant words to span the unfathomable gap that lay between their beliefs, cultures, languages, philosophies, and worldviews. The scene leads Rose to perceive baptism as *the beginning of the end*. The narrative makes clear the deal was medicine in exchange for baptism and new Christian names. The newcomers had brought disease that devastated Indigenous communities and, then, provided the cure at a cost.

Rose acts as tour guide reading from her notes. She picks up the thread of what she was saying and stitches another thought into the fabric of the discussion regarding clear cutting, reading from her

notes. *He feels like a criminal held hostage by his dreams. Like, he wanted to be a doctor but he's got to do this awful thing [to pay for medical school], which is clear-cutting.* Although she takes the conversation a little deeper by filling in more details from the narrative, the journal entry and inclusion of it in the discussion give no hint of expanded awareness or critical reflection by Rose. She does not extend the text or expand beyond it by linking her lived experience and lifeworld with the narrative.

Rose frequently changes the trajectory of discourse by speaking from her notes. For example, she shifts the conversation from Indigenous spirituality and connection with nature to an early scene in the book. In this instance, injecting her journal notes truncates the volley of words already in play. Rose causes the conversation to retreat from one point of discussion and pivot back to the text. The others in the group do not intervene to smooth the transition from one topic to another but rather allow the conversation to jump and skip around each time Rose interrupts to inject another nugget of reading experience from her journal. It is as if the discourse, as a collaboration among many voices, becomes an entity in and of itself with forward-facing motion and momentum.

### Final Interview

*Interview Scenario.* I sequester myself in a private space, a cocoon where the sounds and motion of home life are buffered. This conversation is between researcher and participant and I am committed to creating a safe environment that is conducive to allowing the minutia of this cognitive, emotional, and embodied experience of reading to rise into awareness and filter through the sieve of language so that it can be storied and shared. An iPhone, audio recorder, and computer with Microsoft Word dictation activated are the tools to capture talk to become text as material for iterative cycles of reading, reflecting, and writing. It is the final interview with Rose in this research process and an opportunity to clarify and expand on her reading experience as expressed in the first interview, her reading journal, and her participation in the book club discussion. This is a waypoint in Rose's reading lifeworld, and not assumed to be the final word on her reading experience.

In the initial interview Rose expressed her attraction to books featuring strong female characters and relationships. She did appreciate that aspect of *Celia's Song*, once the characters stepped into the story. *I did like the female characters. You could feel for them for sure. ... like Celia and her mother and her siblings ... and the wisdom of the women.* For Rose, the book *hit [the mark] on some levels but not all.* At times, she found herself looping back through metaphors and descriptive prose in search of clarity. She found the language *obtuse* and *complicate[d]*. *I didn't find it easy.*

*Celia's Song* is not a book Rose would have chosen to read. *Nooo [laughing].* She *probably would have stopped reading it* if not for her commitment to the research project. *It took quite a while before I got engaged.* During that time, she was continuously questioning where the story was going. *I just had more questions in the early part, like, what's this about?*

Just prior to reading *Celia's Song*, a friend recommended Rose read *Five Little Indians* (Good, 2020) and lent Rose her copy of the book. This, then, became Rose's first experience engaging with Indigenous Literatures. She found it to be *pretty clear cut* and *read it quickly.* The narrative unfolded in a way that felt familiar and comfortable, and accommodated her typical reading practices and pace. *Absolutely. And you got right into the characters. Boom. Here's the people. Here's their story, right? ... you could make sense of it.* In comparison, *it was a slug* for her to grasp a thread of the storyline in *Celia's Song* and get into the characters. *... the early part is just sort of a tease, like, you're kind of circling around it ... It wasn't to the point. It's just such a different style than what I typically read.* The atypical storying style also meant that Rose was not able to read at her typical pace.

*... part of it, of course, was my own fault because I left it. I normally can read a book in about a week. I left insufficient time, so I was kind of hurrying when I was reading and that makes it harder to concentrate, right? You're just kind of trying to get through and that was unfortunate.*

As Rose pressed on, her experience of the narrative improved. She acknowledges her discomfort in the circular nature of the storytelling, and notes her preference for a more linear reading experience.

*... it did get better. I did enjoy it. Like, I'm glad I stayed with it. ... I thought there was [sic] some brilliant observations of some things, and then there were other things that were so circular ... and I'm kind of straightforward. ... Like, don't make me work so hard.*

Rose describes the reading experience as *pretty heavy sledding [with] a lot of things going on*. She gained insights and new perspectives on baptism during the time of first contact, and on the vote as a colonial act of democracy that did not align with Indigenous ways of decision-making. She notes that *the good that was promised [to Indigenous Peoples by the crown, the government, and religious institutions] never came through*, and that the choices available to Indigenous Peoples came with *huge trade-offs*.

Rose is open to *possibly* reading other works of fiction by Indigenous authors, especially if a title is recommended to her. *I don't know if I'd run out seeking it right away*. She does not plan to include other titles by Maracle on her to-be-read list of books unless she is *told that it was quite different than this one*. *... I read for enjoyment and ... a book that you're kind of struggling to get through or get to the point is not really something I would seek out*.

Rose labelled many of the author's observations in the book as gems, denoting them as *words of wisdom* and *interesting reflection[s] on the two cultures*. These literary moments are embedded in her reading experience. The relationship dynamics between parents and adult children, and between partners felt like *universal struggles* and *was really interesting* to Rose. She reiterates her wonder at the love of a father who cared for a daughter who was untethered from her own humanity. *... it was quite something*.

At one point in her reading experience, the book became overwhelming to Rose who *just wanted to get away from it. ... It was horrific ... you just can't imagine human beings doing such things to other human beings, right?* The journaling task combined with *the nature of the book*, meant Rose could not read *Celia's Song* when she retired to bed at night, the usual time of day that she reads. *I don't think I'd want to be trying to go to sleep right after reading it. Like, it was a disturbing book.* The entertainment factor that she enjoys in a book was not there at all for Rose. *It wasn't a book that grabbed me.*

Overall, Rose was aware of *a real loss of culture over a few generations*, and the *struggle, desire, and importance* of reclaiming what had been lost from the *nuggets* that remained. Rose retained more details about the narrative than she usually does in her reading practice. *I read so much that, really, books kind of blend into one another other after a while.* When she read her notes during the discussion she also drew connections between elements in the story that went unnoticed as she was reading. Rose typically makes notes of every book she reads as *a little summary of it*, as well as a reference for future reads. *... it's funny, I'll bring the same book home from the library and I'll think, "I read this before." I look back and sure enough.*

Rose was relieved when the reading experience was over. She also felt a measure of relief in that *there was some resolution* in the final chapter. *Well, it was a tough; probably one of the tougher reads I've had, I would say. And different, you know, it was different, a different style, a different subject matter.* Overall, this reading experience underscored her prior understanding of Indigenous experience and lifeworlds.

Rose would not recommend the book *in a hurry. ... it's a hard read.* She is not sorry that she read the book and may suggest it to another book club she knows of with readers that regularly *read heavier books*. Rose plans to keep her copy of *Celia's Song* and may reread it at a slower pace at some

point. ... *it would be interesting to see what I felt the second time around because I would know more [going in].*

A sense of confusion sprung early in Rose's reading experience and streamed throughout her engagement with the book. The characters—human, other than human, spirit, and ancestor—were a constant source of confusion. ... *to some extent, just getting the people straight was a bit of something.*

Rose had not considered herself as reader-witness during the reading experience or the book club discussion. Upon reflection, and with prompting to consider herself in that role, she agrees. *Yeah, I guess, I guess, I guess we were really. Yeah.* For Rose, witnessing entails *acknowledging* and *listening* to the truth telling. ... *they knew about these unmarked graves back during when the [Truth and Reconciliation] Commission held their meetings and, yet, no one really listened until they were physically discovered, right?*

The words Rose used in her journal to describe how she was feeling as she read the book included anxious, unnerved, tense. She expands on her emotional response to the degradation of the trees, the land, the culture, and several of the characters portrayed in the story. ... *it was just, just bad, right? You're just like, oh, my god, how can this be, right? And, hearing the trees scream, yeah.*

Rose likes to predict the trajectory of a story, to a point. *I kind of like twists in stories but, I think in this one, it was more, what is the story? What is this about? I couldn't get my head around it. ... there was just so much turmoil in it.*

When Rose came across a *gem* in the book she would stop and *read it again.* *I just found it insightful. I mean, it was just such an interesting way to look at things, right?* The passage in the book highlighting the impact of accepting the vote was one such moment for Rose, a former returning officer with Elections Canada. The connection to her lived experience was poignant.

*... it was just interesting to me to see [the vote] not being seen as the privilege, or the right, or the good thing that we have in our country. Seeing that they traded it for things that didn't bring the happiness that they thought they were going to get, right? ... Well, that just makes you stop and think, right? It's just another, it's a different perspective; something you hadn't thought of before.*

Descriptions of the natural environment and the deep *connection* the characters felt to the land and to creation also resonated with Rose. *I understand that to be big part of their [Indigenous Peoples'] culture. That was kind of foundational in their belief system and the same with medicines and cures ... And, sadly, a lot of it has been lost.* Rose does not articulate the cause of that loss. Instead, she assigns shared responsibility for historical and present-day harms.

*You know, although, certainly the white man did some bad things, I also think ... this community had its own issues which didn't really come out in this book. ... we spend millions and millions of dollars on Indigenous communities that never get to the people because they're so corrupt ... and, I think I said this before, it's not all sweetness and light on the Indigenous side. They've had their own people not treating their own people well.*

Rose believes education is a path forward; ideally education that is reciprocal. *... for us to learn from some of their ways, right? I mean, it could be a two-way street.*

Rose found the book club discussion of *Celia's Song* more robust than the usual book talk. She finds that it is typical for the group to discuss a book they are *really keen on* over about an hour. This discussion went for two hours.

*... much longer than we normally talk about a book, which is excellent, and I think, because there was journaling, there was more probably a lot more thought going into it than other books. ... there was, you know, certainly a lot of material in which to react to, or to think about.*

Rose agrees that my presence at the book club session *probably* influenced the length and depth of the conversation. *But, you know, we're not shrinking violets, so I think if there was nothing more to say, we would [have said,] we're done. No, I think, you know, it was a dense book and there was lots in it, right?*

She remembers more points of agreement than disagreement in the discussion. *I don't think we disagreed with one another on much of it.* The experiences the other readers shared did not cause Rose to reconsider her individual experience of the book, by way of challenge or expansion on her individual engagement with the book.

*I felt like most of us felt that it was a tough book to read and certainly the feeling was that a lot of people wouldn't have kept reading, except that ... we signed on for it. I wish I'd left myself more time to read it. That was like kind of the regret I have. Just because that may have changed how I felt because I was under a time constraint, it was more important for me to get to the story faster. Although that's kind of what I look for anyway in a book, something that kind of grabs me early on.*

## Chapter 5: Discussion

*Every experience is a moving force.*

— John Dewey, 1938/2015, p. 40

In Chapter 2, I presented the theoretical framework to both scaffold and justify this hermeneutic phenomenological exploration of transformative learning in settler readers of *Celia's Song* by Lee Maracle (2014). The theoretical framework built on Paulo Freire's (1970/2018) conceptualization of knowing as a process of being and becoming and was structured using transformative learning theory and reader response theory as aspects of lived experience within a reading lifeworld context that, in this post-TRC era, includes social processes of reconciling and decolonizing. While the focus of this phenomenological research centred on what the experience of transformative learning is like, the analysis of the gathered materials and the discussion that follows lean into social and cultural theories on reading, shared-reading, reconciliation, and decolonization as aspects of the reading lifeworlds of the participants to convey the complex context in which the experience of transformative learning arose and came into being.

As a form of praxis, Patricia Lather (2017) advocates for research that is "openly committed to a more just social order" (p. 71), and notes that the feasibility of praxis rests on theory illuminating lived experience as theory is illuminated by the experience. To that end, I now weave the study findings in and through the literature under three main headings: Reading *Celia's Song*; Phenomenology as Reading Approach; and, Transformation as Growth.

### Reading *Celia's Song*

Hermeneutic phenomenology aligns with a phenomenological inquiry that privileges an ontological focus on the temporality of lived experience, on the nature of being, and on humans as beings in and of the world (Neubauer et al., 2019; Vagel, 2018). It pivots on an ontological assumption that perceives experience as a continual process of interpretation situated within the lifeworld context of

the one experiencing (Neubauer et al., 2019). As a tenet of phenomenology, lifeworld is understood as a confluence of time, space, place, and relations in constant flux (Creely, 2018; Neubauer et al., 2019; Vagle, 2018). Hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry extends beyond descriptive understanding to interpret aspects of observable experience as well as aspects of experience revealed only through the narrative an individual composes as the product of a phenomenon and their lifeworld (Neubauer et al., 2019). A focus on the lifeworld means interpreting observations and participant narratives within the context of lived experience to illuminate subjective understanding of being in and of the world as well as how that understanding influences thought and behaviour (Neubauer et al., 2019).

### *Reading Lifeworld*

The reading lifeworlds of the study participants were gleaned from materials gathered during the initial interviews as the first access point to their lived reading experience. Each reading lifeworld is a composite of early reading experience, a significant reading experience, a recent reading experience, shared-reading experience, and reconciliation as reading context. These participants experienced reading early on as a relational activity within familial and educational spheres. Reading as a skill was highly valued and books as artifacts were accessible, often cherished, gifted, exchanged, and typically granted prominent display space. Each reader-participant recalled and storied significant and recent reading experiences including adaptations to individual and shared-reading practices during the COVID 19 pandemic. All shared their love of books, the value they placed on shared-reading experiences as members of the same book club, and the enjoyment they drew from this social enactment of reading.

Exploring the experience of readers who were members of the same book club was a methodological choice based on an expectation that conversation would be open and free-flowing among reader-participants familiar with one another over a period of time. They were well versed in one another's likes and dislikes, individual reading styles and practices, as well as a shared sensitivity to and avoidance of storylines they deemed to be too violent. It was easy to note the level of familiarity among

the book club members. For example, when Letitia introduced quotes she had copied from the book she said, *I did a Rose*, poking fun at the group member who routinely copies passages from books in preparation for book discussions. At times, participants filled in words for one another or completed each other's sentences, demonstrating a sense of familiarity arising from shared experiences over time and an assumption, at least, of consensus, concurrence, or cohesion in thought. All participants agreed that they would not have chosen *Celia's Song* as either an individual or a book club read.

### *Influence of Study*

The study context influenced the participants actions as well as their experience reading and discussing *Celia's Song*. It is well documented in the initial interviews that all participants would typically choose to avoid reading books containing violent events. All participants shared their experience of wanting to abandon the read at various points. All chose to continue out of a sense of commitment to me, to the research, and to the other members of the reading group. In other words, the choice to continue the read was not based on their experience of the book. I had stressed to the group when I introduced the research, and again to everyone during the initial one-on-one interviews, that the expectation was for them to treat *Celia's Song* like any other book club selection and exercise their own judgement and agency regarding their reading experience.

The two-hour discussion was a protracted version of their usual book talk, especially given that their experience of the book was marked by confusion and uncertainty, and considering the extent to which they all found the content disturbing. In the initial interviews, many of the participants recalled past book club sessions noting abbreviated discussions when members of the group did not enjoy the book. Overall, this shared reading experience was influenced by the fact that it was lived within the context of a research study that created a reading experience that fell outside the scope of their reading lifeworlds with respect to the selected text and the journaling task.

Additionally, comments noted in the reading journals, and spoken during the book discussion and final one-on-one interviews, suggested that these readers interpreted their participation in the study as an assignment. This was specifically true for the journaling task. For example, Letitia's self-deprecating description of her journal as *the worst journal you've ever read in your life* suggested that she viewed the activity as a task that would be evaluated rather than a generative exercise intended to support a reflective, reflexive mindset. Rose, a self-declared notetaker, tends to write a brief synopsis of each book she consumes as a reference and reminder of what she has already read. It is typical for her to jot down notes and use tabs to mark specific pages and passages. She took more notes with this reading, interpreting the journaling task as an assignment. Hazel's depiction of her reading experience suggested she felt a requirement, as a participant in the study, to complete the book and journal *properly*. She expanded on this during the book club discussion adding that her husband observed that she *was kind of struggling* with the reading experience and recognized that as unusual for her. ... *normally I would be just saturated, especially if it was an assignment*. Her comments suggested a felt sense of obligation to the research endeavour and self-imposed expectations on her own participation in the research study as a series of tasks. Abbie also spoke of consciously making a commitment to finish the book when she found a section of the text very difficult to read. *And, it was like, ok, I got to get past this, you know? I made the commitment*. In more dramatic fashion, Letitia made it very clear that she would not have continued the read had it not been for her felt obligation to me and to the research endeavour. *I would just like to say, I would never, never in a thousand years would I have continued to read this book. I get too agitated by these books. I get really mad*. Near the end of the book club discussion, Rose also made it clear that if it had not been for her commitment to me and to the study she would not have continued the read.

The reader-participants lingered in the individual reading experience and the group discussion longer than they would have if not involved in a research study. Significantly, Hazel, Letitia, and Rose all stated that they would not recommend the book to other readers. Recommending the book would be an

active outcome of this reading experience marked by confusion, unsettling affect, and uncomfortable embodied experiencing. I would consider a book recommendation evidence of some level of entertainment, at a minimum, and, at a maximum, some level of learning or growth inspired by the text. Recommendation culture is a ubiquitous feature of contemporary reading practices (Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2023) and a key source for book titles for these reader-participants.

### *Reconciliation as Reading Context*

Indigenous Literatures as a unique literary canon (Younging, 2018) existed outside of the awareness of this group of settler readers. None had considered reading as a way to engage in processes of reconciling and decolonizing. These readers had no to minimal understanding of the terms and the concepts they represent. None perceived reconciliation or decolonization as social imperatives for settler Canadians. The word *reconciliation* held some familiarity stemming from exposure to news media and recent coverage of the discovery of the remains of Indigenous children at the sites of former Indian Residential Schools. A clear sense of separation between settler and Indigenous communities and projection of marginalization wove through the lived experience participants narrated during the portion of the initial interview that focused on reconciliation and decolonization. The sense of division and disconnection between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples was recognized and acknowledged yet went unquestioned and unchallenged as a given aspect of their lifeworlds past and present. Maracle (2017) speaks to marginalization as presumptive in her book of essays, *My Conversations With Canadians*. She says:

The notion of marginalization is conjured by those who believe we want to be a part of this racist, colonial, patriarchal world that is struggling to maintain a grip on our continent and on the former colonies ... I feel more like Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Cherie Dimaline, Marily Dumont, Greg Schofield, Maria Campbell, Tom King, and Jeannette Armstrong, who are

interested in continuing the work of the foremothers and forefathers, who have never felt they were on anyone else's margin, but have always been central to their own world. (p. 48)

At the time of the initial interviews, no reader-participant had selected or engaged with an Indigenous-authored novel either as an individual or as a member of a shared-reading group. Based on a recommendation from a trusted source, Rose read *Five Little Indians* (Good, 2020) the week prior to reading *Celia's Song* to familiarize herself with Indigenous Literatures and prepare for the reading experience to be researched. Reading the text I selected for the study, then, became a first encounter with Indigenous Literatures for Abbie, Hazel, and Letitia. The lack of awareness of and experience with reading Indigenous Literatures meant that these reader-participants entered a new territory of thinking, feeling, and experiencing. They found themselves immersed in a strange landscape unmarked by the familiar signposts of their reading lifeworlds.

The practices they used to facilitate their typical reading experiences did not work within the pages of this text. For example, the reader-participants typically wait until the week before the book club discussion to read a selected text for the story details and reading experience to be *fresh* and top-of-mind and this book was no exception. Rose, an avid reader, found herself rushing to finish, unable to read this text at her usual pace. She wrote this as her final journal entry: *I can usually easily read a book in a week but this one was very dense and challenging and I felt rushed to complete.* Abbie read the last 168 pages of the book on the day of the scheduled discussion; significant for someone who describes herself as *not a fast reader*. This reading experience serves as an example of how a book can influence the temporal aspect of reading as one among an array of activities in any given day. For these participants, reading is typically a way to unwind in bed at the end of the day to bridge the span between wakefulness and slumber. Without alert, wakeful focus perhaps a reader could feel like they were constantly missing some key piece that would consolidate, integrate, and create cohesion from the pieces of the story puzzle.

It appeared that these readers assumed *Celia's Song* would offer a typical reading experience in terms of reader engagement as an investment of time, energy, and attention. It seemed that reading *Celia's Song* required a more deliberate pace; a slower, more attentive and intentional approach. Perhaps, the storytelling style of Maracle denied a consumptive encounter in favour of a more thoughtful form of engagement. *Celia's Song* centres the Indigenous Voice and Coast Salish ways of knowing and being. It is an example of Indigenous Literatures that, as Daniel Heath Justice (2018) describes, engages with and responds to colonialism without being determined by it. The storying is not confined, refined, and defined by settler-colonial mores. Maracle's *Celia's Song* is a testament to the literary canon as "the most culturally authentic literary expression of Indigenous realities" (Younging, 2018, 11). Through the holistic portrayal of her characters' cognitive, emotional, and embodied experiencing, Maracle (2014) offers experiential insight into the colonization and colonialism Marie Battiste (2013), Jane McMillan (2019), and Sherry Pictou (2019) describe in educational, legal, and political spheres.

### *Reader Confusion*

Readers use their lived experience to make sense of a text, and the text to make sense of their lived experience (Collinson, 2009; Djikic et al., 2013; Mar & Oatley, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1978; Ross, 1999). For these reader-participants, life and text collided. The predominant experience of reading *Celia's Song* was expressed explicitly as an almost constant state of confusion. In her journal entry for Chapter 23 Letitia noted, *I feel like I need a decoder ring*. The sense of confusion they experienced as individual readers was validated during the book discussion by virtue of its commonality. In using the term *validate* I mean to convey that confusion, as an experience of reading this book, was substantiated as a true and accurate experience proven by the fact that it was shared by all group members. The book club discussion, in fact, validated the unknown as unknowable for these settler readers. The participants attributed their confusion to a lack of knowledge of settler-colonial history and Indigenous ways of

knowing and being. Hazel, Letitia, and Rose all cited the number of characters, character forms (animal, spirit, ancestor, human, and other-than human), and similar character names over multiple generations as key sources of confusion. Hazel and Rose also pointed to the circular nature of the storying as a contributing factor to their sense of uncertainty throughout the read.

Hazel, Letitia, and Rose also explicitly ascribed their confusion to the author rather than to their own in/ability to comprehend or to embrace a style of storying that was unfamiliar to them. In her journal entry for Chapter 18, Letitia wrote: *I feel like I am being set up.*

Hazel, in particular, appeared to have an expectation that the author assume responsibility to meet her needs as a reader related to content and context. In her reading journal, Hazel depicted an experience of moving through an initial feeling of curiosity to frustration and, then, to exasperation as she struggled to access the sense of clarity and connection she sought. In her journal entry for Chapter 11, Hazel describes her reading experience in terms of the author being *clear at times* and her, as the reader, *being allowed to see*. Hazel stopped journaling at Chapter 11. At this point, she chose to put the book down and step away from the story until the week the book club was scheduled to meet. To prepare for the discussion she *skimmed through chapters and skipped others entirely*. Ending the journaling task and skimming and skipping chapters served to mitigate a reading experience this reader found intolerable. In both the reading journal and book discussion, Hazel clearly places the onus on the author to create the conditions for her to *connect, understand, and empathize*. She centred herself in the reading experience and assigned blame for the sense of disconnection to the author and her writing style as depicted in her journal entries for Chapters 1, 3 and 11:

Chapter 1: ... *I'm lost. ... I feel a bit like the author is trying to confuse me.*

Chapter 3: *Ok, I'm sure all these metaphors and mystical allegory will unravel themselves before the end of the book (I hope), but for now it's causing me frustration. I don't feel connected—and I no longer even feel curious. Just exasperated.*

Chapter 11: *I'm lost again. ... She [Maracle] gets clear at times, then just when I think I'm feeling something for the characters—a connection, an understanding—just when I think I'm being allowed to see them, she closes the curtain or ... plays the shell game so I can't discern where the story is. It's not enjoyable. And I'm not saying every book has to be enjoyable—I don't mind uncomfortable. I don't mind when the author makes me feel something I didn't want to feel, but the feelings I'm having with this book are not about the story or characters—they are about her writing style.*

### *Admissions of Ignorance*

The reader-participants openly admitted that they were unaware or *ignorant* of settler-colonial history and Indigenous knowledges and ways of being. These admissions of ignorance were made using phrases such as: *See, I'm ignorant to the culture; ... we have no idea; I don't know; I don't understand; ... that was just kind of a stunning shock to me.* In the analysis of the book club transcript I used the word *ignorance* 25 times to capture moments in the discussion when participants acknowledged, accepted, acquiesced to, and even seemed to embrace their lack of knowledge and awareness. It is possible that admitting ignorance is a way to ignore, avoid, dismiss, defend, and/or absolved oneself from accountability and responsibility. When Letitia conceded that she was *ignorant to the culture* there was a clamour of voices overlapping one another. I understood the statement by Letitia, and the subsequent unanimous agreement of the other readers, to be acknowledgement of a lack of knowledge with respect to Indigenous cultures and traditional knowledges in general and, specifically, with respect to Sto:lo culture and traditional knowledge as portrayed in *Celia's Song*. The reader-participants appeared resigned to their ignorance. Repeated expressions of ignorance seemed to imply an unspoken claim of

innocence. Maracle (2017) contends that “[i]nnocence is a recurring insistence of white people” even as they “continue to live more comfortable lives” (p. 75).

There was no indication of any impulse, impetus, or inspiration to reflect on their lack of knowledge or to explore the unknown to begin to fill knowledge gaps; no sense of responsibility or response-ability. For these readers, the unknown was accepted as unknowable. Assuming an unquestioning and unchallenging stance is to be complacent and complicit, ultimately leading to repetition and reproduction of the society in which we live. Roy Bhaskar (2002) states unequivocally that each of us is always actively engaged in the process of constructing the society in which we live either by way of repetition and reproduction, or through transformation and change (p. 307, as cited in Budd, 2012).

Hazel and Letitia discussed the book and their individual reading experiences prior to the book club session and questioned whether they had *missed something* as they read. Hazel recognized and acknowledged her inability to make sense of the story, asking Letitia: *Did I miss something?* This suggests that she expected the narrative to provide the answers, resolve uncertainty, and fill in gaps in her understanding and knowledge. It seems she held an expectation that, if she did not *get* something, the necessary information to figure it out would be found somewhere within the pages of the book. Hazel also made an observation during the book discussion that a family tree diagram would have been helpful. Multiple voices sounded agreement and added a call for a glossary of terms and cultural references to allay confusion attributed to the number and form of characters, repeating names, multiple generations, and the storying of Indigenous knowledges, cultural practices, and traditions. These comments suggest an expectation that the book would contain the answers to all questions, and that the responsibility to clarify, inform, and educate lie solely with the author.

An idea to re-read *Celia's Song* was introduced in the book discussion. There seemed to be some recognition or intuitive knowing that there was more to the story than was captured in a single reading experience even with the journaling task intended to generate and inspire reflective and reflexive thought. Perhaps the group discussion provided some clarity, soothed the sense of confusion, and instilled a level of confidence in their ability to engage with the book more thoughtfully. It seemed as if these readers sensed that in circling back and re-engaging with the narrative from this new place of knowing, that they might have an expanded and extended experience of it. Perhaps, then, clarity is not a necessary outcome of the book discussion. Perhaps a valid outcome is acceptance of confusion, uncertainty, and not knowing as a possible space for learning and growth. Equally possible is that these settler readers continue to expect all answers to be contained in this single point of access to Indigenous expression of lived experience rather than leaning into learning by seeking other sources of information, knowledge, and experience. It must be noted that the idea to re-read *Celia's Song* was not supported by individual reader-participants in the final one-on-one interviews.

### *Sense-Making and Meaning-Making*

The desire and frequent attempts to accurately predict the trajectory of the story were expressed repeatedly in the reading journals and in the book discussion by all reader-participants. Letitia and Rose searched for predictability in the storyline almost continuously. Letitia notes discomfort in her inability to infer and predict the story. Her journal entries suggested the act of anticipating what might happen next affords a sense of preparedness regardless of the accuracy of the prediction. This entry is from Letitia's journal for Chapter 5:

*The tangible bits are eclipsed by the symbolism and spiritual. This is no light read and probably the first book in a while that I have read where I have no frigging idea where it is going.*

*Interesting how frustrating I find it. I don't enjoy the lack of sense of story. I read for enjoyment—how shallow.*

Abbie, too, expressed feeling uncomfortable with her inability to infer and predict the storyline. For example, she wrote in her Chapter 8 journal entry that she ... *felt like I was sitting on the edge of my chair just waiting for something to reveal itself, but unsure of what was going to happen. The story is unfolding, but not visible yet.* She journaled just once more for Chapter 13 and then wrote *I can't journal anymore.* Perhaps, conjuring a sense of certainty is a way to self-protect, guard against, or prepare for an experience of something unwanted. Perhaps, too, the need for certainty is the basis for adamantly maintaining a worldview that is no longer justifiable or sustainable. Resistance to a new paradigm, then, becomes an attempt to hold on to what is/was known and lived as true in a lifeworld shaped by and structured on settler colonialism.

Often, when one participant expressed a lack of understanding of an event in the story or the significance of specific elements, the others were inspired to share their own understanding or their own experience of confusion and uncertainty. Sometimes these exchanges lead to collaborative meaning-making but, more often, simply validated the unknown as unknowable for these settler readers. The reader-participants expressed no inspiration, interest, or agency to lean into learning. Only once during the group discussion did anyone reach for a cell phone or other electronic device as a tool to search for an answer to a question or to fill a gap in knowledge. It turned out to be an unsuccessful attempt to ascertain the genesis and meaning of an unfamiliar word. The consensus, then, was to deem it as *not really a word.* She [the author] *made that word up. ... No wonder we didn't know what it meant.*

At several points, however, the storied experiences of the characters resonated with the lived experience of the reader-participants with such clarity that they labelled these moments of attunement as *gems* and *pearls of wisdom*; naturally occurring formations with intrinsic beauty and bestowed value. A specific example of this occurred as Rose read a quote from her journal: *"You don't need to know why anything happens. You only need to know what to do [is all]"* [Maracle, 2014, p. 169]. Laughter and wholehearted agreement from the others in the group suggested this statement resonated as another

*gem*. It was a moment of recognition of a shared truth that expanded awareness and facilitated relational processes of sense-making and meaning-making that centred on the narrative and extended beyond the bounds of the book as it was woven into lived experience.

Rose found the perspectives presented in the book to be *interesting*. *I liked a lot of the observations about, well, the difference between the two societies [Indigenous and settler] but, also, just about life in general*. The *observations* conveyed life as a universally human experience but also clearly portrayed contrasts between Indigenous and settler societies. The *differences* illuminated disparities in circumstances, opportunities, and expectations, as well as the beliefs, values, and philosophies that distinguish Indigenous and colonial worldviews. Megan Boler (1997) argues for testimonial reading as a way to meet the challenge of undertaking the inner work necessary to accept “responsibility founded on the discrepancy of our experiences” (p. 262). With respect to the specific reading experience delineated in this study, the concept of testimonial reading is relevant. The reading approach Boler (1997) suggests shifts the focus of a reading encounter from “isolated acts of individual response to distant others ... [to] a collective educational responsibility” (p. 262). Hazel, Letitia, and Rose did not experience this shift in focus. Reading *Celia’s Song* proved to be a difficult, confusing, and laborious experience; atypical for this group of life-long readers. Boler (1997) suggests that “[t]he ultimate risk of passive empathy may be the annihilation of the text into an object of easy consumption” (p. 266). For Rose, Letitia, and Hazel, I suggest that the Indigenous knowledge and knowing woven poignantly in and through the text was dimmed to the point of being extinguished, at least in part, by the individual and collectively validated perception of the text as an object that defied easy consumption and, further, defied comfortable conversation.

### *Emotional Experiencing*

Beyond the sense of confusion, these reader-participants experienced emotional responses including *anger, deep sadness, fear, hope, horror, shame* (Abbie); *curious, frustration, exasperated, no*

*feelings, relieved, empathy, split apart, unsettling, impotent, validated* (Hazel); *dread, intrigued, frustrating, annoying, no feelings, relief, overwhelmed* (Letitia); *anxious, unnerved, tense, interesting, unsettling, empathy, horrific, shocking, sickening* (Rose). I include this list of descriptors as traces of engagement (White & Lemieux, 2017), and to illuminate the spectrum of emotional experiencing the reader-participants noted in their journal entries, as well as the breadth of emotions from hope to horror. Letitia's journal entry for Chapter 16 spoke to her strategy to mitigate the depth of emotional experiencing: *I keep my emotions in check because the misery of this story is so big*. Both Letitia (Chapter 8) and Hazel (Chapter 5) described a state of having *no feelings*. Neither reader elaborated further on this experience in the group discussion or in final individual interviews. Only Hazel (Chapter 7) and Rose (Chapter 8) specifically noted feeling a sense of *empathy* in their journals, and only once each. The word was not spoken during the book club discussion.

The literature on reading and empathy (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Johnson, 2013) suggests transportation into a narrative, observed as a high level of cognitive engagement, emotional involvement, and vivid imagery, is a predictive factor for empathy fostered and facilitated through reading experiences. Empathy is significant in that high levels of the emotion correlate positively with prosocial behaviours (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Johnson, 2013). In other words, empathy acts as a sluice between affect and action; a catalyst for emotion to become visible and tangible as motion in physical form. Only Abbie appeared to experience transportation into the narrative. That her cognitive engagement with the text extended beyond the book to consider broader social, cultural, and political issues was evident in the group discussion. Abbie described her emotional involvement in the narrative using words such as *anger, deep sadness, and shame* in her journal. Her emotional response intensified as the story unfolded to include critical health care extended to save the life of a young character. This may have resonated specifically with Abbie due to her career as a registered nurse. Christine Jarvis

(2006) suggests that resonance between a reader and a piece of literature increases the potential for transformative learning.

Abbie wrote in her journal that she found the author's detailed descriptions *compelling*, and she expanded further on her experience of the descriptive prose during the book club discussion. *Like, you could see it. Like, you could see ... nature [in] the descriptions of things.* For Abbie, the author's words conjured images so vivid that she felt as if she *could see it*. She was moved by the prose that offered her a deep, rich, and nuanced immersion into the narrative. Abbie's high level of cognitive engagement with the text, her emotional involvement with the characters, and her experiencing of vivid imagery all point to transportation into the narrative.

Abbie did not label her emotional experience as empathy, yet, during the book club discussion and both individual interviews, there was a noticeable shift in the tone and pace of Abbie's speech around topics related to colonization, reconciliation, and decolonization, and she assumed a questioning stance regarding her observations of systemic power dynamics, injustices, and inequities. I suggest this is indicative of other-oriented perspective taking (Coplan, 2011) as Abbie attempted to simulate the experience of another from their point of view. During the book club discussion she shared her experience of the story as *a glimpse into maybe what their life is like and what's important to them*. Her statement aligns with Amy Coplan's (2011) assertion that other-oriented perspective taking provides "experiential understanding of another person, or understanding of another from the 'inside'" (p. 58) and approaches genuine empathy. Abbie's reading experience indicated transportation into the narrative (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Johnson, 2013) and other-oriented perspective taking as a marker of genuine empathy (Coplan, 2011). It suggests that a fictional character can act as a window on/into the cognitive, affective, and embodied experiencing of another that creates a space for other-oriented perspective taking. It also suggests that fiction allows the possibility for a reader to feel what another feels from *their* perspective instead of from her own even when the other, and the lifeworld of the other, is perceived as

very different from herself and her own lifeworld. In fact, Coplan (2011) finds “[t]he effort and regulation involved in other-oriented perspective taking suggests that empathy is a motivated and controlled process, which is neither automatic nor involuntary and demands that the observer attend to relevant differences between self and other” (pp. 58–59). As an outcome of this reading experience, Abbie plans to recommend *Celia’s Song* as a *compelling* read and sees value in the book as a potential conversation starter.

*I think people are quite ignorant about what's gone on and the only way you're going to learn anything is to start investigating and learn for yourself, you know. Ask the questions, do your own research, read more books, engage in conversations ... there's probably a lot of people out there that have a lot of information to share.*

On the other hand, Hazel, Letitia, and Rose all seemed to exhibit self-oriented perspective taking, or pseudo empathy (Coplan, 2011), as part of their reading experience. Significantly, Coplan (2011) distinguishes between empathic and personal distress as observable aspects of empathy. In instances of empathic distress, such as displayed by Abbie, the observer experiences the distress of another as a vicarious simulation and is able to maintain focus on the other. Personal distress, as a feature of pseudo empathy, occurs when a person observing the distress of another reacts by becoming distressed themselves and shifts to focus on efforts aimed at alleviating their own discomfort. In this case, a person can lose sight of the fact that the observed experience is that of another, not their own, and can become completely focused on their own reaction and desire for relief, according to Coplan (2011). Hazel exhibited this desire for relief when she ended her reading encounter before finishing the book, then re-engaged to prepare for the discussion by skimming and skipping sections. At one point in the discussion, she expressed a sense of sadness and a need to avoid. *Ahh, that’s sad. Don’t say that.* A little later, Hazel physically left the group discussion to walk alone through other more quiet and private spaces in the house. *I have to go do a cleanse. ... Too much heavy talk.* In stepping away from the

conversation, Hazel's focus shifted to mitigating her own reaction to the text and talk. In the final interview she described this moment in more detail. *I was getting a little full up of everyone's emotions towards the end of the discussion ... it was starting to just be too much.* Hazel attributes her tendency to avoid to her disposition as an empath and highly sensitive person. In this instance, she chose to remove herself from the discussion to allow the emotions that threatened to overwhelm dissipate.

I did not note evidence of transportation into the narrative or other-oriented perspective taking in the reading experience of Letitia. In the final interview, she shared that she did not feel *engaged with the characters* and, therefore, *did not get emotionally invested. I don't think it [the story] will stick with me.* Emotional investment in the characters is one signal of transportation into a story. Although Letitia did not describe her reading experience in a way that denoted transportation during the group discussion, her journaling suggested that she was emotionally invested in the well-being of some of the characters. She expanded on her journal entries during our final conversation together and clearly articulated that her sense of concern and relief was not for the characters as much as for herself. Letitia was relieved to end and exit the reading encounter without adding further to the emotional upheaval she experienced. Letitia typically avoids being reader-witness to experiences she finds emotionally intolerable. The personal distress and self-oriented perspective taking Letitia experienced aligns with pseudo empathy as described by Coplan (2011).

Rose used a derivative of the word *horror* (e.g., *horrific, horrendous, horrible, horrified, horrifying, horrid*) a total of 15 times in her journal to describe the content of the story and her reading experience. Her description of the *darkness* of the text and its *unsettling* effect on her suggest self-oriented perspective taking and personal distress associated with pseudo empathy (Coplan, 2011). Rose expressed exasperation with the author during the group discussion. ... *give us a break.* Placing the blame for her reading experience on the author was, perhaps, a way to avoid examining her reading experience more reflectively and reflexively, and to avoid taking responsibility for gaps in her knowledge

and inability to adapt to what was, for her, an atypical style of storying. Coplan (2011) suggests the personal distress experienced with respect to pseudo empathy “makes us more likely to become emotionally overaroused” (p. 57).

### *Embodied Experiencing*

I included this aspect of experiencing in order to investigate the reading experience in its wholeness. This holistic approach honours all forms of sensing and experiencing as knowing including “kinaesthetic, sensor, visceral and ‘felt sense’ dimensions of bodily lived experience” (Finlay, 2011, p. 30). Linda Finlay (2011) describes the lived body as “an *embodied consciousness*” (p. 30) that is lived “pre-reflectively, without thought of the body having its own wisdom and memory” (p. 31). This was certainly true for these reader-participants who seemed unaccustomed to directing their conscious attention and awareness to embodied experience. They did, however, record their body-world interconnection in the reading journals.

Embodied experiencing was described as feeling anxious, unnerved, unsettled, and tense. In an entry for Chapter 11, Rose noted: *Biting my nails furiously. ... Heart is racing.* For Chapter 13, she documented: *I feel tension in my solar plexus.* Hazel depicted a visceral image of her embodied reading experience, recording a sense of *heaviness* and an *unsettling* feeling in her reading journal. She was aware of a hollow sensation in her lungs as she read and noted a desire to somehow avoid taking in and taking on the pain of another by holding her breath. Hazel used a number of tactics to mitigate her reading experience of *Celia’s Song* including ending the journaling task at Chapter 11, skimming and skipping chapters, and setting the book aside unfinished as is her prerogative, privilege, and power as a reader (Boler, 1997). Rose noted the content of the story *almost unbearable* as she journaled her experience of Chapter 15, and also felt the need to *stop reading for a while*. All of the reader-participants adapted their temporal reading practices to accommodate the story content by not reading at bedtime.

*Reciprocal Reading Engagement*

At times during the book club discussion, the reader-participants expanded and extended beyond the book as they drew on scenes from the narrative that resonated with their understanding of Indigenous lifeworlds, knowledges, and ways of being, most notably a relational positioning in/with/to nature. I observed, too, that the act of choosing words to convey a perspective was a generative process. There was a sense of the reader-participants being and becoming aware of their perspectives and beliefs—especially things that, to this point, were presumed or assumed—as they arose, took shape, and were articulated in words. Often, in these moments of reciprocal engagement with the text and engagement with experiences of other readers, multiple voices would chime in simultaneously and the conversation would become inaudible. If any of the reader-participants questioned the origin, extent, or validity of one another’s awareness of Indigenous spirituality and connection to the natural world, it went unheard as did expressions of the perspectives and beliefs held by those present. It is important to note that, in these moments of inaudible discourse, I cannot know what inspired participants to speak at once, nor can I determine what was said or by whom. It is not possible to assess whether the conversation lead to new insights and shifts in perspectives or whether the discourse ensconced prior assumptions as validated beliefs among like-minded individuals thinking and acting in/of/through ways attributed to the experiencing in/of/through settler-colonial lifeworlds.

Reading (Boler, 1997; Hanson, 2017) and shared-reading (Davis, 2008; Long, 2003; Rehberg Sedo & Fuller, 2014) carry the potential to foster and facilitate cultural work, not the certainty. This shared reading experience provoked these readers to share their lives as they discussed moments in their lifeworlds related to racism, Residential Schools, and Indigenous status. A description of salmon swimming upstream launched a discussion that drew on the lived experiences of Rose and Hazel. The scene was a catalyst to these two readers sharing their lived experiences related to this element in the story. It had the effect of weaving the weft of lived experience with the warp of the story and added

texture to the text. This extension of the text into lived experience was one of few instances during the two-hour discussion. Another centred on a scene in the book that described the wisdom of women in familial and community spheres and compared how it is regarded by Indigenous men versus white men. Rose recorded a reference in her journal to the recognition paid to smart women in the family and community portrayed in the book. This expanded the conversation beyond the book with shared lived experiences related to gender divides, grievances with current partners, and limited critical reflection on gender issues. Sense-making and meaning-making extended beyond the book as this narrative excerpt was layered with lived experience leading to expanded awareness and critical reflection on differences between societies, races, and genders.

These instances of sharing lived experience beyond the shared reading experience served to demonstrate the reciprocal relationship between text and reader (Rosenblatt, 1978; Ross, 1999). The book club discussion clearly demonstrated that those who share their reading also share their lives as the reader-participants used lived experience to make sense of the text, and used the text to make sense of lived experience. A shared reading experience, then, can act as a gateway to sharing and reflecting on lived experience. Commonalities between individual reading experiences also seemed to create a sense of belonging as the product of understanding and being understood. At times, shared experiences seemed to negate the need to explain further when cohesion in thought, emotion, and embodied experiencing was assumed.

The reading experience of the participants also suggests that, perhaps, a reader is not meant to follow, catch, and grab hold of every thread of a story but, rather, pick up those threads they find meaningful—the ones that resonate—and weave them in and through their lived experience in a way that makes sense in the moment. Perhaps, this leaves the possibility for something entirely new to be gleaned by rereading the same text or by engaging with other texts in the same literary canon. Only Abbie expressed a desire to read other literary works by Maracle. Hazel, Letitia, and Rose will not. Letitia

and Rose, however, were open to reading Indigenous Literatures if a specific book was recommended to them by trusted others (see Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2013, 2023).

### Phenomenology as Reading Approach

This phenomenological research endeavour provides a nuanced, experiential understanding of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991, 2000) and transformation as growth (Lawrence & Cranton, 2015) in settler readers of *Celia's Song* by Maracle (2014). It also provides a nuanced, experiential understanding of phenomenology as a philosophy and as a methodology. I had attained a level of knowledge in both spheres by combing through the extant theoretical, research, and practice literature, first for a graduate thesis in Communication Studies (see Bartlett, 2017) and, then, for this doctoral dissertation in Educational Studies. What I had learned and applied as new knowledge now merges into knowing layered with a healthy dose of uncertainty and a sense of humility that opens to new perspectives and understanding. In this section, I focus on the reading experience of Abbie. Her approach to this first encounter with Indigenous Literatures in/formed her experience of the text and aligned specifically with tenets of phenomenology and the practice of phenomenological research methods in ways that the reading experience of the other participants did not. I suggest that the experience of Abbie offers insight into a reading approach for settler readers of Indigenous Literatures that may foster transformative learning and growth with respect to the reckoning, reconciliation, and reciprocity necessary to think and act in new ways.

Given that phenomenology is understood as “a way of being, becoming, living, and moving through the world” (Vagle, 2018, p. xii) the parallels between phenomenological methodology and lived experience should not come as a surprize. In fact, the notion of being and becoming is also articulated throughout the theoretical, research, and practice literature on transformative learning and transformation as growth. As reader-participants, Abbie and her cohort of book club members afforded access to what the lived experience of reading *Celia's Song* was like; subjective consciousness “brought

into being' in the day-to-day contextualized living in and through the world" (Vagle, 2018, p. 9). I will explore the parallels between Abbie's reading experience and lifeworld, intentionality, and phenomenological reduction as the aspects of phenomenological philosophy and methodology most relevant to this study.

Of significance is the settler-colonial reading lifeworlds of those experiencing the text. The lifeworld context of the phenomenon centres the research as an ontological exploration of what it is to *be* in the experience. In other words, what the transformative learning experience of reading *Celia's Song* is like for a settler reader in a lifeworld context that includes post-TRC concepts and processes of reconciliation, decolonization, and self-identity as a treaty person. I have come to an understanding of a lifeworld as the soil in which thought germinates, takes root, and grows. Lifeworld, as a tenet of phenomenology, is understood as a confluence of time, space, place, and relations in constant flux (Creely, 2018; Neubauer et al., 2019; Vagle, 2018). As such, it conditions and sustains both individual and collective existence. As Margaret Kovach (2010) attests, "[w]e know what we know from where we stand" (p. 7). I suggest that awareness of our lifeworld as the mesh that bonds and binds our being-ness is a key aspect of learning that transforms. When we lack this awareness we do not question what is. Often, we do not even recognize a need to. It is a matter of understanding self as being in the world but not of the world. At this level of awareness, discussion can act to preserve and perpetuate the in-ness of lived experience. In other words, discourse can actually validate the status quo as the only real and true experience of reality.

Alternatively, when one becomes aware of their lifeworld as a particular set of experiences leading to a specific set of beliefs, values, and behaviours as *a* way of knowing and being and not *the* way of knowing and being, then an openness to new perspectives can arise. It is what Lorri Neilsen Glenn (2002) refers to as a "shift from knowledge to knowing. ... from trying to find The Answer and The Way to being open to and hearing many answers, many ways, all in context, all subject to life cycles like

everything else on the planet” (p. 210). Only when we have an understanding of self as an intricate part of the world as well as living *in* the world is there an option to turn the volume down on our conditioned thinking and open to new perspectives and the possibilities for action they introduce. This allows for a shift from reaction to response; from an abstract state of being responsible to an actual state of being response-able. Reading fiction literature is one way to expand awareness of the lifeworlds of distant others (Boler, 1997) and through the reciprocal relationship between text and reader (Rosenblatt, 1978; Ross, 1999) expand the awareness of the one reading. The lived experience of the reader-participants in this study exemplified that when we share our reading we share our lives.

Abbie’s reading lifeworld was and is shaped by reading as a relational activity in familial, educational, and social spheres. This aligns with the extant research on the social infrastructure of reading that positions reading as an activity that is taught, practiced, and sustained in relationship to/with others (Long, 1993; Ross et al., 2006). Catherine Ross et al. (2006) infer that all aspects of reading are socially mediated and serve as a means by which to connect to others and engage in/with the world. Abbie had not read Indigenous Literatures on her own, or in either of her two book clubs prior to reading *Celia’s Song* for the study. Although she had not considered linking her reading to reconciliation, Abbie was not opposed to the idea prior to the reading experience.

Abbie had no understanding of reconciliation and decolonization as social imperatives, and scant knowledge of the concepts the terms represent. Abbie acknowledged, simply as a matter of fact, that she was unaware of the history of the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia, which operated from 1929 to 1967 as the only residential school in the Maritime provinces. This, even though her mother grew up in the community. She also described Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities as separate with Indigenous people occupying what she perceived as the margins of society. This sense of separation and projection of marginalization seemed to be uncritically accepted, as were the negative stereotypes she has been witness to. Abbie admitted that she was *ignorant* about

reconciliation and repeated the phrases *we have no idea* and *I don't know*. Reconciliation did not factor into her work life nor was it something that typically came up in conversations with friends or family. As Abbie turned her attention to describing her experience and understanding of the terms *reconciliation* and *decolonization*—terms she is hearing more frequently in the media but not taking the initiative to investigate—a momentum gathered in the way she engaged and responded as she began to reflect, question, and challenge her own thinking. The exchange demonstrated the power of discourse that questions and challenges one to rethink, reimagine, and redress assumptions, perceptions, and knowledge gaps simply by engaging in the act of turning thought to talk. The research process provided access to this moment that saw conscious awareness arise and become tangible as sound and syllables. Finlay (n.d.) describes these as moments of self-discovery for participants as they “describe their own meanings and find their own way through” (n.p.).

It is important to note that moments such as these happened with and between each of the reader-participants as topics related to settler-colonial and Indigenous lifeworlds were explored for the first time in this group as new points of conversation for most of the members. Sometimes the moment was a clarification of a thought newly spoken and, at other times, it was a catalyst to linking a past lived experience to a recent one in a new way that created expanded awareness of both. As Brian Neubauer et al. (2019) note, “individuals are understood as *always already* having an understanding of themselves within the world, even if they are not constantly, explicitly, and/or consciously aware of that understanding” (p. 94). This points to a state of being unaware or unconscious to our own understanding and subsequently to the reasons we navigate lived experience the way we do.

Abbie described her individual experience of the text as *compelling, engaging*, and, like the other reader-participants, *confusing*. She also shared similar emotional responses with the other readers including *anger, deep sadness, fear, hope, horror, and shame*, and noted tension as an experienced embodied sensation in her reading journal. Abbie expanded on her sense of confusion during the book

club discussion. She described in more detail her overall lack of understanding regarding events in the story as well as with respect to the significance of specific aspects of the Indigenous lifeworlds that were narratively portrayed. Although her cognitive, affective, and embodied reactions to the book were similar to those experienced by the other reader-participants, the way in which she responded to the reading experience differed and appeared to lead to deeper and more reflective engagement with the text. During the book club discussion, Abbie repeatedly attempted to expand and extend the conversation beyond the book into related and relevant topics that connected fiction to fact, past to present. I interpreted this as a signal that Abbie engaged in reflection and critical self-reflection as she read *Celia's Song*. John Dewey (1938/2015) asserts that to react is to be closed; to respond is to be open. To react is to be controlled by what it is you are reacting to; to respond is to exercise agency.

The concept of intentionality is a tenet of phenomenology. It is interpreted by Mark Vagle (2018) as a sense of interconnectedness signifying “how we are meaningfully connected to the world” (p. 28) rather than an action-oriented state or purpose to achieve something. The notion that we are inseparably connected to others (experiencing subjects) and other things (objects in experience) is reflected by readers as experiencing subjects and Indigenous Literatures as both objects in experience *and* as conveyances for the storied, subjective experiencing of others. It is also reflected in reading and learning as relational acts. Edwin Creely (2018) aligns his understanding of intentionality to education research by emphasizing that learning is situated in and expressed through the one experiencing. He finds the nature of learning to be complex and often subtle, with learning understood as a socio-cultural phenomenon enmeshed in contextual understandings, discursive practices, and learning communities. This interpretation of intentionality as consciousness that is both sensing and doing is important with respect to transformative learning and growth that leads to thinking and acting in new ways.

It is not clear whether the approach Abbie chose to take in reading *Celia's Song* was consciously intended as a way to foster and facilitate learning as an outcome, or as a way to simply complete the task

of reading for a research study to which she felt an obligation as a participant. Regardless of her level of conscious intention, or her ability to clearly articulate the choice she made, Abbie found a way to engage with the text that expanded her awareness, prompted critical reflection, and provoked a degree of questioning and challenge—on individual (self) and collective (systems and society) levels—the other reader-participants did not experience as they read and then discussed the book.

Abbie shares that she found the story *really hard* and struggled through the first 100 pages of the book. She read the remaining 168 pages on the day of the scheduled book club meeting, finishing the read just in time for the discussion. By reading this volume, at this pace, without interrupting her reading experience to reflect and journal, she got ... *a better feel for the book*. This dramatic shift in her reading pace is significant given her early reading experience and self-assessment as *not a fast reader* during the initial interview. The shift in approach shifted her experience of the book as she was transported into the narrative (Bal & Veltcamp, 2013; Johnston, 2013), became completely engaged in the story (Leavy, 2018), and immersed in the book (Nell, 1988). She found the narrative to be *beautifully written* and enjoyed the descriptive prose as a catalyst to rich, nuanced, and vivid imagery.

Abbie also described the point at which she reached a dilemma in her reading experience. *I almost put the book down and said that was it*. Rather than quit the read, she chose instead to end the journaling task. Abbie found herself ... *lose[ing] the essence of the whole flow of [the story]* ... . She found it too hard to figure out elements of the story she did not understand let alone articulate the experience in writing. Abbie decided that ... *if I don't understand it, I don't understand it*. Essentially, she accepted the unknown and the accompanying sense of uncertainty. Conscious awareness of her felt sense of dis-ease at not being in a place of knowing created an option for Abbie to accept the discomfort—to *be uncomfortable in the experience—and carry on*. Abbie leaned into the “journey through liminality” (Mälkki & Green, 2014, p. 8), a transitional phase between her established meaning framework and the one not yet fully perceived, conceived, or received.

Abbie came to an awareness that she did not need to fully understand the story in order to experience, through the eyes of the characters, *a glimpse into maybe what their life is like and what's important to them*. In other words, the lived experience of a distant other (Boler, 1997) in a lifeworld context different than her own. She seemed to effect other-oriented perspective taking as a genuine form of empathy (Coplan, 2011) and testimonial reading as she accepted the task to challenge her assumptions and worldview (Boler, 1997). “The challenge to undertake ‘our own work’ accepts a responsibility founded on the discrepancy of our [the reader’s and the characters’] experiences” (Boler, 1997, p. 262). Abbie accepted occupying a state of uncertainty—experienced cognitively, affectively, and as embodied sensing—and gained self-awareness around the urge and the effort to figure out the unknown. Compared to Letitia and Rose, Abbie engaged less frequently in attempts to predict the storyline. She recognized that the need to know obstructed and restricted the flow of the story for her.

Abbie made a conscious choice and formed the intention to allow the story to be as it was, to not get *lost* in the mechanics of journaling, to not be bound by thinking rooted in her own settler-colonial lifeworld, and to not be limited by her expectations of storytelling and reading based on her previous lived experience as a reader. Reading is a conscious act lived within the conditioned lifeworld of the one reading, and yet, in this first encounter with Indigenous Literatures, Abbie realized the potential present in the experience to engage with the story in a way that was not completely bound, constrained, reduced, or determined by the experiences of her settler-colonial lifeworld. Abbie, in effect, turned down the volume on her settler-colonial mindset to intentionally shift her attention and open to the experience of reading *Celia’s Song*. It was an intentional choice to quiet the *being* and open to the *becoming*.

This choice to engage in the reading encounter and not be bound by her own knowledge and knowing, or lack thereof, aligns with phenomenological reduction, a fundamental method of phenomenological inquiries designed to allow understandings and insights to emerge and arise. It is

understood that what we know is based on what we experience (Creely, 2018; Eberle, 2014; Kovach, 2009; Neubauer et al., 2019; Nicholls, 2019; Vagle, 2018), and further that limitations inherent to observation and language filter our understanding of the lived experience of another (Aagaard, 2017; Eberle, 2014; van Manen, 2015). In this research context, understanding of the lived experience of another was mitigated by the lifeworld of the reader, the relationship between reader and text, language, metaphors, and storytelling style.

Claire Nicholls (2019) points to *epoché*, *eidetic reduction*, *bracketing*, and *bridling* as terms used to denote notions of phenomenological reduction. She likens these concepts to the reflective, critical self-reflective, and reflexive practices broadly employed by qualitative researchers in which researchers meta-cognate. Meta-cognition—thinking about your own thinking—is fundamental to interpretive phenomenology and involves navigating various tensions in and between personal worldviews, theoretical frameworks, and relevant research literature (Nicholls, 2019). I extend these concepts from phenomenological reduction to the notion of liminality as a transitional phase between established and emerging meaning frameworks (Mälkki & Green, 2014), and the process of negotiating contested meanings (Mezirow, 2000) with respect to transformative learning and transformation as growth. With regard to the practice of phenomenological reduction, bracketing is a process of suspending prior knowledge and knowing to take up an open stance to the phenomenon of interest. Bridling, on the other hand, is a nuance approach that accounts for the lifeworld of the researcher by placing an emphasis on becoming more aware of and familiar with their own personal perspectives rather than attempting to suspend or bracket them out (Nicholls, 2019; Vagle, 2018). The practices of bracketing and bridling are specifically applicable to the hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenological approach used in this study. I suggest that they are also applicable as reading practices for settler readers engaging with Indigenous Literatures based on Abbie's reading experience of *Celia's Song*.

Bracketing and bridling pivot on conscious awareness of oneself as both in and of the world. Self-awareness of one's own subjectivity and intersubjectivity, allows the possibility for a reader to gain perspective on the plurality of knowledges and ways of knowing and being. From this perspective a reader of Indigenous Literatures becomes more capable of embracing the reading encounter in a manner that honours the art form, is respectful and non-judgemental. Such a perspective may also foster a sense of wonder and facilitate a stance of compassionate curiosity. Reflective and reflexive self-awareness further enables a reader to experience the unknown, not as unknowable, but as an area to lean into learning with a sense of agency to explore other sources of knowledge, knowing, and experiencing beyond the book. A sense of openness and acceptance of the story and storytelling, and an intention to fill knowledge gaps, especially related to settler-colonial and Indigenous histories, is an approach that is expansive, reflective, and reflexive. Engaging with Indigenous Literatures and sharing one's reading experience in professional, social, and familial spheres then becomes an act of reciprocity in appreciation of the knowledge and knowing shared through the story and storytelling.

As I dwelled in Abbie's experience reading *Celia's Song*, the similarities between how she approached the text and how I was approaching this phenomenological inquiry emerged and became obvious. This "careful, reflexive, contemplative examination of how it is to *be* in the world" (Vagle, 2018, p. 21), the utter *in-ness* of lived experience, requires a researcher engaged in phenomenological inquiry to dwell in the gathered materials. Finlay (n.d.) concurs, adding that to dwell "with the minutiae of data ... forces us to slow down, to pause, to re-examine taken-for-granted assumptions and the idea that we already know this phenomenon. In the dwelling we linger and become absorbed in what is being revealed (as cited in Vagle, 2018, p. 116). Finlay (n.d., 2011) practices phenomenology as a researcher and therapist. She exercises an open, non-judgemental approach as a phenomenological attitude in both spheres of practice. Finlay (n.d.) further describes this attitude as "one filled with wonder and curiosity about the world—while simultaneously holding at bay prior assumptions and knowledge" (n.p.). I

suggest that what Vagle (2018) and Finlay (n.d.) articulate with respect to research is directly applicable and transferrable to settler readers of Indigenous Literatures. It charts a path for settler readers to be intentional in their attention to Indigenous storytelling and to honour Indigenous Literatures by respectfully engaging in and with the knowledge and knowing they convey. The ideal phenomenological encounter Finlay (n.d.) describes between researcher and participant can also be read with reader as subject and text as object:

we strive to leave our worlds behind and enter into the other's worlds in order to reflect on their meanings and experience. This attitude involves a special attentiveness and presence: an ability to dwell with the situations the person describes, to listen with an ear attuned to detail, nuance, turns of phrase. This attitude involves us separating ourselves as far as possible from value judgments and theoretical constructs.

The *we* in this excerpt becomes the reader. The *other[s]* are the characters, their experiences, and their lifeworlds. To separate from value judgments and constructs, then, is to suspend the settler mindset as a confluence of a colonial lifeworld. There was agreement among Abbie and the other reader-participants during the book club discussion that *Celia's Song* denied a consumptive style of reading for entertainment. These readers had a sense that a more contemplative approach would yield a different reading experience. The idea to reread the text was bandied about near the end of the book club session. The final one-on-one interviews, however, revealed the idea as just that; affect without action. These reader-participants were not willing to be present in the prose of *Celia's Song* any longer. As Kaisu Mälkki and Larry Green (2014) attest, "the process of transformative learning entails the kind of notable existential challenge and rocky path that, if the actualities of the process were clearly explicated, it may elicit a more ambivalent response" (p. 7). Maracle (2014) eloquently captures the essence of the struggle: "... no one wished to face anything that required that they face themselves" (p. 94). Reading Indigenous Literatures requires settler readers to commit to the task of facing themselves as beings in

and of the world; as beings becoming through repetition and reproduction, or through transformation and change.

### Transformation as Growth

As artistic compositions, literature exposes the subjective qualities and objective forms of lived experience that may otherwise be shrouded in assumption, bias, or arrogance. It alters *what* and *how* a reader perceives as the qualities and forms of lived experience are distilled and deciphered, rearranged and reassembled into new perceptions. Dewey (1938/2015) elucidates the idea of art as a sluice that opens us to allow our sensed, lived experience to flow between known and unknown, practiced and possible.

Familiarity induces indifference, prejudice blinds us; conceit looks through the wrong end of a telescope and minimizes the significance possessed by objects in favor of the alleged importance of the self. Art throws off the covers that hide the expressiveness of experienced things; it quickens us from the slackness of routine and enables us to forget ourselves by finding ourselves in the delight of experiencing the world about us in its varied qualities and forms. It intercepts every shade of expressiveness found in objects and orders them in a new experience of life. (p. 108)

I suggest that the potential for transformative learning in adult settler readers of Indigenous Literatures exists in this way as movement between a liminal space conditioned by settler-colonial lifeworlds and an imaginal space of potentiality from which active thought can manifest into form as thoughtful action. The concept of reading for reconciliation implies this potentiality. That it is actualized in meaningful and substantive ways as an outcome of reading (Boler, 1997; Hanson, 2017) and shared-reading (Davis, 2008; Long, 2003; Rehberg Sedo & Fuller, 2014) is anything but certain. By granting research access to the lived experience of reading and discussion of *Celia's Song*, the reader-participants

provided experiential insight and understanding of the phenomenon. The following section weaves this insight and understanding in and through transformative learning theory, research, and practice.

People in Canada are called to think and act in new ways in this post-TRC era (Canada's Residential Schools: Reconciliation, 2015). To think and act in new ways is, in essence, to transform. Within the context of adult learning, transformative learning is generally theorized as a significant shift in perspective based on reflection and assessment of problematic assumptions, leading to revised beliefs, attitudes, and values that are subsequently justified, validated, and acted upon. Jack Mezirow (2000) describes the adult learning process specifically as "a phased and often transformative process of meaning becoming clarified through expanded awareness, critical reflection, validating discourse, and reflective action as one moves towards a fuller realization of agency" (p. 25).

This reading experience was a first foray into Indigenous Literatures for Abbie, Hazel, and Letitia, and a second encounter for Rose. For the most part, confusion pervaded the reading experience. However confusing the reader-participants perceived the book to be, the author did indeed open up a new narrative world that was experienced in cognitive, affective, and embodied ways. Mezirow (2000) states that "[a]s there are no fixed truths or totally definitive knowledge, and because circumstances change, the human condition may be best understood as a continuous effort to negotiate contested meanings" (p. 3). Indeed, the book club discussion was a process of negotiating contested meanings; those held by the readers and those conveyed and portrayed in *Celia's Song*. At times this process of negotiation was inhibited by avoidance and denial responses including interruptions, silence, and humour as controlling speech patterns that limited the depth and breadth of conversation extended beyond the text.

Mezirow (2011) describes communicative learning as dialogue involving "dialectical and critically reflective thinking" (p. 20), based on Jürgen Habermas (1991), and cites requirements for exemplary

discourse reflecting the democratic ideals of respect for self and others, and, importantly, a willingness to engage openly in diversity. Mezirow (1991, 2000, 2011) uses the term *validating* to describe relational discourse that fosters recognition, reassessment, and modification of the assumptions that structure and frame meaning perspectives. As a qualifier for a significant aspect of transformative learning, the word seems presumptive in the context of the study findings. At times during the group discussion, conversation actually became a validation of established reading lifeworlds and settler-colonial mindsets. I would further use the word *closed* to describe the mindsets of the reader-participants given Mezirow's (2011) call for willing and *open* engagement with diversity. These readers repeatedly admitted ignorance with respect to settler-colonial history and Indigenous knowledges and knowing. Hazel, Letitia, and Rose did not indicate any interest, inspiration, or agency to lean into learning to fill knowledge gaps by accessing other sources of information or experiences. The story and the storying disturbed and disrupted established meaning perspectives in these readers. It appeared that discursive moments of interruption, silence, and humour served to contain the conversation within a tolerable range of emotion. This included emotions provoked by the content of *Celia's Song* as well as those provoked by the social, cultural, historical, and contemporary context of the story.

Mälkki (2010) isolates elements of transformative learning (e.g., Mezirow, 1991, 2000) and the neurobiological theory of emotions (e.g., Damasio, 1994, 1999, 2003) that pertain specifically to reflection. She identifies a propensity for "biologically anchored emotions" (p. 56) to support a consistent meaning perspective and, therefore, act as a counterforce to reflection. Mälkki (2010) labels the uncomfortable feelings aroused by recognition and assessment of problematic assumptions as "edge-emotions" (p. 49), and emphasizes the importance of recognizing edge-emotions as they arise. She contends that "the essential issue is to pay attention to these emotions as physical and psychological indications of our thinking possibly being oriented[,] not toward openly examining the situation or ourselves in it[,] but on the contrary[,] toward restoring balance and returning to the comfort zone [of

our established meaning perspectives]” (pp. 56–57). In this statement, Mälkki (2010) highlights emotions as consciousness arising in the body and the mind, *and* in relation to cognition. This implies, then, that a responsive approach to edge-emotions must also be holistic in nature to address the cognitive, affective, and embodied experiencing that arises in awareness as “internal obstacles” (Boler, 1997, p. 262) to reflective and reflexive thought. To that end, I suggest practices incorporating curiosity as a response to cognitive awareness, self-compassion as a response to emotional awareness, and mindful breathing and the releasing of sensed bodily tensions as a response to embodied awareness of edge-emotions.

I believe that Mezirow (2000) points to the concept of edge-emotions when he states that “[a] defining condition of being human is our urgent need to understand and order the meaning of our experience, to integrate it with what we know to avoid the threat of chaos” (p. 3). The idea of chaos echoes in Edmund O’Sullivan’s (2012) definition of transformative learning as the “creative function of cognitive crisis” (p. 171). It reverberates again in Mälkki and Green’s (2014) description of liminality as a phase of transformative learning in which meaning perspectives are confronted, questioned, and challenged. The authors investigate the process of transformative learning experientially through a phenomenological lens, and position transformative learning as a difficult journey to a desirable destination and suggest the journey is often overshadowed by the outcome in both research and practice. Mälkki and Green (2014) position transformation as a “notable existential challenge ... that, if the actualities of the process were clearly explicated, ... may elicit a more ambivalent response” (p. 7). They describe liminality, edge emotions, and comfort zone as experiential aspects of disruptions to established meaning perspectives.

Specifically, Mälkki and Green (2014) characterize “transformation as a journey through liminality” (p. 8). They identify this as a transitional phase and highlight the difficulties experienced “in a state between two sets of meaning frameworks” (p. 8)—the established meaning framework and the one not yet fully perceived/conceived/received. The authors describe this as a letting go and a giving up

of the “relative stability of one configuration (of self) in preparation for a new way of being” (p. 8). In other words, the sense of relative stability—the ability to rest in knowing—can be destabilized by some phenomenon that draws attention to the fundamental truth that all meaning perspectives, all configurations of self are, in fact, changeable and changing. Knowledge is contextual, which makes it complex, often contradictory, and always impermanent. As Neilsen Glenn (2002) attests, “[k]nowledge, like fiction itself, is liminal space. It never arrives. It is always on the brink. It is always a waiting space, a green room, ... a journey” (p. 208).

I will now describe discursive moments of interruption, silence, and humour that arose in the two-hour book club discussion. I suggest that these moments demonstrate how the group talk held the readers in a liminal space that activated and extended the experience of uncomfortable edge-emotions and limited reflective and reflexive thought when the story content and context challenged established meaning perspectives. To be clear, this is not to excuse the lack of critical and self-critical inner work undertaken by this group of readers. Rather, it is to describe and interpret the lived experience to, ultimately, identify ways to foster and facilitate the type of dialogue Mezirow (1991, 2000, 2011) intended when he qualified it as validating.

### *Interruptions*

Frequently during the two-hour discussion a speaker would pause in mid-sentence, thought suspended. It was as if the next thought was coalescing, translating itself into words so that it could be shared. Often another speaker would fill the space created by the pause in speech and the momentum of the emerging thought seemed to subside and dissipate, lost to the flow of conversation. This idea of talk interrupting and unraveling thought was reflected in the book: “Celia doesn’t want to talk just yet. She want’s Alice’s words to roll around in her mind for a while. Talking stops this from happening” (Maracle, 2014, p. 107).

Sometimes one person would fill in or flush out the words of another as they spoke. I interpreted this as an indication of the level of familiarity among book club members who had more than a decade of shared experience reading and discussing books. This form of interruption occurred frequently as voiced acknowledgement of a shared experience or, at a minimum, an assumption of consensus, concurrence, or cohesion in thought. Finlay (2011) speaks to the need for critical awareness of our own subjectivity as phenomenological researchers and the intersubjectivity that can arise between researcher and participant. Specifically, she draws attention to “the shared intersubjective world and the existence of a social reciprocity of perspective” (p. 76) based on the work of Peter Ashworth (1996). I extend this focus of critical awareness to the intersubjectivity of the reader-participants evident during the group discourse and, particularly, the tendency for one reader to presume what another is thinking, feeling, and sensing based on their shared-reading history and similar reading lifeworlds. It is possible that this form of interruption expanded and/or extended what was in the process of being expressed, but it is also possible that it redirected and/or reshaped the original intent of the speaker.

At other times during the two-hour discussion, the person speaking would be interrupted by one or more others adding to, clarifying, or correcting what was said. This seemed to be the typical conversation style of the group. Many times many people spoke at once in response to a question or comment. When multiple thoughts were voiced simultaneously, then all went unheard, drowned out by the flood of voices. Any indication of transformative learning washed away in a wave of indistinguishable words and voices—lost to the audio recording and transcript, as well as to the individuals present and participating in person. A sense of what was said was accessible in real time and, yet, without being articulated and confirmed, quickly dissipated like the flicker of a memory or a dream. As observing researcher, I was left to wonder what was said as the singular succumbed to the plural. When everyone

spoke at once in an inaudible torrent of voices, moments of insight were lost in the tumult. The balance between speaking and listening in conversation is delicate and determinant.

At many points in the group discussion, Rose interrupted the discourse, took the helm, and set a new course as she alternated between reading silently and reading aloud from her journal. In the moments when she read silently, she seemed wholly unaware of the conversation circulating around her. As a practiced notetaker, Rose found the journaling task to be well within her repertoire of writing skills. She typically writes a brief synopsis of each book she consumes as a reference and reminder of what she has already read. She took more notes with this reading, interpreting the journaling task as an assignment. Rose had not read her journal until the discussion and, as she referenced it, things she had missed during the reading experience began to make sense. The act of journaling and, then, reading her journal notes during the discussion afforded Rose another level of sense-making that was specific to her own reading experience. At one point, Rose made a new connection between scenes from different points in the narrative, suggested it as an overarching theme, and opened this concept up for discussion. Trying on new perspectives and new points of view is a step toward transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000; Lawrence & Cranton, 2015). Her journal, as a record of her reading experience, was a catalyst to expanded awareness for herself as well as for others in the group.

Rose frequently changed the trajectory of discourse by speaking from her notes. For example, she shifted the conversation from Indigenous spirituality and connection with nature to an early scene in the book. In this instance, injecting her journal notes truncated the volley of words already in play. Rose caused the conversation to retreat from one point of discussion and pivot back to the text. The others in the group did not intervene to smooth the transition from one topic to another but rather allowed the conversation to jump and skip around each time Rose interrupted to inject another nugget of her reading experience from her journal. It was as if the discourse, as a collaboration among many voices, became an entity in and of itself with only forward-facing motion and momentum.

### *Silence*

Often, silence acted as a dynamic of discourse that truncated discussion topics. At several points in the group dialogue, questions and comments meant to extend the discussion beyond the book and into a broader conversation of colonialism, reconciling, and decolonizing were met with silence. At other times, a reader would comment on a passage from the book that they had found interesting with no response either by way of eliciting further explanation of their reading experience or picking up on the comment as an opening to take the discussion to a deeper level. One such moment occurred when Letitia was inspired to pose a question. *What's the plan to move forward? What are the steps now?* This suggested she was aware of the need for action. It is important to note here that the notion of moving forward is, according to Rosemary Nagy (2020), an imposition of colonial time that “requests Indigenous peoples to *progress* through Eurocentric timelines of ‘moving forward’ that exclude the return of land and other substantive measures” (p. 222). Nagy (2020) positions this as a failure to recognize and honour Indigenous temporality in settler-colonial concepts of reconciliation. In asking the question, however limited by a colonial perspective of time, there was a sense that Letitia was looking for direction in the form of concrete steps to enact change. Her questions were met with silence and went unanswered.

Early in the discussion, Abbie made a comment meant to generate discussion beyond the book. When no other readers weighed in, this line of conversation went no further. It was evidence that silence speaks. Perhaps it was that the reader-participants felt implicated in the events beyond the book and that conscious awareness would create an obligation to attend to their individual roles, as well as to their responsibility and response-ability. As readers they were, at a minimum, bystanders to a story, and engagement, whether cognitive, emotional, or embodied ended with the last page of the book. On the other hand, if a reader perceived herself as a witness, it would open her to an expanded experience of the narrative and an extended role beyond the book. I sensed the silences as an unwillingness, even a resistance, to step into a space of liminality (Neilsen Glenn, 2002; Mälkki & Green, 2014) that included

uncomfortable edge emotions (Mälkki, 2010; Mälkki & Green, 2014) and uncertainty as fear of the unknown.

### *Humour*

When the book talk turned serious, Letitia would often inject humour. This invariably led to laughter, diffused the tension, and steered the course of discourse away from uncomfortable conversation and emotions. In one such instance, Letitia, who admittedly has little to no knowledge of Indigenous cultures and traditions, introduced some levity into a very serious, heavy, sensitive, and potentially explosive topic by laughing at the idea of families trying to live in harmony under one roof (of a longhouse). Humour served to deflect discomfort, contain the confrontation, ease the dis-ease. Again, when the discussion delved into the poignant backstory of Celia, Letitia interjected comic relief, offering a point of humour to pivot to a calmer, more tolerable spectrum of emotions. This had the effect of navigating away from edge emotions and circumventing critical reflection. It is possible that humour was enacted here as resistance to critical reflection; as a means to retreat from liminality—a sense of chaos accompanying the unknown—and return to a sense of safety in the known.

Letitia uses humour again to redirect a disagreement among the group members regarding the intent of the Indian Residential School System to a more agreeable topic. She was unwilling to allow this line of conversation to unfold further and shut the conversation down in an attempt to dispel the discomfort. She steered the conversation back to the content of the book by referencing a character and his assessment of men as, in Letitia's words, *not deep thinkers*. In doing this, it seemed that Letitia circumvented the momentum and trajectory of the discussion on Residential Schools to settle the unsettling discourse, mitigate the disagreement, and return to the book as a form of entertainment. Letitia's bid to shift the course of discourse was met with laughter that lightened the atmosphere in the room. It was a signal to the others to move on from this topic that inspired contentious discussion. I interpreted this as a form of resistance as Letitia, unwilling to allow the conversation to unfold further,

curtailed the discussion. This was an example of one member in a group discussion restricting dialogue. Laughter and more banter followed suit, and the conversation did not circle back at any point to the Indian Residential School System. The moment provided experiential insight into theorization by Randee Lipson Lawrence and Patricia Cranton (2015) regarding the influential role relationships in transformative growth, both its facilitation and its hinderance (p. 76). It had the potential effect of maintaining and perpetuating unchallenged perspectives and beliefs, and, ultimately, hindering, and delaying transformative learning.

At another point in the discussion, the seriousness of comments made by Abbie was followed by Hazel sharing lived experience focused on self and layered with levity. It had the effect of easing the disease. Hazel spoke about her reading experience as witnessed by her husband who *saw that [she] was kind of struggling* and aware that was unusual for her. She brought levity to her reading experience by speculating the real reason I had asked them to read this book. Her imagined scenario was met with laughter and the exchange had the effect of mitigating the emotional overwhelm she felt with talk about the violent events in the story.

“Every experience is a moving force” (Dewey, 1938/2015, p. 38) that, in some way, influences the next experience (p. 37). It is part of the process of expanding awareness or, to use another phrase, becoming conscious. Lawrence and Cranton (2015) label consciousness as “the central process of transformative learning” (p. 71). This process of being and becoming conscious is fundamental to the authors’ theorization of transformation as growth. Lawrence and Cranton (2015) attribute an observed lack of awareness and apparent resistance to change in research participants to being unconscious rather than to a lack of ability. “At times staying unconscious has its advantages when to do otherwise would cause pain and confusion. Yet, it is only through allowing the pain and confusion to enter the conscious mind that transformation can occur” (p. 71). The pain and confusion Lawrence and Cranton (2015) highlight as part of the process of becoming conscious align with edge-emotions (Mälkki, 2010) as

internal obstacles (Boler, 1997) in a space of liminality on the path to transformation (Mälkki & Green, 2014). Lawrence and Cranton (2015) also speak to allowing the discomfort and point to the need for a responsive approach to the difficult cognitive, emotional, and embodied experiencing that marks the transition from a previous meaning perspective to a possible meaning perspective to a practiced meaning perspective in settler readers of Indigenous Literatures. I suggest that once the discomfort experienced in the liminal space becomes greater than the discomfort of transformational change, then we move into an imaginal space where potentiality and possibility exist as the creative function of cognitive[, emotional, and embodied] crisis” (O’Sullivan, 2012, p. 171). It is in an imaginal space that Maxine Greene (1995) feels herself “plunged into all kinds of reconceiving and revisualizing. ... moving from discovery to discovery; ... revising, and now and then renewing, the terms of [her] life” (pp. 4-5). Transformative learning and growth are about revising and renewing the terms of our lives in this lifeworld context where reckoning, reconciliation, and reciprocity are steps on the path forward.

## Chapter 6: Outro

Only in its physical form is this the final chapter. I intend it is an Outro to bookend the Intro[duction] and complete the dissertation in and as form. The notion of an Outro to end a thesis or dissertation is borrowed from film to encompass a sense of dynamism and fluidity (Higginson & McLeod, 2018). Rather than formulating a final conclusion, an Outro reviews, adds to, and extends thinking (p. 365). It connects what is known with what is yet to be known, instilling a sense of being and becoming. As an expression of thought, the Outro represents a beginning point; a new loop through learning that is perceived as a “continuous spiral” (Dewey, 1938/2015, p. 79).

The intent of this research endeavour was to bring a new level of awareness, understanding, and insight to the experiential phenomenon of settler readers engaging with Indigenous Literatures. The literature review (Chapter 1) and theoretical framework (Chapter 2) of the dissertation present academic theoretical concepts of reconciliation and transformative learning. Theory is often presented as linear, sequential, or chronological; as steps in a staircase or scaffolding structured to take us from one level of understanding to another. It is through the lived experience of four of the seven reader-participants (Chapters 4 and 5) that I approached an experiential understanding of reconciliation as a settler-colonial imperative, and of the transformative learning and growth required to meet Indigenous Peoples and communities where they are now—primarily focused on resurgence rather than reconciliation (Hanson, 2017). Indigenous Literatures offer settler Canadians a means to come to know Indigenous ways of being and to reckon with the truth of colonization past and present. It is an invitation into liminality as a necessary waypoint between assumption and awareness, repetition and renewal. It is an invitation for connection, conversation, and critical reflection as grist for reflective and reflexive action. It is about being and becoming in relation with knowledge and knowing, people and places, the land and the water.

Richard Wagamese (2016) explains that, as human beings, the power in story is “[n]ot to tell people how to think and feel and therefore know—but through our stories allow them to discover

questions within themselves” (p. 172). Lee Maracle (2017) shares her experiential understanding of story and storytelling. “I was brought up in story. No one disciplined me by spanking or scoldings; rather, the old people watching me told me a story and I was expected to figure out my behavioural issues from the story” (p. 40). *Celia’s Song* (Maracle, 2014) is a means and a way for readers to step into their agency to find out and figure out as individuals being and becoming within a lifeworld context that calls settler Canadians to the reckoning, to the reconciliation, and to the reciprocity necessary to live in respectful relationship with the First Peoples.

Phenomenology centres on phenomena as they arise in consciousness. The research practice of phenomenology as methodology centred this research endeavour on the lived experience of seven adult settler readers who individually and collectively engaged with *Celia’s Song* by Sto:lo author Maracle (2014), a single textual example of Indigenous Literatures. The reader-participants granted access to their lived experience at four points of research contact: 1) an initial one-on-one interview to establish the reading lifeworld of each participant; 2) a written journal documenting the individual cognitive, affective, and embodied reading experience as it unfolded; 3) audio recorded and transcribed group discourse to illuminate the shared-reading experience, and; 4) a follow-up one-on-one interview to reflect on the overall reading experience of each participant. The focus of this inquiry was to gather a rich array of phenomenological material to create an environment for careful reflection on lived-through experience to allow insights to form, arise, and be encountered as knowing (van Manen, 2017b).

Witnessing the phenomenon of reading *Celia’s Song* as and how it arose as lived experience in seven women of settler ancestry necessitated that I focus on the truth in truth and reconciliation. I recognize that, in my desire and haste to be part of the reconciliation, I circumvented the unsettling, disorienting process of receiving and fully perceiving the truth storied by Indigenous Peoples. The story of Canada, and of Canadians, is catastrophically incomplete without the story of the First Peoples of this land; it is the warp without the weft in the fabric of the multitude of nations connected to this place.

Reckoning with the truth is the beginning of reconciling relationally in substantive versus superficial ways. I suggest that finding a place for the truth to live *in* us allows for the truth to live *through* us.

I understand the lived experience of the study participants to largely be one of reading as reckoning. In engaging with *Celia's Song*, these non-Indigenous readers entered a liminal space that oscillated between confusion and personal distress (see Boler, 1997; Coplan, 2011), resistance and acceptance. Of the four readers who shared their lived experience of the text via all four points of access established by the research methods, one reached a point of acceptance of the truth storied in *Celia's Song* and engaged with curiosity and compassion for the experiencing of Indigenous Peoples past and present.

"A colonial mindset held sway in my upbringing, permeating all I have come to know—it's the air I breathe" (Neilsen Glenn, 2017, p. 303). This statement suffices by way of explanation for where I and other settlers may find ourselves in the moment. It does not explain or address the inclination to remain here. We are learning new ways to perceive and respond to the decisions, actions, and events that have transpired, rooted in a colonial mindset. Accountability is leveled, apologies are spoken, address and redress are carved out in Calls to Action. Yet, if the inclination to think and act in, by, and through a colonial mind set is not also brought into conscious awareness, then the thoughts that manifest in actions that breach the humanity of another will continue. Change will take the form of new labels applied to contemporary circumstances and situations that replicate historical harms. Conscious awareness is an opening. It allows one to move from a liminal space of being marked by uncertainty, resistance, denial, and avoidance, to an imaginal space of becoming marked by creativity, potentiality, and possibility. Freire (1970/2018) defines this potential as "untested feasibility" (p. 102).

For conscious awareness of a settler-colonial mindset to act as an opening, I suggest that the next step is to recognize that we do not need to be bound to or by the thinking that has, as Lorri Neilsen Glenn (2017) attests, permeated all we know. If we are consciously aware that how we think and what

we think is constructed by our lifeworld context past and present, we can open to the idea that there are a multiplicity of ways of being expressed in, by, and through the lifeworlds of others. Indigenous Literatures, as a literary genre, is one point of access to these expressions. We routinely suspend our lifeworld connection when we engage with a novel and enter into a fictional world created by an author. Victor Nell (1988) contends that we give books explicit permission to enfold us in alternate realities (p. 2). For readers, the experience of reading is like breathing; it is both a voluntary and an involuntary process. It is with intention that a reader picks up a book, taps the Kindle app on an iPad, or dons headphones to link to Audible. It is not something that requires attention to the sensory perceptions that pervade their lifeworld in the moment of reading. A reader is transported in, by, and through the experience of story. What if a reader were to actually form a reading intention and, then, place awareness on their settler-colonial mindset as they read Indigenous Literatures? With awareness and intention, a reader can quiet their settler-colonial mind; practice bracketing and bridling (Nicholls, 2019; Vagle, 2018) in phenomenological terms. The phenomenological research practices of bracketing and bridling point to reflexivity as a process of ongoing, critical examination of reader perspective, positionality, insight, and background, and the influence these exert on the reading experience. I locate these practices on a spectrum between awareness of thinking (bridling) and suspension of thinking (bracketing). These phenomenological research practices can become reading practices to intentionally turn down the volume, even silence, the thinking that privileges linear concepts of time and that defaults to an urgent need to predict and to know. When a settler reader takes this approach to quiet the mind, I suggest the heart will open to the cognitive, emotional, and embodied experiencing of another in the context of the lifeworld of the other. Quiet the mind. Open the heart. I suggest this is as a pathway to “[b]e joined, transported, and transformed” (Wagamese, 2017, p. 172) in, by, and through story.

The words of Wagamese (2016) add motion, emotion, and momentum to the journey of discovering a state of being connected, conscious, and whole. It is through story that our sense of

separateness dissipates, even if only for the moment of reading, or listening, or watching. Through story we viscerally embody the experience of another; we see it, hear it, touch it, taste it, smell it, feel it, know it. Through story we reside in the mind, emotions, and body of another. We gain access to the felt sense of an experience as received and perceived. We appreciate how reactions and responses arise in the body and then manifest into patterns of belief and behaviour; patterns of affect and effect. We attune to the experience of another and weave it with our own so that, in the moment of reading, we are joined. We temporarily suspend our own lifeworld to attune to the lifeworld of another. For settler readers of Indigenous Literatures, it can be a matter of stepping into a liminal space, a threshold between the known and unknown. It is a space of feeling unsettled, uncertain, uncomfortable. There is a sense of being wholly unprepared and incapable of predicting where the step across that threshold will lead. There is anxiety, fear, and dread. There is resistance. And, yet, it also brings one to possibility. I suggest that it is in the joining—in the dissipation of separateness and an emerging sense of oneness—that we are transported from a liminal space to an imaginal space. Learning and growth takes root to flourish as transformation within and beyond the imaginal space. It is in this imaginal space that Edmund O’Sullivan (2012) situates transformative learning as the creative function of cognitive crisis. I expand and extend this assertion by including affective and embodied with cognitive experiencing to offer a more holistic understanding of transformation. With respect to embodied experiencing, specifically, it is important to note that transformative learning is actional only through the body as speech, as prose, as song, as dance, as physical action in relationship and in community.

Marie Battiste (2013), Jane McMillan (2019), and Sherry Pictou (2019) clearly articulate colonial ideology as thought and actions defined, confined, and refined within a lifeworld collective that manifests in settler-colonial mindsets that exclude Indigenous identity, temporality, relational perspectives, knowledges, and ways of being. Indigenous Literatures disrupt dominant and hegemonic colonial narratives and mythology. Eurocentric assumptions and attitudes are deeply rooted and

continue to legitimize discrimination and racism in both individual and institutional spheres (Battiste, 2013). This was evident as the reader-participants shared their early life experience that related to the text and fed the inclination to think and act in, by, and through a settler-colonial mindset. Thus, the onus lies with settler society to recognize, acknowledge, and disrupt persistent and pervasive colonial ideologies that shape thought and deeds. Thinking in new ways involves settlers recognizing and acknowledging historical harms and the contemporary consequences that persist. Acting in new ways requires deeper awareness and inner work to address the inclination to reproduce the harms under new monikers.

Battiste (2013) maintains that Eurocentric knowledge is universally accepted as the definitive standard by which Indigenous lifeways are judged to be deficient and subsequently diminished, marginalized, and excluded. Colonization disrupted, dismantled, and re-defined Indigenous societies (McMillan, 2019). Maracle (2014) stories the disruption, the dismantling, and the re-defining of an Indigenous community, the connections between and among people (including ancestors), as well as to the land and other-than-human beings. What academic scholars depict as the past, present, and possible future experiencing of Indigenous Peoples (see, for example, Battiste, 2013; Hanson, 2017; Maracle, 2017; McMillan, 2019; Nagy, 2020; Pictou, 2019), Maracle (2014) vividly stories through the cognitive, affective, and embodied experiencing of the fictional characters that come to life and live through *Celia's Song*.

Testimony at the TRC hearings laid bare the historical trauma perpetrated in and through the Indian Residential School System, and the generational consequences that persist for individuals, families, and communities. The negative repercussions of the colonial ideology that led to the establishment of residential schools persist today in systems of child welfare, justice, education, and health care. Effectively, the TRC positioned settlers to witness the reality of Indigenous life experience (Nagy, 2020). Freire (1970/2018) defines witness as an action, "a confrontation with the world and with

people,” and as such, “it is a dynamic element which becomes part of the societal context in which it occurred; from that moment, it does not cease to affect that context” (p. 177). Indigenous Literatures extend the opportunity for settler readers to witness the reality of Indigenous life experience past, present, and future (Episkenew, 2009; Rymhs, 2016). I suggest reader witnessing can take the form of reckoning, reconciliation, or reciprocity as settler readers approach Indigenous Literatures with different levels of thoughtful, reflective, and reflexive attention. This can be fostered and facilitated by an intention to quiet the mind and open the heart; a phenomenological approach that creates an environment to allow insights to form, arise, and be encountered as shifts in perspective and as new knowing.

Critical self-reflection or reflexivity was not evident as a significant aspect of the reading experiencing in this study. Discourse dynamics such as humour, silence, and interruptions curtailed self-reflective and critical dialogue during the book club discussion. There was a sense that these settler readers did not appreciate the full extent to which the very foundation of their lifeworlds were constructed and structured on, by, and through colonialism. The work of Aubrey Hanson (2017) speaks to collective and individual consciousness as she seeks “to contribute to stronger understandings of what it means for non-Indigenous people to read Indigenous Literatures at this particular moment in Canadian public consciousness” (p. 70). Hanson (2017) focuses on “connections between Indigenous literatures and learning in order to better understand the reimagining embodied by the TRC’s transformative *Calls to Action*” (p. 69). Hanson (2017) argues that, “while the literary arts may be inspiring and reflecting Indigenous communities’ resurgence, a great deal of learning is required by the rest of Canada to develop responsive relationships with this work” (pp. 69–70).

Research suggests that fiction narratives have the potential to create a space and sense of safety to explore aspects of reality that pose a challenge to a reader’s beliefs, attitudes, and values (Davis, 2008; Hoggan & Cranton, 2015; Jarvis, 2006, 2012; Lawrence, 2012). Hoggan and Cranton (2015) find

fiction reading prompts meaningful critical reflection within the space between reader and the experience of fictional characters that mitigates the threat to a sense of self (p. 22). For all but one of the reader-participants this sense of safety was not experienced. The potential for a fiction narrative to mitigate the experience of liminality was not achieved in the encounter between these reader-participants and the text selected for the study. I suggest that in the absence of a sense of safety for self, critical reflection and critical self-reflection, as key aspects of transformative learning and growth, do not take place. Further, when a reading experience coalesces as self-oriented perspective taking, or pseudo empathy (Coplan, 2011), then efforts focus on mitigating the sense of threat to self and block the reflection (Mälkki, 2010) and reflexivity needed for meaning perspectives to evolve beyond what is known and lived within the lifeworld context of the reader. Research further suggests that the arts (Greene, 1995; Lawrence, 2012) and, specifically, fiction literature (Hoggan & Cranton, 2015) can evoke strong emotion as a catalyst to empathy, expanded awareness, reflection, and imagination leading to action (Hoggan & Cranton, 2015; Lawrence, 2012). I suggest that when empathy arises in the form of pseudo empathy or self-oriented perspective taking that Amy Coplan (2011) describes, then reflective, reflexive, and imaginative processes are curtailed and, perhaps, circumvented altogether. This allows a reader to withdraw from liminality in favour of an established sense of comfort in known and practiced ways of being.

The book challenged these readers to face the reality of their lifeworlds as socially constructed on colonial ideologies and to re-evaluate their assumptions. They did not participate in the reflection and reflexivity necessary to examine, re-evaluate, or revise beliefs to shift perspectives to be more inclusive. As a result, the cognitive, affective, and embodied reading experience of *Celia's Song* did not lead to transforming affect into action as the ultimate outcome of transformative learning and growth.

Given that the evidence in the academic research literature on reading points to the potential for engaging with Indigenous Literatures to disrupt hegemonic perspectives, power dynamics, and assumed

social structures regarding the relationship between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Peoples, I had viewed reading Indigenous-authored fiction as a provocation for critical reflection to question the world we live in, and critical self-reflection to question the role we play in that world. Other than for Abbie, this was not the case with this group of reader-participants.

According to Jarvis (2006), “fiction offers scope for imagining alternatives—different resolutions to familiar problems, alternative lifestyles, and moral choices” (p. 76), and this ability to think beyond unexamined assumptions is the basis for transformative learning. Only Abbie consistently linked the content of the fiction narrative to her lifeworld context as a demonstration of reflective and reflexive engagement. Leading into the study I had assumed that reconciliation and decolonization, as current social, cultural, and political issues in Nova Scotia, primed the reader-participants for transformative learning. These readers appeared to view themselves as separate from processes of reconciliation and decolonization based on gaps in knowledge, uncertainty as to ways to respond, a desire to avoid, and denial of accountability and participation in perpetuating colonial systems. They did not appear to be primed for transformative learning in the context of their settler-colonial lifeworlds.

Viewing another culture through a lens of its own making has the potential to create new insight and perspective on how people perceive the world and their experience in it (see, for example, Baron, 2015; Episknew, 2009). This did occur as reader-participants, particularly Abbie, described the story as providing a glimpse into what life is like in an Indigenous lifeworld context. I suggest this is evidence of a measure of transformative growth as described in the gardening metaphor Randee Lipson Lawrence and Patricia Cranton (2015) use to theorize transformative learning as a process of becoming conscious. This allows for transformative growth that is incremental and a product of time, phenomena, and lifeworld context. To this point, Elizabeth Long (2003) positions the formation and the ensuing activity of shared-reading groups as cultural practices and “creative behaviors that bring people into new relationships with themselves, each other, and the environing social world” (p. xvi). The conversation that revolved around

the shared reading experience of *Celia's Song* would not have taken place otherwise. These readers were articulating their beliefs, perspectives, and assumptions on things they do not typically consider or speak about. It was a clarification of their own thinking through dialogue as much as it was a clarification of what others in the group thought about issues referred to in the text and inferred by the text. This reading group privileged enjoyment and entertainment over challenge and critical reflection as Temma Berg (2008) observes in her research of book club members as they “seek intellectual stimulation but not at the expense of enjoyment” (p. 146). Many researchers find reading groups privilege books that provoke personal, affective responses (Addington, 2001; Barstow, 2003; Berg, 2008; Long, 1986; Ross et al., 2006). For this reading group, the content of the book and its broader social context fell outside of their tolerance for affective experiencing.

Kaisu Mälkki (2010) labels the uncomfortable feelings aroused by recognition and assessment of problematic assumptions as “edge-emotions” (p. 49). She contends that “the essential issue is to pay attention to these emotions as physical and psychological indications of our thinking possibly being oriented not toward openly examining the situation or ourselves in it but on the contrary toward restoring balance and returning to the comfort zone” (pp. 56-57). Mälkki (2010) points to the cognitive, emotional, *and* embodied experiencing that is part of transformative learning. This is key to the phenomenon of settler readers intentionally engaging with Indigenous Literatures. To be aware that uncomfortable embodied sensations are to be expected as part of the reading experience means being intentional in practicing a reading approach that is open and allowing of the full experience in order to be able to sit with the discomfort. Mälkki and Larry Green (2014), Lawrence and Cranton (2015), and others, demonstrate that part of the process of transformation is becoming aware of the inadequacy and, therefore, the instability of taken-for-granted meaning perspectives. We can no longer rest in the sense of certainty a perspective, belief, value, or point of knowledge once held. That certainty provided a

sense of comfort, familiarity, and safety. A sense of exposure and vulnerability to a new reality—a new awareness of what is, as it is newly perceived—enters the space once occupied by certainty.

Daniel Heath Justice (2018) pinpoints truth-telling as the essence of the story *Maracle* (2014) weaves. He states that “truth is often hard to face. There’s a lot of ugliness to sort out, a lot of unforgivable cruelty to contend with, losses that can’t be undone” (p. 160). This was the experience of the reader-participants. They read through an almost constant state of confusion and the overall experience was one of reading as reckoning. Only one reader-participant approached an experience of reading for reconciliation as described in the Introduction (Chapter 1). Abbie made a choice part way through the text to engage intentionally. The reading experience served to expand her awareness of what it was and is like to be Indigenous in a country structured on, by, and through colonialism. She gained a greater understanding of historical and generational trauma, as well as the contemporary consequences of the Indian Residential School System. Abbie leaned into learning by researching elements in the story that were unfamiliar to her. Several times during the book club discussion she attempted to steer the course of discourse beyond the book to include relevant social and cultural issues that related directly to the story.

I suggest that the research attitude Vagle (2018) prescribes for crafting a phenomenological inquiry is particularly applicable as a reading approach for settler readers to intentionally engage with Indigenous Literatures. With respect to phenomenology, Vagle (2018) advises a practice that centres on humility:

the kind of humility whereby we turn ourselves over to openness, wonder, and inquiry ... the kind of humility we engage when we try to stop being so certain of what we know and think ... the kind of humility evinced when we truly consider new things. (p. xvi)

Abbie chose to be open to the story as storied. She allowed herself to be transported into the flow of the narrative. The discomfort she experienced with the truth-telling was, for her, balanced by

the beauty in the prose, the strength and resolve of the female characters, and the solidarity of the community. She also approached a genuine form of empathy that remained other-oriented perspective taking (see Coplan, 2011). Abbie would recommend *Celia's Song* to other readers and expressed a desire to read other books by Maracle specifically, and Indigenous Literatures generally.

Phenomenological research means entering the lived experience of another as an interpretive process situated within the lifeworld context of the one experiencing. It involves a careful, reflective, contemplative examination of what a phenomenon is like and how it is to *be* in the world. I suggest this is the unconscious assumption we make as readers entering into the narrative world of another created by an author. Engaging with literature offers the possibility to suspend the in-ness of our own experiencing and join in the experience of another to know, feel, and embody vicariously what it is to be of, in, and moving through their world. Reading is, potentially, an immersive experience. Immersion is akin to dwelling (Finlay, n.d.; Vagle, 2018) in the gathered research material in phenomenological terms. Indigenous Literatures offer a cognitive, affective, and embodied reading experience that approaches a more holistic ontological understanding of what it is to *be* that extends and expands an epistemological understanding of what *is*. This creates a distinction between sources of knowledge and knowing about Indigenous perspectives and ways of being, reconciliation, and decolonization as presented by scholars such as Battiste (2013), Episkew (2009), McMillan (2019), and Pictou (2010), and sources of knowledge and knowing presented as fictional recounting and accounting by authors such as Maracle (2014) and Wagamese (2012). Both are valuable and necessary perspectives that serve epistemological and ontological forms and ways of knowing.

I grappled with a sense of discomfort throughout this research endeavour as an educated, mature, white woman exploring the lived experience of other educated, mature, white women. The current emphasis in social sciences research is on exploring and honouring the lived experience of people whose voices have historically been dismissed, diminished, denounced, dampened, and

deadened. It is a shift that begins to redress attitudes that centred and amplified white experience as the standard, dominant, and true expression of reality.

So how might this study advance ideals of social justice and equity, specifically processes of reconciliation and decolonization, when the focus is exclusively place on the experience of white readers? What has emerged is a sense that this study holds a mirror up to an experience of reading and highlights critical reflection—in its lack—as a determinant process in transformative learning. In this way, the findings may serve to confront and compel non-Indigenous adult readers to intentionally engage with Indigenous Literatures in more critically self-reflective ways, and, specifically, to quiet the settler-colonial mind as a reading practice rooted in phenomenology. As Maracle (2014) notes in *Celia's Song*, “no one wishe[s] to face anything that requires that they face themselves” (p. 94). To learn to think and act in new ways requires that we face ourselves.

To that end, I share that I was resistant to the positioning of white women as oppressive and racist; as deaf and blind to social injustices and inequities; as insensitive and uncaring toward the well-being of those who look, love, and live in ways that are unknown, unfamiliar, or simply uncomfortable to me. Observing, reflecting on, and writing about the lived experience of the reader-participants in this study has led me to confront my own resistance to concepts of white privilege and sensitized me to the ways in which I allow my perspectives and beliefs to go unchecked and unchallenged; the ways in which I avoid; the ways in which I resist; the ways in which I delay, defer, deflect, distract in order to remain comfortably ensconced in the status quo, embracing ignorance as a way of navigating the tough stuff. This research reflection captures one such moment during the initial interviewing phase of the study:

*Research journal entry Tuesday, March 29, 2022. I hesitate. Introducing the words reconciliation and decolonization into the easy flow of book talk suddenly feels like an abrupt intrusion. It calls forward and confronts conflicting thoughts and emotions. It forces articulation of what is in or outside of awareness; where attention rests or resists. I am aware of my practiced and perpetual tendency to skirt the uncomfortable in favour of appeased approval. Awareness of this*

*propensity sneaks up, then seeps in. This trait is, in fact, a cloak of politeness and positivity, modelled for me and expected of me, as a woman of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century vintage. I am now aware of this cloak as garb I can choose to don or discard.*

It is now abundantly obvious to me that what goes unseen goes unchallenged and unchanged. In other words, we cannot attend to what we do not attune to. Had I not spent the past 10 years in an academic setting where course content was offered up in a way that centred diverse voices and illuminated the ideals of inclusion and equity, I would have shown up to the reading and discussion of *Celia's Song* in exactly the same way these women had.

Attention, as awareness or consciousness, is a necessary precursor to intention. For Claire Nicholls (2019), intentionality is an indication that consciousness is actional. Edwin Creely (2018) explicates this interpretation of intentionality further by stating that it “implies both a doing and a sense in doing, with both action and meaning experienced together, tacitly, in consciousness” (p. 109). Creely (2018) aligns his understanding of intentionality to education research by emphasizing that learning is situated in *and* expressed through the one experiencing. He finds the nature of learning to be complex and often subtle, with learning understood as a socio-cultural phenomenon enmeshed in contextual understandings, discursive practices, and learning communities. Reading, like learning, is relational and situated within lifeworld contexts.

Heather McGregor and Michael Marker (2018) level responsibility on a researcher to be aware, humble, and creative in ensuring they give back, share knowledge, and be accountable on an ongoing basis to the relationships formed. It is important to note that I have a new awareness of and appreciation for the level of vulnerability created in, by, and through the research process. I inserted *Celia's Song* (Maracle, 2014), an Indigenous-authored text, into a wholly non-Indigenous space with no context or preparation to facilitate its reception with respect and reverence for place-based and deeply relational storytelling traditions and practices, or to foster engagement in generative and substantive ways. Hanson (2017) contends that good intentions alone are insufficient to the task of “creating

significant change in colonial dynamics” (p. 77). This research endeavour, rooted in good intentions, created a contrived reading experience for the participants rather than one inspired in, by, and through a desire to lean into growth and learning around reconciliation, reciprocity, and settler decolonization. The research process also created a situation in which a group settler readers, who would not otherwise have engaged in Indigenous Literatures, trusted me as researcher to story their lived reading experiences that others may study, critique, and possibly use to form opinions and value judgements about the participants as persons. There is a sense of vulnerable exposure with respect to a work of Indigenous literary art as well as to a group of voluntary research participants.

I was inspired by the notion of reciprocity in research that McGregor and Marker (2018) present, as well as by the dialogic, reciprocal, and reflective research approach espoused by Patricia Lather (2017), to introduce the concept of reader-witnessing to the participants during the one-on-one follow-up interviews. Witnessing is a theme in the book that the participants did not fully perceive, particularly in terms of extending the concept to themselves as readers. Wagemese (2016), a journalist and prolific author of both fiction and nonfiction books, wraps the act of being and becoming more fully human in the power of story. His words echo Freire’s (1970/2018) idea that a person may initiate the process of unveiling the world for another, yet true unveiling—understanding through cycles of reflection and action as praxis—is initiated as an internal, individual act of discovery and inquiry with potential to be a catalyst for action (p. 169). An author, then, can initiate the process of unveiling the world for a reader, but true understanding arises in and through the reader as internal cycles of discovery, inquiry, and reflection leading to external, embodied action.

Based on this study, I now also appreciate reflection as a determinant process in transformative learning and growth. To reflect requires a felt sense of safety that, I suggest, can be accessed by quieting the mind. The observed and participant-storied experience was one of readers and reading lifeworlds steeped in settler-colonial ideology that had these readers feeling separate and, with respect to

reconciliation and decolonization, residing in a space of liminality that was uncertain, unsettling, and marked by confusion based in ignorance and denial.

I suggest that by quieting the mind we quiet the sense of cognitive urgency to fully understand a story and the storying as well as the drive to predict to self-protect against experiences we find emotionally intolerable. When we quiet the mind we suspend the cognitive need to master the text. This enables the heart to open. In other words, it allows us to open to a reading experience on affective and embodied levels. When we quiet the mind and open the heart we allow ourselves to be joined with the characters on cognitive, affective, and embodied levels and to be transported from a space of liminality to a space of imagination, creativity, and possibility.

Many scholars point to imagination (Greene, 1995; Hanson, 2017; Hoggan & Cranton, 2015; Jarvis, 2006; Justice, 2018; Michelle, 2017) and creativity (Freire, 1970/2018; Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2014; Long, 2003; O'Sullivan, 2012) as the conduits to transformative change. I suggest, then, that the space of liminality Mälkki and Green (2014) describe as a phase in transformative learning is, in fact, a critical waypoint. I propose that readers either succumb to liminality and return to the comfort of what is known, or they transition into an imaginal space where the unknown is perceived as full of promise, potential, and possibility that awaits as “untested feasibility” (Freire, 1970/2018, p. 102) on the path to being and becoming more fully human.

Rosemary Nagy (2020) speaks to settler witnessing of residential school survivor testimony at the TRC hearings. “Reciprocating and respecting the principles of Indigenous storytelling involve heart and mind and a willingness to struggle with the stories we hear and our own reactions to them” (p. 237). I suggest it is appropriate to extend this concept to settler readers of Indigenous Literature as reader-witnessing. Nagy (2020) finds the TRC served “as a catalyst for the ongoing unsettling of colonial beliefs and attitudes and the restorying of settler narratives in response to what was witnessed” (p. 237). I

suggest that reading Indigenous Literatures continues this unsettling for settler readers and therefore plays an important role in the work of reconciling and settler decolonization.

I want to explore and expand on the idea of leaning into a story and of shared-reading as holding space for one another to lean in, to experience vicariously, to feel viscerally, and to read and talk and listen in a good way. With Indigenous Literatures, it is essential for settler readers to be intentional in their listening. This entails listening to the storyteller, witnessing with a quiet mind and an open heart and, then, listening to one another share the experience of the reading, the resonance, the reaction, the response. Listening, then, becomes a means to explore and examine, confront and challenge, test and attest, and, ultimately, to hold a space to allow it all to unfold.

As a researcher who explores phenomena as lived experience, it is important to be very clear that my access to the lived experience of others is primarily through their own subjective interpretation of it. The concept that I am interpreting experience that is already an interpretation of experience constitutes a double hermeneutic (Noon, 2018, p. 75). I am storying the story as told by the one who experiences, and each phase of interpretation is woven with the perceptions, values, and beliefs of the one who is interpreting. These perceptions, values, and beliefs are, subsequently and simultaneously, shaped by experience, and on it goes.

Processes such as reconciliation and decolonization must happen in both private and public spheres. For settlers, I see the initial process as a confrontation with self as we challenge our assumptions and perspectives of history, our role in contemporary systems and power structures, how we benefit from them, sustain, and perpetuate them. For the reader-participants in this study, it amounted to reading as reckoning. This is an experiential example of expanded awareness as Mezirow (see, for example, 1991, 2000) describes. I suggest that reading as reckoning sits on a spectrum of reading experience with reading for reconciliation and reading as reciprocity. The book club discussion exemplified how the meanings people ascribe to their experience are inextricably linked to the

discourses available to them (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), and the relational spaces they occupy (Lawrence & Cranton, 2015). The study also offers experiential understanding of validating discourse (Mezirow, 1991) as, at times, a validation of the unknown as unknowable, acceptance of ignorance, and a means to eschew the responsibility to lean into learning. The reader-participants did not articulate recognition that their state of being unaware meant that they assumed an uncritical stance.

Reading as cognitive, affective, and embodied experience can become the fuel for resolve when we allow ourselves to surrender to the imperative to expand awareness of the patterns of conditioned settler-colonial beliefs and behaviours, and lean in to learn more open, inclusive, just, and equitable ways of living in this geographically defined nation of Canada. One way for that learning to begin is by disrupting the colonial narrative and listen to the Indigenous Voice as it resounds in Indigenous Literatures. It means taking up a lens of compassionate curiosity. It means exploring our own origin stories so that we may understand the actions of our ancestors, or lack thereof. It means self-reflection on ways we have been complacent and complicit. It means untangling the inclination to act from assumptions (conscious or unconscious) that position settlers as superior and paternalistic. The roots of superiority are enmeshed in our sense of separateness. In unity there is no hierarchy, only wholeness.

The act of reading can carry a reader to a perceived, sensed, and felt realm of connectedness in which the similarities between the lived experiences of the one reading and the one being read (i.e., the narrative character) displace differences. "What brings us together cannot exist in the same time and place as what keeps us apart" (Wagamese, 2016, p. 40). Similarities unite on cognitive, emotional, embodied, and relational levels. Episkew (2009) echoes this point.

This research also offers experiential understanding of phenomenology as a philosophy and as a methodology. Eberle (2014) offers a concise explanation of Husserl's theory of the science of phenomena as extending beyond a methodological description of the appearance of things, and of experiences, to include a philosophical stance grounded in intentional, subjective consciousness of

matter (things) and motion (experiences) (p. 185). Our perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and imaginings are always of some thing, and this “ensemble” or assemblage of consciousnesses *is* the phenomenon (Eberle, 2014, p. 185). Eberle (2014) further explicates how Husserl approached the analysis of phenomena by delineating between the perceiving subject and the perceived object as constitutive of any phenomenon (p. 186). The perceiving subject enacts consciousness, through attention and by intention, on aspects of the perceivable world. By intentionally focusing attention on *Celia’s Song* (Maracle, 2014) as an object within the realm of their perception, the reader-participants created, through individual and collective conscious experiencing, a phenomenon that would otherwise have been missed. Their conscious attention and intention brought the narrative into their sphere of subjective perception as a phenomenon to sense and layer meaning into their lived experience and lifeworld contexts.

This dissertation wandered through theory as a reflection of what *is* known before exploring the wonder of human experiencing as it arises in consciousness *to be* known. I hope it will take readers “beyond what they think and know and feel and empower them to think and know and feel even more” (Wagamese, 2016, p. 172). This dissertation is the story of five women of settler ancestry—four reader-participants and one reader-researcher—whose lifeworlds intersect in and through reading *Celia’s Song* (Maracle, 2014) and how the experience challenged each of us to go beyond what we think and know and feel. Research presents a “powerful opportunity for praxis” (Lather, 2017, p. 73) by encouraging self-reflection that leads both participant and researcher to a deeper level of awareness and understanding of self in relation and in context. The possibilities for transformation exist and await in the space where phenomena arise in consciousness.

### References

- Aagaard, J. (2017). Introducing postphenomenological research: A brief and selective sketch of phenomenological research methods. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 30(6), 519–533.
- Abbott, H. P. (2008). *The Cambridge introduction to narrative*. Cambridge University Press.
- Addington, A. H. (2001). Talking about literature in university book club and seminar settings. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 36(2), 212–248.
- Armstrong, P. B. (2013). Preface. In *How literature plays with the brain: The neuroscience of reading and art*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Bal, P. M., & Veltkamp, M. (2013). How does fiction reading influence empathy? An experimental investigation on the role of emotional transportation. *PLoS ONE*, 8(1), 1–12.
- Baron, N. (2015). *Words onscreen: The fate of reading in a digital world*. University Press.
- Barstow, J. M. (2003). Reading in groups: Women's clubs and college literature classes. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 18(4), 3–17.
- Bartlett, R. A. (2017). *The link between literature and empathy: Exploring the capacity for Indigenous-authored literature to foster change* [Unpublished master's thesis]. Mount Saint Vincent University.
- Battiste, M. (2013). You can't be the doctor if you're the disease: Eurocentrism and Indigenous renaissance [CAUT Lecture]. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279577148\\_You\\_can't\\_be\\_the\\_global\\_doctor\\_if\\_you're\\_the\\_colonial\\_disease/link/598a50380f7e9b9d44c9c995/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279577148_You_can't_be_the_global_doctor_if_you're_the_colonial_disease/link/598a50380f7e9b9d44c9c995/download)
- Battiste, M. (2016). Reframing the humanities: From cognitive assimilation to cognitive justice. In M. Battiste (Ed.), *Visioning a Mi'kmaw humanities* (pp. 1–17). Cape Breton University Press.

- Beglar, D., Hunt, A., & Kite, Y. (2012). The effect of pleasure reading on Japanese university EFL learners' reading rates. *Language Learning, 62*(3), 665–703.
- Berg, T. (2008). "What do you know?": Or, the question of reading in groups and academic authority. *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory, 19*(2), 123–154.
- Boler, M. (1997). The risks of empathy: Interrogating multiculturalism's gaze. *Cultural Studies, 11*(2), 253–273.
- Brookfield, S. (2000). Transformative learning as ideology critique. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.), *Learning as transformation* (pp. 125–148). Jossey-Bass.
- Brookfield, S. (2012). Critical theory and transformative learning. In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton (Eds.), *Handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice*, (pp. 131–146). Jossey-Bass.
- Brydon, D. (2003). Canada and postcolonialism: Questions, inventories, and futures. In L. Moss (Ed.), *Is Canada postcolonial? Unsettling Canadian literature*, (pp. 49–77). Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Budd, J. M. (2012). Phenomenological critical realism: A practical method for LIS. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science, 53*(1), 69–80.
- Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2014). *Tri-Council policy statement: Ethical conduct for research involving humans*. Ottawa, Canada: Secretariat on Responsible Conduct of Research.
- Castro, L. R. (2018). Feeling-thinking for a feminist participatory visual ethnography. In D. Kember & M. Corbett (Eds.), *Structuring the thesis: Matching method, paradigm, theories and findings* (pp. 319–328). Springer.

- Charmaz, K. (2005). Grounded theory in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: applications for advancing social justice studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 507–535). Sage Publications.
- Charmaz, K., Thornberg, R., & Keane, E. (2018). Evolving grounded theory and social justice inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed., pp. 411–443). Sage Publications.
- Chartier, R. (1994). Communities of readers. In *The order of books: Readers, authors, and libraries in Europe between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries* (pp. 1–23). Stanford University Press.
- Collins, J. (2010). Introduction. In *Bring on the books for everybody: How literary culture became popular culture*. Duke University Press.
- Collinson, I. (2009). *Everyday readers: Reading and popular culture*. Equinox.
- Coplan, A. (2011). Will the real empathy please stand up? A case for a narrow conceptualization. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 49(1), 40–65.
- Corbett, M., & Green, B. (2018). Emergent theory and/as doctoral research. In D. Kember & M. Corbett (Eds.), *Structuring the thesis: Matching method, paradigm, theories and findings* (pp. 275–284). Springer.
- Cranton, P. (2006). *Understanding and promoting transformative learning: A guide for educators of adults* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Cranton, P., & Taylor, E. W. (2012). Transformative learning theory: Seeking a more unified theory. In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton (Eds.), *Handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 3–20). Jossey-Bass.
- Creely, E. (2018). 'Understanding things from within'. A Husserlian phenomenological approach to doing educational research and inquiring about learning. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 41(1), 104–122.

- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Danaher, P. A., Baguley, M., & Midgley, W. (2013). Imagining the role of participants in education research: Ethics, epistemologies, and methods. In W. Midgley, P. A. Danaher, & M. Baguley (Eds.), *The role of participants in education research: Ethics, epistemologies, and methods* (pp. 1–10). Routledge.
- Datta, R. (2020). Possibilities and challenges in reconciliation. In R. Datta (Ed.), *Reconciliation in practice: A cross-cultural perspective* (pp. 2–33). Fernwood Publishing.
- Davidson, C. (2009). Transcription: Imperatives for qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(2), 35–52.
- Davis, K. C. (2008). White book clubs and African American literature: The promise and limitations of cross-racial empathy. *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 19(2), 155–186.
- Dehaene, S. (2009). Introduction. In *Reading in the brain: The science and evolution of a human invention*. Viking.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- DeSalvo, L. (1999). *Writing as a way of healing: How telling our stories transforms our lives*. Beacon Press.
- Dewan, P. (2013). Reading matters in the academic library: Taking the lead from public librarians. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 52(4), 309–319.
- Dewey, J. (1938/2015). *Experience and education*. Free Press.
- Djikic, M., Oatley, K., & Moldoveanu, M. C. (2013). Reading other minds: Effects of literature on empathy. *Scientific Study of Literature*, 3(1), 28–47.

Eberle, T. S. (2014). Phenomenology as a research method. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 184–203). Sage Publications.

Eigenbrod, R., & Episkenew, J. (Eds.) (2002). *Creating community: A roundtable on Canadian Aboriginal literature*. Bearpaw Publishing.

Episkenew, J. (2002). Socially responsible criticism: Aboriginal literature, ideology, and the literary canon. In R. Eigenbrod & J. Episkenew (Eds.), *Creating community: A roundtable on Canadian Aboriginal Literature*, (pp. 51–68). Bearpaw Publishing.

Episkenew, J. (2009). *Taking back our spirits: Indigenous literature, public policy, and healing*. University of Manitoba Press.

Finlay, L. (n.d.). *Phenomenology: Phenomenological attitude*. Retrieved April 27, 2023, from <https://www.lindafinlay.co.uk/phenomenology/>

Finlay, L. (2011). *Phenomenology for therapists: Researching the lived world*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Freire, P. (1970/2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (50<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed.). Bloomsbury Publishing Inc.

Fuller, D., & Rehberg Sedo, D. (2013). *Reading beyond the book: The social practices of contemporary literary culture*. Routledge.

Fuller, D., & Rehberg Sedo, D. (2014). "And then we went to the brewery": Reading as a social activity in a digital era. *World Literature Today*, 88(3–4), 14–18.

Fuller, D., & Rehberg Sedo, D. (2023). *Reading bestsellers: Recommendation culture and the multimodal reader*. Cambridge University Press.

Gilbert, K. L. (2002). Taking a narrative approach to grief research: Finding meaning in stories. *Death Studies*, 26, 223–239.

Greene, M. (1995). Introduction: Narrative in the making. In *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change* (pp. 1–6). Jossey-Bass.

- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 191–215). Sage Publications.
- Hanson, A. J. (2017). Reading for reconciliation? Indigenous Literatures in a post-TRC Canada. *English Studies in Canada*, 43(2), 69–90.
- Haraway, D. (2012). Awash in urine: DES and Premarin® in multispecies response-ability. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 40(1/2), 301–316.
- Hart, C. (2018). *Doing a literature review: Releasing the research imagination* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2017). *The practice of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Higginson, J., & McLeod, J. (2018). Now, then, when: Working with qualitative longitudinal and intergenerational research to study pathways and imagined futures in transnational times. In D. Kember & M. Corbett (Eds.), *Structuring the thesis: Matching method, paradigm, theories and findings* (pp. 357–367). Springer.
- Hodgson, K., and Thomson, R. (2000). What do medical students read and why? A survey of medical students in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England. *Medical Education*, 34, 622–629.
- Hoggan, C., & Cranton, P. (2015). Promoting transformative learning through reading fiction. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 13(1), 6–25.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.
- Humble, Á. (n.d.). *Guide to transcribing* [PDF document]. Retrieved March 28, 2019 from Mount Saint Vincent University online website:  
<https://www.msvu.ca/site/media/msvu/GuideTranscribing.pdf>
- Hunter, P. (2012). Using vignettes as self-reflexivity in narrative research of problematised pedagogy. *Policy Futures in Education*, 10(1), 90–102.

- Jardine, J. (2014). Husserl and Stein on the phenomenology of empathy: Perception and explication. *Synthesis Philosophica*, 58(2), 273–288.
- Jarvis, C. (2006). Using fiction for transformation. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 109, 69–77.
- Jarvis, C. (2012). Fiction and film and transformative learning. In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton (Eds.), *Handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 486–502). Jossey-Bass.
- Johnson, D. R. (2012). Transportation into a story increases empathy, prosocial behaviour, and perceptual bias toward fearful expressions. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 52(2), 150–155.
- Johnson, D. R. (2013). Transportation into literary fiction reduces prejudice against and increases empathy for Arab-Muslims. *Scientific Study of Literature*, 3(1), 77–92.
- Justice, D. H. (2018). *Why Indigenous Literatures matter*. Wilfred Laurier University Press.
- Kearns, L. L. (2015). Subjects of wonder: Toward an aesthetics, ethics, and pedagogy of wonder. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 49(1), 98–119.
- Kearns, L. L., Tompkins, J., & Lunney Borden, L. (2018). Transforming graduate studies through decolonization: Sharing the learning journey of a specialized cohort. *McGill Journal of Education*, 53(2), 233–253.
- Kember, D. (2018). Critical reflections on the conventional thesis structure and a guide to the research questions addressed in the book. In D. Kember & M. Corbett (Eds.), *Structuring the thesis: Matching method, paradigm, theories and findings* (pp. 3–13). Springer.
- Kember, D., & Corbett, M. (2018). *Structuring the thesis: Matching method, paradigm, theories and findings*. Springer.
- Kitchenham, A. (2008). The evolution of John Mezirow's transformative learning theory. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 6(2), 104–123.

- Konchar Farr, C. (2008). Talking readers. In *The Oprah affect: Critical essays on Oprah's Book Club* (pp. 33–54). State University of New York Press.
- Koopman, E. M. (2015). Empathic reactions after reading: The role of genre, personal factors and affective responses. *Poetics* 50, 62–79.
- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. University of Toronto Press.
- Kovach, M. (2016). Doing Indigenous methodologies: A letter to a research class. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Sage handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed., pp. 214–234). SAGE.
- Lang, A. (2012). Introduction: Transforming reading. In *From codex to hypertext: Reading at the turn of the twenty-first century* (pp. 1–24). University of Massachusetts Press.
- Lather, P. A. (2017). Thirty years after: From research as praxis to praxis in the ruins. In H. J. Malone, S. Rincón-Gallardo, & K. Kew (Eds.), *Future directions of educational change: Social justice, professional capital, and systems change* (1st ed., pp. 71–85). Routledge.
- Lawrence, R. L. (2012). Transformative learning through artistic expression: Getting out of our heads. In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton (Eds.), *Handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 471–485). Jossey-Bass.
- Lawrence, R. L., & Cranton, P. (2015). *A novel idea: Researching transformative learning in fiction*. Sense Publishers.
- Leavy, P. (2009). Poetry and qualitative research. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *Method meets art: Arts-based research practice* (pp. 63–99). The Guilford Press.
- Leavy, P. (2018). Fiction-based research. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *Handbook of arts-based research* (pp. 190–207). The Guilford Press.
- Lemieux, A. (2020). *De/constructing literacies: Considerations for engagement*. Peter Lang.

- Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2013). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research* (pp. 199–265). Sage Publications.
- Long, E. (1986). Women, reading, and cultural authority: Some implications of the audience perspective in cultural studies. *American Quarterly*, 38(4), 591–612.
- Long, E. (1993). Textual interpretation as collective action. In *The ethnography of reading* (pp. 180–212). University of California Press.
- Long, E. (2003). *Book clubs: Women and the uses of reading in everyday life*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lowman, E. B., & Barker, A. J. (2015). *Settler: Identity and colonialism in 21<sup>st</sup> century Canada*. Fernwood Publishing.
- MacAdam, B. (1995). Sustaining the culture of the book: The role of enrichment reading and critical thinking in the undergraduate curriculum. *Library Trends*, 44(2), 237–263.
- Mälkki, K. (2010). Building on Mezirow's theory of transformative learning: Theorizing the challenges to reflection. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 8(1), 42–62.
- Mälkki, K., & Green, L. (2014). Navigational aids: The phenomenology of transformative learning. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 12(1), 5–24.
- Mar, R. A., & Oatley, K. (2008). The function of fiction is the abstraction and simulation of social experience. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3(3), 173–192.
- Mar, R. A., Oatley, K., & Peterson, J. B. (2009). Exploring the link between reading fiction and empathy: Ruling out individual differences and examining outcomes. *Communications*, 34, 407–428.
- Maracle, L. (2013). Blind justice. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 2(1), 134–136.
- Maracle, L. (2014). *Celia's song*. Cormorant Books Inc.
- Maracle, L. (2017). *My conversations with Canadians*. Book\*hug Press.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2011). *Designing qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.

- May, T. (2011). *Social research: Issues, methods and process* (4th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- McGregor, H. E., & Marker, M. (2018). Reciprocity in Indigenous educational research: Beyond compensation, towards decolonizing. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 49(3), 318–328.
- McMillan, L. J. (2019). Committing anthropology in the muddy middle ground. In C. R. A. Hernández, S. Hutchings, & B. Noble, (Eds.), *Transcontinental dialogues: Activist alliances with Indigenous Peoples of Canada, Mexico, and Australia* (pp. 65–92). University of Arizona Press.
- Merriam, S. B., & Kim, S. (2012). Studying transformative learning: What methodology? In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton (Eds.), *Handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 56–72). Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 74, 5–12.
- Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformation theory. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.), *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 3–33). Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (2011). Transformative learning theory. In J. Mezirow & E. W. Taylor (Eds.), *Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, workplace, and higher education* (pp. 18–31). Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (2012). Learning to think like an adult: Core concepts of transformative learning theory. In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton (Eds.), *Handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 73–95). Jossey-Bass.
- Michell, H. J. (2017). *Reconciliation from an Indigenous perspective: Weaving the web of life in the aftermath of residential schools*. JCharlton Publishing Ltd.
- Morton, T. (2010). *The ecological thought*. Harvard University Press.

- Moss, L. (2012). Is Canada postcolonial? Re-asking through the "The Forgotten" project. *TOPIA*, 27, 47–65.
- Nagy, R. (2020). Settler witnessing at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. *Human Rights Review*, 22, 219–241.
- Neilsen Glenn, L. (2002). Learning from the liminal: Fiction as knowledge. *The Alberta Journal of Education Research*, XLVIII(3), 206–214.
- Neilsen Glenn, L. (2017). *Following the river: Traces of Red River women*. Wolsak and Wynn Publishers, Ltd.
- Nell, V. (1988). *Lost in a book: The psychology of reading for pleasure*. Yale University Press.
- Neubauer, B. E., Witkop, C. T., & Varpio, L. (2019). How phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others. *Perspectives on Medical Education*, 8(2), 90–97.
- Nicholls, C. D. (2019). Innovating the craft of phenomenological research methods through mindfulness. *Methodological Innovations*, 12(2), 1–13.
- Noon, E. J. (2018). Interpretive phenomenological analysis: An appropriate methodology for educational research. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 6(1), 75–83.
- Oatley, K. (1999). Why fiction may be twice as true as fact: Fiction as cognitive and emotional simulation. *Review of General Psychology*, 3(2), 101–117.
- Oliver, D. G., Serovich, J. M., & Mason, T. L. (2005). Constraints and opportunities with interview transcription: Towards reflection in qualitative research. *Social Forces*, 84(2), 1273–1289.
- O'Sullivan, E. (2002). The project and vision of transformative education: Integral transformative learning. In E. O'Sullivan, A. Morrell, & M. A. O'Connor M. A. (Eds.), *Expanding the boundaries of transformative learning* (pp. 1–12). Palgrave.

- O'Sullivan, E. (2012). Deep transformation: Forging a planetary worldview. In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton (Eds.), *Handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 162–177). Jossey-Bass.
- Peters, N. (2015). *Learning for more just relationships: Narratives of transformation in white settlers* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Saskatchewan.
- Peters, N. (2016). Learning shame: Colonial narratives as a tool for decolonization. In M. Battiste (Ed.), *Visioning a Mi'kmaw humanities: Indigenizing the academy* (pp. 149–164). Cape Breton University Press.
- Pictou, S. M. (2019). What is decolonization: Mi'kmaw ancestral relational understandings and anthropological perspectives on treaty relations. In C. R. A. Hernández, S. Hutchings, & B. Noble, (Eds.), *Transcontinental dialogues: Activist alliances with Indigenous peoples of Canada, Mexico, and Australia* (pp. 37–64). University of Arizona Press.
- Pinotti, A., & Salgaro, M. (2019). Empathy or empathies? Uncertainties in the interdisciplinary discussion. *Gestalt Theory*, 41(2), 141–158.
- Radway, J. A. (1997). Reading for a new class: The judges, the practical logic of book selection, and the question of middlebrow style. In *A feeling for books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, literary taste, and middle-class desire* (pp. 261–301). University of North Carolina Press.
- Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2016). Chapter 6: Validity: Processes, strategies, and considerations. In *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological* (pp. 185–214). Sage Publications.
- Ravitch, S. M., & Riggan, M. (2017). *Reason & rigor: How conceptual frameworks guide research* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Rehberg Sedo, D. (2011). *Reading communities: From salons to cyberspace*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Richardson, L., & St. Pierre, E. A. (2005). Writing: A method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 959–978). Sage Publications.
- Robertson, P. D. (2016, March 31, updated 2018, May 16). Author Jo-Ann Episkenew wrote of aboriginal literature's power to heal. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/author-jo-ann-episkenew-wrote-of-aboriginal-literatures-power-to-heal/article29486545/>
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*. Southern Illinois University Press.
- Ross, C. S. (1999). Finding without seeking: The information encounter in the context of reading for pleasure. *Information Processing & Management*, 35, 783–799.
- Ross, C. S., McKechnie, L., & Rothbauer, P. M. (2006). Reading as a social activity. In *Reading matters: What the research reveals about reading, libraries, and community* (pp. 221–241). Libraries Unlimited.
- Rymhs, D. (2016). Appropriating guilt: Reconciliation in an Indigenous Canadian context. In D. Reder & L. M. Morra (Eds.), *Learn, teach, challenge: Approaching Indigenous literatures* (pp. 325–339). Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Schapiro, S. A., Wasserman, I. L., & Gallegos, P. V. (2012). Group work and dialogue: Spaces and processes for transformative learning in relationships. In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton (Eds.), *Handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 355–372). Jossey-Bass.
- Smith, D. W. 2018. Phenomenology. *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. Retrieved April 29, 2021, from: [Phenomenology \(Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy/Summer 2018 Edition\)](#)
- Stolz, S. A. (2020). Phenomenology and phenomenography in education research: A critique. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 52(10), 1077–1096.

- Stuckey, H. L., Taylor, E. W., & Cranton, P. (2013). Developing a survey of transformative learning outcomes and processes based on theoretical principles. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 11(4), 211–228.
- Sweeney, M. (2010). Tell me what you read; I will tell you what you are: Reading and education in U.S. Penal History. In *Reading is my window: Books and the art of reading in women's prisons* (pp. 19–53). University of North Carolina Press.
- Taylor, E. W. (2009). Fostering transformative learning. In J. Mezirow, E. W. Taylor & Associates (Eds.), *Transformative learning in practice* (pp. 3–17). Jossey-Bass.
- Taylor, E. W. (2011). Fostering transformative learning. In J. Mezirow & E. W. Taylor (Eds.), *Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, workplace, and higher education* (pp. 3–17). Jossey-Bass.
- Taylor, E. W., & Snyder, M. J. (2012). A critical review of research on transformative learning theory, 2006–2010. In E. W. Taylor & P. Cranton (Eds.), *Handbook of transformative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 37–55). Jossey-Bass.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Retrieved from [http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Honouring\\_the\\_Truth\\_Reconciling\\_for\\_the\\_Future\\_July\\_23\\_2015.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/Honouring_the_Truth_Reconciling_for_the_Future_July_23_2015.pdf)
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Reconciliation*. Retrieved from [http://www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/Reports/Volume\\_6\\_Reconciliation\\_English\\_Web.pdg](http://www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/Reports/Volume_6_Reconciliation_English_Web.pdg)
- Vagle, M. (2018). *Crafting phenomenological research* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

- Van Den Hoonaard, W. C., & Van Den Hoonaard, D. K. (2013). *Essentials of thinking ethically in qualitative research*. Left Coast Press Inc.
- van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. Left Coast Press.
- van Manen, M. (2015). *Writing in the dark: Phenomenological studies in interpretive inquiry*. Routledge.
- van Manen, M. (2017a). But is it phenomenology? *Qualitative Health Research*, 27(6), 775–779.
- van Manen, M. (2017b). Phenomenology in its original sense. *Qualitative Health Research*, 27(6), 810–825.
- Wagamese, R. (2012). *Indian horse*. Douglas & McIntyre.
- Wagamese, R. (2016). *Embers: One Ojibway's meditations*. Douglas & McIntyre.
- Warren, C. A. B. (2002). Qualitative interviewing. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research: Context and method* (pp. 83–101). Sage Publications.
- Weinbaum, R. K., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2016). Getting more out of your interview data: Toward a framework for debriefing the transcriber of interviews. *Journal of Educational Issues*, 2(1), 248–264.
- White, B., & Lemieux, A. (2017). *Mapping holistic learning: An introductory guide to aesthetigrams*. Peter Lang Publishing.
- Young, D. C. (2009). Interpretivism and education law research: A natural fit. *Education and Law Journal*, 18(3), 203–219.
- Younging, G. (2018). *Elements of Indigenous style: A guide for writing by and about Indigenous Peoples*. Brush.

Appendix A

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics*

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
<i>Hazel</i>	50-59	She/her	Undergraduate degree in business; certified health coach	Business owner; self-employed; full-time
<i>Letitia</i>	60-69	She/her	Doctorate in business	Freelance consultant; seeking employment
<i>Abbie</i>	60-69	She/her	Undergraduate degree in nursing	Retired registered nurse
<i>Holly</i>	60-69	She/her	Grade 12	Grocery store staff working in cash office, customer service; until recently a postal clerk for 31 years
<i>Rose</i>	60-69	She/her	Undergraduate degree in urban and regional planning	Semi-retired; elections returning officer; also worked in urban and regional planning; held various positions in the film industry (location scout, assistant director, production manager)
<i>Flora</i>	60-69	She/her	Some university; post-secondary training	Semi-retired X-ray and CT technologist
<i>Eleanor</i>	50-59	She/her	Law degree	Long-term disability due to injuries sustained in a car accident; unable to visually process text; currently in remission with cancer

## Appendix B Initial Interview Guide

Interview #:      Date:                      Start/End Time:                      Name:

### Demographic information

Age: 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70-79, 80+, rather not say

Gender identity: she/her, he/him, they/them, rather not say

Education: *(highest level of education achieved)* some high school; high school diploma; professional certification; some postsecondary; college diploma; university degree; graduate degree; PhD; other; rather not say

Occupation: employed full-time; employed part-time; self-employed; not employed; retired; student; homemaker; other; rather not say

### Reading experience

*Tell me a little bit about your life as a reader. What is your earliest memory of reading? Do you have a particularly significant or memorable experience involving reading?*

*Can you please describe your most recent reading experience? Describe where you read in as much detail as you can recall. What time of day was it? Why did you choose to read then? Where were you at the time? Please describe the setting in as much detail as you can.*

*Do you have a favourite genre? If so, what is your favourite genre and why?*

*How many books did you read in the last six months? Would you say that is typical? Have you experienced a change in your reading habits during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

*How do you discover new books? Tell me about how you decided to read the book you're reading now.*

*What format (print, audio, e-reader) do you usually read in? What draws you to that format?*

*Do you typically buy or borrow (library, friends, family) the books you read?*

**Experience reading Indigenous Literatures**

*Do you seek out Indigenous-authored books to read? Please tell me why (or, why not).*

*What Indigenous-authored books have you read so far?*

*How did you come select these books in particular?*

**Shared-reading experience**

*Are you a regular participant in this book club (i.e., attend most or all meetings)?*

*How long have you been an active member of this book club?*

*What aspects of being a member of a reading group do you enjoy the most/least?*

*Do you, or have you, belong[ed] to other book clubs? If so, how many book clubs, and for how long?*

*Tell me about a recent or particularly memorable experience discussing novels in this reading group.*

*Do you find that you read books differently when it is for book club?*

*When it comes to choosing the book for book club, do you find that enjoyable, or do you feel some pressure in that?*

*How do your experiences of the books typically compare to that of the other members of the group? Can you share an example of when this happened?*

*Generally, do you find other readers' experiences of the books effect your perceptions of them? Can you give me an example of when this happened?*

*Did your book club function during the pandemic? If so, how? What online venues did you use when gathering restrictions were in place?*

**Reconciliation**

*Please share with me what comes to mind when you hear the term reconciliation. What does reconciliation mean to you?*

*Is it a term you come across often? Where do you come across the term?*

*Can you describe an example of this that is recent or particularly memorable?*

*Is it a term you use often? Can you share with me a recent or particularly memorable instance?*

*Do you share your views with others? If so, how and with whom? If not, why not? Can you describe a recent situation that this happened or a situation that is particularly memorable?*

*Is reconciliation something that is discussed by your employer and/or your colleagues in the workplace?*

*Can you share an example of when this happened?*

*Is reconciliation part of your work life? Can you describe a situation where this was the case?*

*Does reconciliation factor into your personal life? Can you share an experience when this happened?*

*Does reconciliation ever factor into your choice of books to read?*

### Decolonization

*Please share with me what comes to mind when you hear the term decolonization.*

*Is it a term you hear or use often? Can you describe a recent or memorable experience of hearing and/or using the term decolonization?*

*Is decolonizing something that is discussed by your employer and/or your colleagues in the workplace?*

*Can you share an example of when this happened?*

*Is decolonizing part of your work life? Can you describe a situation where this was the case?*

*Does decolonization factor into your personal life? Can you share an experience when this happened?*

*Do you link reconciliation and decolonization? Can you explain how you perceive these concepts together?*

*Do you connect your reading experiences and/or choice of books to reconciliation and/or decolonization?*

*Can you share an example of when this happened?*

### Closing

*Is there anything else you would like to add about your reading and book club experience?*

*Do you have any questions about the study?*

*Thank you for sharing your experience and your time with me today!*

Appendix C

**Table 2**

*Recorded Audio Dates/Times and Journal Word Counts by Participant*

\*includes Book Club discussion time of 1:59:02

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Initial Interview</i>	<i>Journal Word Count</i>	<i>Book Club Discussion</i>	<i>Final Interview</i>	<i>Recorded Audio</i>
<i>Abbie</i>	3-29-22		6-10-22	6-22-22	
	1:17:35	523	1:59:02	1:22:12	2:39:47
<i>Eleanor</i>	6-02-22		6-10-22	6-29-22	
	1:38:19	No journal	1:59:02	59:55	2:38:14
<i>Flora</i>	4-13-22		6-10-22	6-17-22	
	1:09:57	3434	47:45	1:14:53	2:24:50
<i>Hazel</i>	3-28-22		6-10-22	6-28-22	
	1:05:08	1538	1:59:02	1:05:39	2:10:47
<i>Holly</i>	4-05-22		6-10-22	6-30-22	
	41:31	No journal	1:59:02	17:27	58:56
<i>Letitia</i>	3-28-22		6-10-22	6-22-22	
	1:21:14	1187	1:59:02	1:19:00	2:40:14
<i>Rose</i>	4-06-22		6-10-22	6-28-22	
	1:05:53	4353	1:59:02	1:10:42	2:16:35
<b>Totals</b>	8:19:37	11035	1:59:02	7:29:48	17:48:27*

## Appendix D

### Instructions for Sharing Your Reading Experience

The intent of this journaling activity is to capture your emotional, intellectual, and embodied (i.e., physically felt sensations) experience as you read the book *Celia's Song* by Lee Maracle.

Please note the date, time of day, and the chapter or page range you are journaling about. You may find the following prompts helpful. They are not, however, intended to limit or direct your journaling:

- *What did I feel as I was reading? (e.g., happy, excited, engaged, curious, sad, scared, angry, anxious, agitated, soothed, calm, clear, confused, wondering, inspired, etc.)*
- *How did this manifest in my body? (e.g., smiling, laughing, nodding, head shaking, relaxed, tense, teary, breath holding, inhaling, exhaling, verbalizing, vocalizing, etc.)*
- *What did I think as I was reading? (e.g., questioning, challenging, confronting, realizing, agreeing, knowing, understanding, new perspectives, insights, etc.)*

Please choose whatever means of self-expression you are inspired to use. This may include, for example, writing in print or digital format, poetry, photography, voice and/or video recording, or a visual art form such as collage, drawing, or painting.

You may journal as much and as often as you like. I would appreciate you sharing your reading experience at least once for each of the 24 chapters in the book.

If your journal is in digital format, you may email the final compilation to me at [allana.bartlett@msvu.ca](mailto:allana.bartlett@msvu.ca).

If your journal is in hardcopy, please bring it to the book club session when *Celia's Song* by Lee Maracle will be discussed. Alternatively, you can contact me, and I will pick it up at a time and location that are convenient for you.

If you have any questions or comments about this phase of the study, please contact me by phone or text at 902-xxx-xxxx or by email at [allana.bartlett@msvu.ca](mailto:allana.bartlett@msvu.ca).

Thank you in advance for the time, thought, and effort you invest in this phase of the research project.

## Appendix E

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

Nova Scotia Inter-University Doctoral Program in Educational Studies



166 Bedford Highway  
Seton Academic Centre, Room 449  
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada B3M 2J6  
902.457.6372

**Consent to Participate**

**Title of study:** *Reading that Disrupts: A Phenomenological Exploration of Transformative Learning in Settler Readers of Lee Maracle's Celia's Song*

**Principal Investigator:** R. Allana Bartlett  
PhD Candidate  
Faculty of Education  
Mount Saint Vincent University  
Halifax, NS, Canada  
902.xxx.xxxx  
[allana.bartlett@msvu.ca](mailto:allana.bartlett@msvu.ca)

**PhD Supervisor:** Dr. DeNel Rehberg Sedo  
Professor, Department of Communication Studies  
Mount Saint Vincent University  
Halifax, NS, Canada  
902.457.6478  
[denel.rehbergsedo@msvu.ca](mailto:denel.rehbergsedo@msvu.ca)

**Participant:** *(Please print your full name)*

---

**Purpose of Research Study:** You are invited to join a research study to explore and describe the experience of non-Indigenous readers as they engage individually and collectively with a fiction novel written by an Indigenous author. Established reading theory suggests that reading literature fosters empathy, understanding, and new perspectives, and studies of book clubs characterize these groups as sites of significant cultural work. I believe exploring the experience of adult readers of settler ancestry as they engage with a novel written by an Indigenous author is a timely and pragmatic endeavour given the current political, cultural, and social climate in Canada.

**Participant Recruitment:** You must identify as a non-Indigenous person and be a current, active member of an established book club with a minimum of six members in order to participate.

**Requirements of Participants:** I will explore your lived experience of reading and discussing the fiction novel *Celia's Song* by Lee Maracle at four distinct junctures:

- 1) I will request that you meet with me for a one-on-one conversation about your experience as a reader and member of a book club. You will choose the date, time, and location to meet for approximately one hour within a two-week period at the beginning of the study and prior to reading *Celia's Song*. This may take place in person or via an online platform such as Skype, Skype for Business, or Microsoft Teams. All current, provincial guidelines related to the COVID-19 pandemic will be followed. This interview will be audio recorded if it takes place in person and video recorded if it takes place via an online platform.
- 2) I will ask that you journal as you take up the novel as an individual reader. You may do this via written text (handwritten or digital), or you may choose to represent your experience via photographs, videos, voice recordings, and/or some form of visual art like collage, drawing, and/or painting. You will be asked to capture your engagement with the text in some way at least once for each of the 24 chapters of the book. The time required for this activity will depend on the form of journaling you choose and the extent to which you share your engagement with the book. The intent is to record your intellectual, emotional, and embodied (i.e., physically felt sensations) experience of reading *Celia's Song*.
- 3) I will request that you attend the book club session when the novel is to be discussed. I will attend this event to make an audio recording of the discussion and to take notes to describe the setting and observable behaviour like gestures, facial expressions, and body language. In the event that in-person gatherings are not permitted due to current, provincial guidelines related to the COVID-19 pandemic, alternative arrangements will be in collaboration with the group to meet via an online platform such as Skype, Skype for Business, or Microsoft Teams. In this case, the discussion will be video recorded.
- 4) I will ask that you meet with me again to talk one-on-one about your experience of the book and the book club discussion. You will choose the date, time, and location to meet for approximately one hour within two weeks of the book club session. This may take place in person or via an online platform such as Skype, Skype for Business, or Microsoft Teams. All current, provincial guidelines related to the COVID-19 pandemic will be followed. This interview will be audio recorded if it takes place in person and video recorded if it takes place via an online platform.

**Potential Risks & Benefits:** As a reader and active member of a book club you are aware of the risks and benefits of reading and discussing a variety of literary genres. The novel *Celia's Song* by Lee Maracle to be read and discussed in this research study contains a fictionalized account of Indigenous life experience and includes descriptions and scenes that involve emotional, physical, and sexual violence and abuse. This may trigger an intellectual, emotional, and embodied (i.e., physically felt sensations) response. The book may challenge what you know, what you think you know, and how you know it. As a

resident of Nova Scotia, you have 24/7 access to the [Provincial Mental Health Crisis Line](#), 1-888-429-8167, should you need assistance.

Although there are no direct benefits to you from your involvement in this study, it is my hope that by exploring in-depth the specific experience of one group of non-Indigenous readers that insights into the broader social and cultural impact of Indigenous Literatures may be revealed. What you share with me about your experience reading *Celia's Song* by Lee Maracle will add to the current understanding of learning through fiction reading and shared reading in book clubs.

**Compensation:** I will provide you with a new paperback copy of the book *Celia's Song* by Lee Maracle at the beginning of the research. This book is yours to keep. In addition, I will give you a new paperback copy of Lee Maracle's book *My Conversations with Canadians* as a thank you and to recognize your valuable role in this research endeavour.

**Confidentiality:** Your participation in this study will be confidential. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified in the data, subsequent analysis, or final dissertation. All identifiable information will be securely stored separate from the data collected in the study. To protect your confidentiality, information about you will only be accessible to me as the principal investigator.

If your name is spoken in audio or video recordings of the interviews or book club discussion, it will be edited from the final transcripts and a pseudonym devised by the researcher and unknown to you and the other participants will be used.

All participants will be asked to keep what is said during the book club discussion confidential.

**Information about the Study Results:** The final study results will be disseminated according to MSVU policy for electronic copies to thesis committee members, the library, and the archives.

I intend to seek opportunities to publish and present the results of my dissertation research once complete. Your confidentiality will be maintained in any and all published articles or presentations that may result from this study. You will not be identified as a participant in the final study report, future articles or presentations. If I use your words as spoken, they will not be attributed to you using your given name. In this event I will use a pseudonym that I have devised and that is unknown to you and the other participants.

I will inform you by email when the research is complete and you will have an opportunity to read the final dissertation. I would also welcome an opportunity to attend a future book club session to share the findings with you in person as a group.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you do not want to answer some of the questions in the one-on-one interviews, you do not have to and can remain in the study.

**Freedom to Withdraw:** You have the right not to participate and to end your participation at any time, for any reason, with no consequences to you. The right to withdraw from the study extends for the duration of your participation. I request that if you choose to do so that you document your choice to withdraw from the study in an email or other form of written correspondence to me.

In the event that you withdraw from the study, data associated with your participation will not be used in the analysis, interpretation, or final report unless you indicate otherwise. The exception to this will be your recorded voice in the book club discussion. I will request permission to use this data due to the difficulty in identifying and extracting the verbal contribution of an individual participant in the flow of group conversation.

**Data Storage, Security, and Use:** Research data will be collected via:

- 1) a digital audio or video recording of the initial one-on-one interview
- 2) written notes of the researcher's observations at the one-on-one interview
- 3) a journal in the form of written text (print or digital), photographs, videos, voice recordings, and/or some form of art
- 4) a digital audio or video recording of the book club discussion
- 5) written notes of the researcher's observations at the book club meeting
- 6) a digital audio or video recording of the one-on-one interview, and
- 7) written notes of the researcher's observations at the one-on-one interview

Data collected in hardcopy will be stored in a locked file as well as transcribed to an electronic file. Digital audio recordings will be uploaded to an electronic file from the recording device and then deleted from the device. The audio file will be transcribed verbatim to an electronic word document. All electronic files will be secured by password protection, backed-up, and stored on the MSVU server located on campus.

Study data will be electronically archived for 20 years for its potential to inform future research by the principal investigator. All computer files will be archived on the MSVU server. Data in hardcopy form will be destroyed by shredding upon completion of the study.

**Contact Information:** If you have questions about the study and wish to speak to someone directly involved in the research, you may contact me, Allana Bartlett, as the lead researcher at 902.xxx.xxxx or via email at [allana.bartlett@msvu.ca](mailto:allana.bartlett@msvu.ca). You may also contact Dr. DeNel Rehberg Sedo, my PhD supervisor, via email at [denel.rehbergsedo@msvu.ca](mailto:denel.rehbergsedo@msvu.ca).

**University Research Ethics Board Clearance:** The ethical components of this research study have been reviewed by the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) and found to be in compliance with Mount Saint Vincent University's Research Ethics Policy.

If you have questions about how this study is being conducted and wish to speak with someone not directly involved in the study, you may contact the Chair of the UREB c/o MSVU Research Office, at 902.457.6350 or via email at [research@msvu.ca](mailto:research@msvu.ca).

**Consent:** Completion and submission of this form is your formal consent to participate in the study and to the use of your responses to interview questions and your participation in the book club group discussion.

**Signatures:**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print your full name), consent to participate in the study entitled *Reading that Disrupts: A Phenomenological Exploration of Transformative Learning in Settler Readers of Lee Maracle's Celia's Song* conducted by Allana Bartlett. I understand the nature and requirements of this study and wish to participate. My signature below indicates my consent.

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*You will receive a copy of this form for your records.*