My Embodied Transformative Educational Journey as an East Asian International Student Learner: A Self-Study Approach

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Education
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Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of my personal, educational, and embodied journey as a female Chinese student learner who has travelled across contexts for education in both Canada and my home country China. Using a self-study approach, this thesis examines how embodied knowledge informs my educational learning experiences in different contexts. I question the taken-for-granted knowledge (Greene, 1995) existing in the education I have received, and challenge the possible assumptions I have about my learning. Through processes of creative writing, new knowledge and understandings emerges and I explore possibilities of how knowledge can be malleable and shaped by different cultural contexts. Inspired by the documentary Schooling the World directed by Carol Black (2010), as well as other literature, I bring in first-person source materials such as poems, land-based reflections, and narratives to explore my understandings of the role of knowledge and education. In this process, I also explore the dichotomous nature of my educational journey within, and in-between different educational contexts is shaped by different forces. My thesis project takes up various themes and questions around the implications of education in the 21st century; specifically, I consider the following themes: (1) the role of embodied knowledge and land-based approaches to learning; (2) representations of resilience in academic and social environments; (3) different proximities to spaces of learning and knowing; and finally, (4) the role of intersectionality and liminal space in learning as an international student. As an emerging scholar, I reflect on my lived experiences of acquiring an education in both Chinese and Canadian contexts, and how a methodology of self-study allows my imagination and creative expression to animate various themes in this thesis.

Keywords

embodied knowledge, resilience, contexts, liminal space, self-study, land-based learning, biculturalism, emergent methodology, art-informed method.
Summary for Lay Audience

I am a student from Jiangxi, China, who has attended different schools in both China and Canada. In this thesis, I draw on self-reflexive (self-study) methods to engage my writing through narrative components, land-based reflections, and poetry in ways that illustrate how one can learn from their own past and learn about the importance of living in the present through educational experiences. This approach helps to reconsider how knowledge occurs and emerges within various educational contexts and lived experiences. I acknowledge that my education is deeply influenced by my culture and therefore am compelled to challenge the presumed view of education and knowledge; if not examine the assumptions which may or may not exist as a result. Consequently, I am interested in exploring how knowledge can present in many different forms and cultural contexts. Arguably, new knowledges emerge when an individual is open to learning in new ways. As a result, several questions were considered for this project, beginning by responding questions posed in Carol Black’s documentary *Schooling the World* (2010) and other significant literatures that are relevant to this thesis. Further, I take into consideration the following themes, (1) how knowledge is expressive and how I learn from my situated learning contexts; (2) the role of resilience and flexibility in academic and social settings; (3) the geographical closeness with the learning environments; and (4) diversity, intersectionality, and liminal space in international students’ learning. As a student I reflect on the educational experience in China and Canada. As a project that starts with self-learning can used to support my imagination and exploration of different topics of this thesis.
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Acknowledgments

This acknowledgement is the most delightful thing to write as part of this thesis. I am reminded about the process of reading, learning, communicating, and writing while preparing this thesis, and reflect on the people who inspired me. Meanwhile, I want to express my appreciation to the different places I have been and learned from, and how these different contexts enriched my understanding when writing this thesis. This has made the writing of this thesis enjoyable and exciting. I could not achieve this alone. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Spy Dénommé-Welch, who taught me the meaning of teaching and knowledge. He demonstrates how the exchange of knowledge, and the process of writing, can be a journey. He is a true role model for me, and learning from him has helped me to navigating the unknown. I would also like to thank my committee member, Dr. Candace Brunette-Debassige, who supported my writing through the sharing of her stories and experiences. Her engagement with the writing process was an invaluable asset for me and helped to bring depth and clarity to this thesis. Next, I want to extend my love and respect to both my parents, Ke Pang and Lili Dai who have shown me love and unconditional support in every aspect of my life. Their intelligence and passion for life always inspired me to challenge myself, my knowing and learning. They are my first teachers in this world; they are the source of my courage who have taught me to embrace life and all its challenges and possibilities. I want to also extend my thanks to my dear friends, Shushu Xiong, Congying Shao, Tianshu Shang, Jingyu Tu, and many others who have supported me in various ways, and have shown me great amount of faith when I had doubts about my writing and learning.

Finally, a special thanks to all who love, care, and support me with writing this thesis, I will always cherish the past few years, which are transformational and embodied. Thank you all deeply.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Hook

A ‘WEIRD’ Place

The greatest battles are with ourselves,

How do I understand this when there are no textbooks?

Unknown is normal, but it shall not be normalized.

I want my learning to be mine,

I want to enjoy the process of getting the knowledge.

All I hear is ‘fit in’!

There is no room for imagination and creativity.

Why invite me when difference is not welcome?

There is a fine line between:

You are different

And

We are different

I dream of another possibility of learning… (Pang, March 2023)

1.2 Introduction to The Thesis

Using a self-study approach, this thesis engages various forms of situated knowledge (Lang, 2011) and embodied understanding that are in part rooted in my own educational experiences. My name is 庞伊轩, and the first and last names are written backwards in English as Yixuan Pang in Pingyin. I am from Ji’An (吉安), Jiangxi (江西),
situated in the Southeast of China, then I came to Canada for higher education. Before coming to Canada, I went to Wuhan (武汉), Hubei (湖北), another city in China for both middle and high schools. So, I self-identify as both a domestic student in China and an international student of higher education in Canada, thereby allowing me to make connections between different shifting identities. In this thesis, I draw special inspiration from the film *Schooling the World* (Black, 2010) to critically reflect on my own experiences in educational contexts and reflect on to embodied learning and knowledges I have developed throughout my educational journeying across these different contexts.

Meanwhile, I explore the academic and social resilience I have developed as I have learned across different places which depend on my proximity to the space of learning and knowing. Additionally, attention is given to the influence of the globalizing force of Western education, and how it impacts learners from non-Western societies such as myself. Through this work, I aim to reflect on my lived educational experiences in both China and Canada and explore how my education has been a transformational embodied journey drawing on the strengths of bicultural understandings. In doing so, I use my own embodied creative expression to share a missing voice in Western educational literature that likely resonate with others who share similar educational experiences with me, such as international students who may also be questioning the meaning of Western education.

### 1.3 Scope, Context, Purpose

This self-study examines my embodied knowledge and experiences learning in different educational contexts. I reflect on my schooling experiences in my home country, China, and then the higher education system in Canada. Through creative writing, I recall four places I have studied including: Ji’An (吉安), Jiangxi (江西), China; Wuhan (武汉),
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Hubei (湖北), China; Langley, British Columbia (BC), Canada; and London, Ontario, Canada. In Ji’an, I went to a private primary school called Yougshulu (永叔路) experimental school. Then, I went to Wuhan and attended Shuiguohu (水果湖) Middle school, then Maple Leaf International High School. Afterwards, I went to Trinity Western University in Langley in BC for a bachelor’s degree in applied linguistics and TESOL certificate. After graduating in 2020, I went to Western University of Ontario in 2021 situated in London, Ontario pursuing a master’s degree in education. As I find my educational journey is diverse and sometimes turbulent, I incorporate a creative writing approach by writing poetries and land-based reflections about these experiences.

1.4 Research Questions and Aims

A self-study prompts me to start writing by asking these overarching questions inspired by the documentary:

- Who am I?
- Where do I come from?
- Where am I going?
- “What does it mean to be human and alive” (Wade Davis, 1:02:02, 2010)?
- Am I in school to learn or to survive?
- What is the meaning of going away from home, from families and pursuing education in a different place that is totally alien to my own?

I have been attending school since the age of three. I have journeyed across different places in pursuit of my education and realize how easy it is to be forgetful about the purpose and meaning of education when testing and scores become the priorities in
learning (Ravitch, 2016). Also, when I encounter language barriers and cultural misunderstandings in learning environments that I am not familiar with, the main tasks in education become ‘surviving’ instead of ‘learning’. For this reason, I focus on re-visiting my education, the meaning of education for me, by asking how has pursuing an education away from home influenced me from the past until now and in the future? As such, I raise my awareness of the significance of intersectionality, culture, resilience, embodiment, and liminal space as I encounter them in education.

In my overarching questions inspired by the film *Schooling the World*, I also ask these sub-questions to construct this self-study based on my educational journey:

- When and why did I start to rethink critically my understanding of education?
- What cultural tensions emerged for me as I learned across contexts and in liminal spaces between cultural understandings?
- How has pursuing an education away from home contributed to new understandings of education, particularly embodied learning?
- What is my definition of resilience, and how is it represented in my educational journey in different places?

### 1.5 Overview of the Thesis

This thesis comprises five chapters, including this introductory chapter. In Chapter 2, I lay the groundwork of this self-study by providing my in-depth understanding of the film *Schooling the World* directed by Carol Black in 2010. I then discuss critical education and embodied learning based on the readings of literatures. I close Chapter 2 with the theoretical frameworks relevant to this self-study, which cover
the concepts of intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2020), biculturalism (Schwartz & Unger, 2010), and liminal space (Arnold van Gennep, 2019). In Chapter 3, I write my methodological justifications for this self-study. Specifically, I explain my choice of writing this self-study with a creative writing approach by constructing poems, land-based reflections, and vignettes. Afterwards, I present my personal reflections on my lived experiences in education with poems and land-based reflections. They are my methods and analysis to seek answers to my research questions of this self-study. Finally, I conclude this thesis in Chapter 5 by providing the summative results and possible implications for future research.
Chapter 2: Conversations with Selected Readings

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, I lay the groundwork of this self-study by providing an in-depth background and review of the film *Schooling the World* directed by Carol Black in 2010. This documentary serves as a foundation which inspires me to reconsider my educational experiences across different cultures and contexts. Then, I offer my reading of critical education and embodied learning. After, I read closely about the definition of resilience, and how it is illustrated in different educational contexts. The review of different literatures helps with reflecting on the globalizing nature of Western education and international students’ intersectional experiences when learning across different cultures and contexts. Further, I draw on intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2020), biculturalism (Schwartz & Unger, 2010), and liminal space (Arnold van Gennep, 2019) as they are entry points for understanding my research questions and help to inform my inquiry of my embodied educational journey. Specifically, intersectionality emerges when there are complexities and entanglements. I examine my educational journey through an intersectional lens, and applying a creative writing approach invites me to look at the complexity of culture, context, and identity through multiple perspectives, which is an intersectional way of learning and knowing. Biculturalism, on the other hand, helps me to better address how my bilingualism and biculturalism are major forces in my learning as there are constant tensions between two languages, cultures, and knowledge. In addition to this, liminal space explains the subtle and unsolved paradoxes in education and pushes boundaries to help me understand the liminalities in learning. I develop these concepts at the end of Chapter 2.
2.2 Laying the Groundwork

2.2.1 An Inspirational Foundation

The documentary *Schooling the World* (2010), directed by Carol Black, investigates the effects of modern education on a sustainable Indigenous community and culture in India. In particular, the film takes a critical look at the impacts of Western education when imposed and implemented in rural India. In her view of this production, Mitchell (2020) suggests that the film questions the motives of bringing Western methods of education to the Himalayas and surrounding rural areas of India and its impacts on the village of Hemis Shukpa-Chen and the Ladakhi people. According to Mitchell (2020), the documentary:

> questions our very definitions of wealth and poverty – and of knowledge and ignorance – as it uncovers the role of schools in the destruction of traditional sustainable agricultural and ecological knowledge, in the breakup of extended families and communities, and in the devaluation of ancient spiritual traditions. (Mitchell, pp. 2)

The film explores issues of schooling by inviting Ladakhi people in India into a conversation with scholars and thinkers, including Wade Davis; Helena Norberg-Hodge and Vandana Shiva; and Manish Jain. These thinkers bring multiple perspectives about the promises and dilemmas of the globalization of Western education.

I was first introduced to the film, *Schooling the World* while enrolled in an education and globalization course during the first semester of my graduate studies at Western University in Ontario, Canada. As a class, we reflected on how Western schools
were being brought to different parts of the world. Underneath this expansion was a
global rationalization that education driven by the logic of science and the myth of
progress (Carney et. al, 2012) could save Indigenous people. The film demonstrates the
effects of such approaches to schooling by sharing a specific case in rural India and its
consequences for Ladakhi people.

As a student, I learned about the critical issues of Euro-Western education around
the world, a subject deeply concerned with the diversity of humans, and their cultures,
which provoked my critical consciousness to ask similar questions about the context of
global Western education agendas, their colonial foundations, and their impacts on not
only Indigenous people, but for international students. The film therefore provided me
with a pathway to reflect on my experiences and shed new insights on the meaning
of learning and knowledge, which inspired me to reconsider my motives and understanding
of education across different contexts.

Further, the film also looked at how Western education is rooted and intertwined
with colonialism and economic development, and how global schooling policy agendas
often reinforce inequities and undermine different types of knowing including Indigenous
ways of knowing, being and doing (Cochran-Smith, 2010). Also, the film critiqued the
globalizing effects of Western education and its purpose in civilizing, assimilating, and
training students to be good workers for scarce jobs. The significant messages of the film
forced me to reconsider how I have been influenced by such Euro-Western educational
agendas and assumptions. To be more specific, the film inspired me to reflect on my own
educational experiences in both China and Canada and consider how embodied learning
and knowledge shape learners to be better prepared to compete in a global job market and
participate in diverse workplaces, in turn “escape” to a “better life” (Baillie et al., 2011, as quoted in Stein, Andreotti, Susa, 2019). I relate this with my choice of education across different learning environments, both locally and globally.

Lastly, under the reform of global approaches to education, schooling in the film converges toward a single global model (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). For example, the role of English language instruction among students in India was notable in the film. To be more precise, English becomes an academic discipline for Indian children to follow in schools, which forbids them of speaking in Hindu and Ladakhi languages (Black, 43:05). The disciplining nature of Western schooling might result in children forgetting the values of their own languages and cultures, instead, they are taught to believe that English is a superior knowledge and skill they must have to survive. Thus, the globalization of Western education is sometimes ignorant about the complicated differences between cultures and modes of learning. There is therefore an urgent need for people to understand the potential impacts of imposing a solely Western education in different contexts. The impacts of Western education and the unforeseen consequences done to Indigenous peoples are things to consider. Education and schools should not become places that erase the values of certain cultures in ways that make dominant cultures stronger. The integration and learning of different cultures in schools thereby needs to be taken up critically and consider notions of power and privilege.

The film presents paradoxes about promoting diversity and bringing modern education in schools in rural India without considering the equally valuable cultures already in place within these contexts. The documentary was an inspirational foundation for me to reconsider my different learning experiences within different cultural contexts.
The dissonant voices and hegemonic shifting between learning across different contexts is one of the significant aspects of the film. Therefore, I examine these aspects in this self-study, by exploring how I encountered similar situations in different places, and how I relate with the multi-disciplinary analysis of the film. The definitions of culture, knowledge and liminal space between cultural understanding, self-reflection, and change, incorporating and transforming through education are reconsidered.

2.2.2 Embodied Learning and Knowledge Through Creative Writing

Knowledge and learning can be considered embodied, which is helpful in educational learning contexts as knowledge is not only situated in textbooks with fixed definitions. Instead, knowledge can be an embodied and subjective reality inspired by surroundings and experiences. The definition of embodied knowledge and learning could be expanded when I seek to understand embodied learning and knowledge through creative writing.

While the film *Schooling the World* raised my critical consciousness about the importance of understanding different models of education, my educational journey across contexts has taught me that knowledge and education are not situated in a single context or through one single form. Education is not simply a tool given to people to survive in the competitive global market, education goes beyond prescribed texts and can be considered in other ways (Black, 2010). In this section, I bring in the literature and consider how this self-study deeply connects with embodied learning and knowledge, as well as with the imperial and colonial nature of Western education indicated in the film *Schooling the World* (Black, 2010). I also demonstrate my approach to creative writing to
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better understand embodied knowledge and learning. I believe embodied knowledge and learning is my beginning of thinking about education intersectional.

Roxana Ng’s (2018) article *Decolonizing teaching and learning through embodied learning* is fundamental to my consideration of education and the differences between mind-intellect and mind-body-emotion-spirit centers of knowing. I look closely at Ng’s goals, specifically against “the existing boundaries of educational discourse and turn to incorporate other epistemological and philosophical traditions” (p. 33). She challenges the binary thinking of education and the taken-for-granted assumptions and practices in the field around the world. Ng (2018) also argues that today’s education does not pay attention to the embodied features of individuals, and so it fails to explore the interconnection between mind and the body. In other words, people are so disciplined and deeply influenced by their existing cultures and environments around them that they are sometimes reluctant to understand other forms of culture and knowledge. For instance, international students like myself often have the feeling of not belonging to any culture, and so often we find ourselves in a battle between our own culture and the culture of the academic environment that we are situated in. To be more precise, my perspective of learning and knowledge is first disciplined by Chinese educational thought, which is deeply rooted in Confucianism (Bush & Qiang, 2000, as cited in Sit, 2013). Thus, practical knowledge acquisition is highly valued in the education I received in China. Since transitioning to higher education in Canada after 18 years of education in China, I realize the boundaries with learning in a cultural environment that I do not come from. For instance, many adult learners, especially graduate level international students, bring their prior experience of the rapport and discipline between teachers and students in
academic environments from their home countries (Yamashita & Schwartz, 2012). Thus, these existing boundaries of interpersonal relationships causes misunderstanding between different cultures in academic and learning environments. Meanwhile, the academic and interpersonal boundaries that many international students encounter create barriers for them to recognize their own embodied knowledge (Sidhu & Dall'Alba, 2012). I have also found that it is difficult to encounter these boundaries and become embodied in an academic learning environment that is foreign to me, as there is liminal space of learning (Jones & Hammond, 2023).

In addition to the difficulty of understanding the dynamism of learning and knowledge across cultures, Ng (2018) discusses some reasons for struggles when integrating body, mind, and spirit in understanding knowledge and learning. Often, these struggles are hidden because there is a lack of courage in confronting the differences both physically and psychologically. To be more specific, Roxana Ng (2018) described her difficulties in decolonizing herself from the embodied historical stereotype:

Each time I stand in front of a classroom. I embody the historical sexualization and racialization of an Asian female, who is thought to be docile, subservient, and sexually compliant, even as my class privilege, formal authority, and academic qualifications ameliorate some of the effects of this stereotype (p. 36).

As a Chinese female international student studying in higher education in Canada, I often feel similar struggles as I fail to embrace the integration of my physical body and intellectual mind. Rather, I posit a distinct separation between them (Bordo 1987, esp. chap.5, as cited in Ng, 2018). Ng invites me to look at myself and the relationship
between my body and mind. Education thereby becomes a self-learning process of the different cultural traditions we carry, which can become our assets while going on the path towards understanding. For example, Ng (2018) disrupts the body-mind binary through Qigong, which she describes as “a generic term for any exercise that involves the breath-the art of cultivating qi, with qi in this context referring to the breath, and it is one of the healing and martial arts” (p. 37). She introduces a concept that is arguably unfamiliar to the contemporary Western liberal and critical education system, so it can be possible for people to realize the coexistence of multiple forms of education. I consider this process as a transformational journey through education, the beginning of restoring the self from the past, present, and extending it into the future. Further, my realization of my own culture, and my past educational experiences across contexts, develops my critical consciousness. Ng (2018) puts it as we come to the interconnectedness of body, mind and spirit, a reflexive process acknowledges different forms of knowledge and learning, including embodied learning.

Craig et al (2018) also explore the embodied nature of narrative knowledge in teaching and learning, which is significant to this self-study as I explore my own experience in different educational settings. I recognize the knowledge learned in one context can be applied in other cultural settings if I am mindful of my thoughts and actions. There is the potential to extend the boundaries of education across contexts, and thereby gain new understandings of education. Thus, embodied knowledge can be discussed in diverse disciplines, and does not need to be contained by the hegemony of Western education (Craig et al., 2018). Also, embodied knowledge and learning are processes of decolonizing our bodies and minds from common-sense thinking and taken-
for-granted assumptions (Ng, 2018). Colin Leys suggests that ideology is often “completely normalized, and embedded in language, it is not merely a set of ideas, but a practice in that it shapes how we act, as well as how we think” (As cited in Ng, 2018, p. 41). Thus, embodied knowledge and learning challenge us as we confront the patterns of thinking and behaviors that are deeply rooted within us. In summary, embodied knowledge and experiential learning could be gained in the classroom, also through resilience and decolonization of our own bodies and minds (Ng, 2018). Ng reminds us that,

the system of oppression, the questions addressed by Fanon and Gramsci, understanding the dissonance between body, mind, and spirit leads me to see that, regardless of whether we are the oppressor or the oppressed, the perpetrator or victim, we reproduce oppression through normalized patterns of behavior that have developed over time and have become natural automatic and unconscious actions and ways of being in the world. The notion of decolonization to indicate the practices in which we can engage to free us from ideas and ideology. (p. 52).

Therefore, the idea of embodied learning and knowledge could be given different meanings and interpreted differently based on our experiences of education and life experiences. The choices are multiple and open to further discussions. The notion of leaving space for multiple understandings is inspirational, and I intend to illustrate the beauty of it by using a creative writing approach (poetry and land-based reflection) in this self-study.
2.2.3 In-Depth Reading about Embodied Learning and Knowledge

Building on critiques raised in the film *Schooling the World*, my work draws from Roxana Ng’s understanding of embodied learning and knowledge. In this section, I provide a literature review of embodied learning and knowledge.

Embodied learning and knowledge are deeply connected with the silencing nature of colonialism (Brunette-Debassige, 2018). The meanings and expressions of silence is closely examined by Dénommé-Welch and Rowsell (2017) in their article named *Epistemologies of silence*, which I find relevant with the film *Schooling the World* and embodied learning and knowledge. For instance, the film illustrates the silencing violence of how “Western North American culture has been preoccupied with its own language, political discourse, social norms and cultural values” (Dénommé-Welch & Rowsell, 2017, p. 13). Ladakhi children are forced into an education that is beyond their choices to recognize their needs and values in learning, which I believe could cause moments of silence such as “a form of shyness, or resistance” (Dénommé-Welch & Rowsell, 2017, p. 15). While there is silence in Western education, there is also less room to realize the embodied nature of knowledge and learning.

The concept of embodiment illustrates how the body is not simply a container to store knowledge but a site of experiential learning (Craig et al., 2018). “Embodied knowledge is the knowledge that dwelling in the body and enacted through the body” (Craig et al., 2018, p. 329). Dénommé-Welch and Rowsell (2017) indicate something similar by demonstrating how bodies become way of making meaning when people widen the possibilities and ways of learning through silence. In this self-study, I reflect on my schooling experiences using poetic device to respond to different educational
contexts with the concept of embodied knowledge and silence in mind. Embodied learning and knowledge can be interpreted through formation of self-knowledge and identity, which is the core to the interconnection between mind and the body (Ng, 2018). Through self-reflection and understanding of my own stories with education, I honor an embodied way of knowing and learning.

Embodied learning and knowledge help connect our experiences, which may be categorized as instructive (educative) or non-instructive (non-educative) according to the qualities of different experiences (Craig et al., 2018). However, I believe experiences come with learning and knowing, they are unique and could not be strictly summarized into categories, nor should they be considered separately (Dewey, 1930, as cited in Craig et al., 2018). In my educational experiences, embodied learning and knowledge are in connection with my feeling and action, and it is constructed gradually through experiences. Education is the site of exploration for me to have a better understanding of embodied learning and knowledge. As noted previously, John Dewey (1897) argues: “education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience; that process and the goal of education are the same thing” (p. 13). The concept of experience is closely connected to the notion of embodied knowledge. For Dewey, life and education constitutes experience (Dewey, 1986). So, I ground my understanding of educational experience through poetic narrative as a form of self-reflection.

In Craig et al., (2018)’s article, The embodied nature of narrative knowledge: A cross-study analysis of embodied knowledge in teaching, learning, and life, the authors argue that narrative is a significant way to realize embodied learning and knowledge. Consequently, I understand the need to revisit my experiences of education in different
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contexts over time. Similarly, I examine questions raised in the film *Schooling the World*, which lead me to ask, “What does it mean to be human and alive?” (Wade Davis, 1:02:02, 2010) I also realize how we all have different ways to story and re-story these experiences, and arguably they are the moments which we are telling our stories that we may feel most alive (Craig et al., 2018). I draw on my own schooling experiences to inform my inquiry and this self-study. Therefore, it is by reflecting on select moments from my schooling experiences that I come to understand embodied experience.

To sum up, I look at embodied learning and knowledge at notions of intersectionality. Specifically, I consider Craig et al.’s (2018) argument that “education, experiences, and life are deeply intertwined (Dewey, 1938), narrative inquiries foreground human experience in their research studies to uncover embodied, narrative, moral, emotional, and relational knowledge” (p. 331). I connect this concept also with creative writing approaches (i.e., poetry and self-reflexive writing) because they both require imagination and creativity as a process of learning.

### 2.3 Critical Education

Paolo Freire (1970) argues that education has the potential to either empower or disenfranchise learners. Accordingly, critical thinking is highly promoted under critical pedagogy as it is the most notable skill one should have to be successful in school (Moosavi, 2020). Although this is partly true, critical thinking could stand against the banking model of education (Freire, 1970) by providing a new method of education that is against oppression and binary beliefs. Students then could learn and solve problems based on their own cultural and social contexts. However, with the expansion of internationalization and globalization, people turn towards Western education, believing...
it is the panacea to promote inclusive and sustainable learning experiences, to address social justice, and to solve the problems in non-Western education systems (Stein, et al., 2019). As a Chinese international student studying at universities in Canada, I am challenged to carry multiple identities and understand two cultures simultaneously. So, the idea of “cultural baggage” (Kuokkanen, 2008) emerges each time I go to a new place for education that is not my home, and whether I conform or check my cultural baggage at the gates of every place in which I learn is always a hard decision for me to make. In my understanding, my cultural baggage is the traditional Chinese culture I carry, my way of learning and my understandings of knowledge and education that were nurtured when I was still living in my hometown. Instead of presenting them proudly, I always feel burdened and scared of not being understood.

The concept of embodied knowledge and learning play a role in my understanding of critical education while journeying different contexts. Embodied knowledge and practices use the body as a tool for healing through self-awareness, mindfulness, connection, self-regulation, finding balance and creating self-acceptance (Ng, 2018). They are equally essential for me in realizing there is no standard for determining which culture or education is better, that is not the only path for me to develop critical thinking and find meaning through life. I aim to connect the dots between my past, present and future educational experiences, and ask myself these questions, so I can preserve my difference and find my path in education.

2.4 Resilience in Different Educational Contexts

When I encounter different experiences across contexts, including people, cultures, and disciplines, I come to understand the meaning of resilience in new ways.
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Whether it is in the Chinese or Canadian context of learning, the term exemplifies various qualities I and others must have or learn to develop to help navigate specific contexts, cultures, and geographies. Rutledge (2020) presents that resilience is often considered threefold. Resilience is elasticity, the ability to return into shape; it is also toughness, the ability to persevere and endure difficulties; it is then transformation, the ability to become something different as a byproduct of trial and struggle. Based on this threefold definition, Steward explains how people build resilience such as through active and healthy network of relationships. Further, the development of resilience comes with a sense of self-regard and confidence. With these characteristics in mind, I investigate how resilience could be defined differently through case studies and by different people based on their life experiences. I draw on scholars from different cultural backgrounds to discuss the significance of resilience in life encounters. I also write about the process of bringing resilient in my education.

McCubbin (2001) then describes resilience “as an umbrella term or surrogate word to cover many aspects of overcoming adversity and adapting to one’s environment” (p.1). However, achieving resilience is not always easy, especially for international students who are new to their context of learning. Like He (2010) indicates there are significant differences and understanding gaps between the learning pedagogy in China and Canada. As a student who has pursued education in different places, I experience difficulty of being “elastic” and face pressures to fit into different learning environments. The idea of building resilience for some people may mean being forced to adapt to a new learning environment by assimilating oneself into new relationships, new contexts, and new culture (Wake, 2018). Therefore, the hegemony of education is imposed on
individuals and suggests that resilience is something you must build to survive in a new environment (Ansari & Shahzad, 2017).

I connect my experience of developing resilience with Sara Ahmed’s book, *Living a Feminist Life* published in 2017. She “writes about the Feminist Killjoy as a figure who not only notices the wrongs produced by sexism, racism, and other overlapping oppressions but also refuses to let them slide” (Hart & Colonna, 2021, p. 26). Building and achieving resilience in different educational contexts are being realized by many, but it is like feminine oppressions, people are focusing on the reasons of finding resilience without consider the pathways of becoming resilient. Resilience serves as a happy point to explain the intersectional challenges people encounter, and it gradually becomes the solutions to these problems. In this self-study, I explain the recognition of resilience prior and post pandemic and realize how different contexts are teaching me to find my strength of developing resilience when there is unexpectedness in life.

Drawing on the notion of un-situatedness Maxine Greene (1995) argues how imagination and courage to enter in the world of unknown is an essential step to achieving resilience. Greene writes: “on some level of the integrity and the coherence of what may seem to us to be an alien world in the person of another, we are called upon to use our imaginations to enter into that world, to discover how it looks and feels from the vantage point of the person whose world it is” (p. 4). I recognize that one may encounter tensions while studying in unfamiliar academic environments, but can also find strength in the intertwined cultures, social and academic environments. Resilience could emerge through the exploration of myself, which in this self-study is to discover the embodiment of my educational experiences.
Further, academic resilience is most discussed when talking about international students’ learning experiences in foreign countries, and places that are unfamiliar. Academic resilience then influences students’ social and academic performances (Waxman, Gary & Pardon, 2003). Pooley and Cohen (2010) suggest that the notion of ‘bouncing back’ as the primary definition of resilience, which echoes Rutledge’s definition of ‘elasticity’.

Lastly, as illustrated in the film Schooling the World, resilience cannot simply be achieved through assimilation or integration. However, resilience is another way to gain a form of education, a way to learn about us, and how multi-faceted embodied learning becomes. Kearns and McArdle (2012) suggest that resilience could be a means to build “Positive role models, trust, managed optimism, flexibility of support in and beyond induction, and, crucially, self-efficacy and space for reflexivity, these are more prominent sources of resilience and strong identity” (p. 385). In this self-study, narrative inquiries from my learning across context is another way of becoming resilient and I continually explore the representation of resilience in my educational journey despite challenges along the way.

2.5 Intersectionality

I look at education and reconsidering my experiences in education through multiple perspective instead of a looking at it linearly. When Collins and Bilge (2020) discuss intersectionality, they are not only diagnosing the larger social problems happening all around the world but inviting a deep dialogue between ideas, practices, and people from various backgrounds. For instance, the term “intersectionality” has been
discussed by scholars, policy advocates, practitioners, and activists from different
locations and cultures. Also, students in higher education around the globe and from
distinct fields all encounter intersectional understandings of knowledge? in textbooks,
courses, and articles (Collins & Bilge, 2020). Meanwhile, grassroots organizers, bloggers
and teachers all take up intersectionality as “diverse intellectual and political projects”
(Collins & Bilge, 2020, p. 1). In this section, I write about my understandings of
education with an intersectional lens. Intersectionality becomes an analytical tool (Collins
& Bilge, 2020) that allows me to reconsider the tensions and paradoxes I encounter
across diverse learning environments, while giving voice to my embodied self through
intersectional challenges.

There are four different domains of power operating in intersectional
understandings of the self, the structural, cultural, disciplinary, and interpersonal which
“are distinctive yet interconnected domains of power” (Collins & Bilge, 2020, p. 6) that
describe organizational practices in real life situations. I find these domains relate to my
educational journey and are helpful in exploring how each is represented in diverse
contexts, cultures, peoples, and languages. At the same time, I raise my awareness of
both visible and invisible power forces in the education I have received and how these
forces impacting my educational decisions and experiences.

The Clashing

This is blur,

I know nothing.

Go to that place, finish your work, get the grade, then you done.
No one ever told me these tasks,
They are buried in the hidden room called ‘policy’.

English, Oh! English!
I need that to understand, to communicate,
To Survive!

Why can I read without comprehension?
Why can I speak without communication?
Why can I write without understanding?
Why can I listen without responding?

The rules are different everywhere,
It is hard to make twists, to adapt.
I just obey.

Are there people out there really understand me?
Am I understanding others?

I am clashed by differences,
I am situated in a maze with clashing powers. (Pang, July 2023)

To understand intersectionality, it is helpful to unpack the complex structural domains of power at play in my experiences navigating foreign educational contexts.

Collins and Bilge (2020) describe this intersectional work as navigating “the fundamental structures of social institutions such as job markets, housing, education, and health” (p.
7). People enter school at a certain age and graduate after completing all the tasks assigned to them, this becomes a process and norm in life. However, I have also seen and experienced the sorting mechanisms in education that create barriers to knowledge (Collins & Bilge, 2020). For instance, there are “admissions policies, curriculum offerings, tracking, allocation of resources, and districting policies, as well as economic boundaries such as tuition fees, and cost of eligibility testing” (Collins & Bilge, 2020, p. 207). While studying from K-12 in China, I went to a private school, which had few students, diverse learning activities besides textbook learning, and newer facilities compared to public schools. These distinctions are made clear to appeal to parents, but they tilt the playing field (Mazzucato & Ryan-Collins, 2020) at the same time. Then, I experienced a shift in the opposite direction when I had to pay enormously higher tuition fees and living costs when I began studying abroad in Canada. These disadvantages are all embedded in the education I received as a part of the structure, and they are often too subtle for people to recognize its larger impact. The differences between private and public schools, studying domestically or internationally foster accumulated advantages and disadvantages that I may not always be conscious with others. Therefore, as an insider of these structural social inequalities, I bring acritical eye and reexamine my understanding of education under these inequities.

The cultural domains of power, on the other hand, indicates “the increasing significance of ideas and culture in the organization of power relations, which often normalize cultural attitudes and expectations concerning social inequalities” (Collins & Bilge, 2020, p. 9). I connect this to my decision to go study abroad. As mobility and migration become the trend of globalization, more and more international students are
going abroad for higher education (Zhang & Beck, 2014). I am not an exception, and the term ‘culturally competent’ and ‘global citizen’ (Lewin, 2009) serve as two powerful driving forces when considering the trend to go abroad for education. However, it is difficult to have a strong understanding of these terms and become globally competitive by only going abroad without knowing the obstacles during the process (Ramírez, 2013).

Going abroad comes with intersectional challenges such as, cultural misunderstandings embedded in education. It is significant to understand the differences between going abroad and experiencing intersectional challenges while learning in another country. For instance, the international high school I attended in China functioned as a preparatory school for me to go to Canada and seek education abroad. The idea of becoming a ‘global citizen’ is highly encouraged in some parts of China, which is one of the principles of my international high school. Bellamy and Weinberg (2006) however suggest that the characteristics of global citizens are developed at the individual level. Therefore, studying abroad does not necessarily justify one’s ability to learn and thrive in the globalized society. In more deeply reflecting on this goal in my own education, I can see how cultural domains of power influenced the notion of global citizenship education, and many Chinese schooling officials view education as a measurement of success, which reinforces inequality as equal opportunities are not given to everyone (Collins & Bilge, 2020).

Further, the disciplinary domain of power reveals how rules and regulations apply to different students in schools (Collins & Bilge, 2020). These rules are often fairly and unfairly applied to people based on their race, gender, sexuality, class and other characteristics, which causes intersectional challenges for oppressed people, yet at the
same time privileging others. As a Chinese international student learning in a Canadian university, I have experienced such challenges financially, socially, and intellectually. Financially, international students pay much higher tuition fees compared to domestic students in addition to the cost of rent and other expenses (Cudmore, 2005). International students also experience challenges in socially adjusting as they adapt to a learning environment that requires them to understand another culture and grasp a new language. Although many Western universities promotes themselves as multicultural and inclusive, there is still the myth of diversity in education, and students face obstacles that cannot be categorized into one single category (Collins & Bilge, 2020). I reflect and explore how I navigate and cope with these intersectional challenges, paradoxes and engage different learning environments, carrying different identities, both as a domestic and international student.

Last, “the interpersonal domain of power refers to how individuals experience the convergence of structural, cultural, and disciplinary power” (Collins & Bilge, 2020, p. 15). It is nearly impossible for me to have an unbiased eye towards my educational experiences and decisions, the different identities I carry, and the embodied self and knowledge I carry through my education. Based on my gender, ethnicity, linguistic and cultural background, my identity aligns closely with them, and they change as I experience structural, cultural, and disciplinary powers that have played out in the educational context I am situated in. These intersectional power relations raise my critical consciousness toward the different types of educational agendas I have received in the past, the education I have now, and might move toward in the future. Education as a field of power (Collins & Bilge, 2020) at the same time creates tensions and promotes
resilience, which are concepts I believe are worth exploring further in my own educational experiences.

Nevertheless, as intersectionality continues to circulate in educational venues, creating impacts and raising critical thinking, people come to notice there is a surrogate word for intersectionality, which is diversity (Collins & Bilge, 2020). When looking at university agendas and the introductions of schools I have been to, I realize the term ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’ are highly appreciated in education, both in teaching and learning, from my elementary schools to universities. Diversity is highly relevant to my own education as well, whether it is in the international high school I attended in China, or the universities I have studied at in Canada. However, this linguistic shifts in intersectionality invites me to have a closer look at my educational journey, and how has diversity has been framed and displayed in various contexts. Lastly, the creative method (poems and narrative devices) I have adopted in this thesis point to the intersectional lens of my research.

2.6 Biculturalism

Biculturalism is a concept that assists me with identifying the major challenges I have experienced navigating across more than one language and culture in China and in Canada. While constructing poems and narratives as part of this self-study, I write in English, but it sometimes sounds differently in my mother tongue (Mandarin). The term biculturalism derives from the acculturation literature, which forces individuals to make a choice between the two cultures (Mexican/Anglo).

Although the midpoint of this continuum can produce a bicultural/bilingual measure, it
still fails to provide independent measures of individuals’ maintenance of their culture of origin and adherence to their dominant culture (Cabassa, 2003, p. 133).

However, I do not want to limit myself with a single definition of biculturalism. Scholars around the world are expanding on the definition of biculturalism by indicating different cultural practices, values, and identifications (Schwartz & Unger, 2010). Based on different individuals, the definition of biculturalism is nuanced, but is a critical concept I draw on for this self-study.

**Choices**

I try to fit in by hanging out with student's who speaks English.

I try to laugh along when I don’t get the joke.

I try to become local!

With masks on my face,

Helmets on my body,

Am I still the me?

I try to find the answers.

So, I take off the masks,

I take off the helmets,

I speak my language,

I do what I used to do when I was a little child in my hometown.

Who Am I Now?
I must choose a side,
I must shift between the two cultures, two languages, two groups of friends.
I do not find my choice in it,
I lost myself. (Pang, July 2023)

When journeying across different contexts for my education, I have started to consider the tensions and paradoxes I face navigating differences between different cultures and people I encounter. I realize the in-betweenness (Green, 1995). To make connections, I consider biculturalism as a significant factor when engaging in dialogue about the meaning of education in past, present, and into future contexts (Lourie, 2015). I believe that bicultural identities are more than ideas, thoughts, or definitions; I draw on biculturalism as a theoretical framework to inform me through different values and identities, and to set me free from binary thinking in education and in life.

As mentioned above, biculturalism works closely with acculturation, which in my opinion is a rather passive process of accepting one or multiple cultures in the context you are situated in. In this self-study, I argue that biculturalism is a choice, a choice between assimilation or separation (Tadmor, Tetlock, & Peng, 2009). For instance,

The family is not merely a conduit for larger environmental and cultural influences; rather, parents can actively decide how they want their children to acculturate, and their attempts to socialize their children culturally can complement – or clash with – the effects of the larger cultural context (Schwartz & Unger, 2010, p. 28).

This means being bicultural is highly influenced and shaped by family, societal, structural, and political transformations, and individual who are bicultural undergo
incremental changes in life (Dennis, 2008). These changes could be smooth or challenging for people both physically and psychologically based mainly on the cultural environment. To be more specific, biculturalism is most adaptive in bicultural environments, and less adaptive in monocultural environments. The level of difficulties in navigating biculturalism among individuals are different depending on how people integrate into two cultures (Schwartz & Unger, 2010).

Moreover, Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997) offer terms that explain such differences when people combine their heritage and receiving cultural streams, they are blended biculturalism and alternative biculturalism. Blended biculturalisms occurs when people behave bicultural in all situations, and alternative biculturalism is when people shift between their behavior to align with different social contexts. I identify with these nuances in my own experiences when I have studied in Canadian universities as an international female student from China. At the same time, I am also aware of the resilience I have acquired being able to navigate this biculturalism as I try to fit in to different learning environments by shifting between cultural behaviors.

Further, there are ongoing challenges for people being bicultural including navigating these expectations without questioning or having second thoughts about their identities, cultural values and being free from judgements. The choices are limited for people who identify themselves as bicultural, or multicultural. Barker (2017) examines the combination of blended biculturalism and alternative biculturalism, which bicultural individual adapts to new contexts are often integrated their two cultures by alternating between them as well as blending them. Biculturalism becomes a difficult multiple-choice question, and the answer to the question varies depends on the cultural context. I
have often felt similarly trying to find the right cities or countries for me to start my own education. These places are all unfamiliar to me, and I develop bicultural consciousness when I walk in two worlds simultaneously, and I struggle when I cannot integrate or blending my home culture with the current educational culture. I call this operating in the in-betweenness being influenced by both Chinese and Canadian culture. Chen et al. (2022) explain similar challenges among students who are experiencing bicultural tensions navigating identity integration, self-esteem, academic resilience, and integration anxiety. These experiences demonstrate how biculturalism inform individual strengths and limitations in education.

Afterwards, I make connection with the film Schooling the World, and indicate how biculturalism is represented in the film. The film highlights the fact that as the world becomes globalized and interconnected, the influence of Euro-Western education forces people to abandon and replace their traditional culture to fit in to their educational environments. The film offers insights into ways of looking at my own education, the similar processes of wandering between two cultures and seeking understandings through my learning. Biculturalism helps me to realize how education has influenced me and makes me to consider the meaning of pursuing education in a different place that is alien to me. I have learned that it is essential for me to understand the bicultural process and reconcile two cultures within myself and build bridges between different cultural contexts and people.

Building onto the value of the film for me, Wade Davis, one of the speakers in the film Schooling the World discusses how schools become places where knowledge is imposed onto people through a single pedagogy. Individuals who come from different
cultural contexts to study in Western universities may experience the conflicts between two cultures and find it difficult to have their own nuanced intersectional identities (Moosavi, 2020b). Instead of inviting different voices in education to foster creativity and other possibilities of learning, globalization of education is causing the loss of languages and the soul of every culture (Black, 2010). Thus, bicultural individuals are struggling to embrace their traditional culture once they step in Western universities. In this manner, biculturalism sets the framework for me to critically think about my experience and definition of the term itself. In my experience of an East Asian student studying across contexts, I have been aware of the paradoxes and the resilience I have developed while I search for reconciliation across cultures. There were also times I ignored the benefits of being bicultural, and blindly fit in the dominant culture that seems most ‘acceptable’.

Biculturalism is a springboard for me to have profound realization of pursuing education in unfamiliar cultures.

In drawing on bicultural understandings, I am concerned about how bicultural individuals ignore the benefits this way of moving in the world brings, instead we often become concerned more about the tensions and boundaries biculturalism causes, especially in education. In close connection with acculturation, “bicultural are consistently faced with the challenge of integrating different sets of cultural demands and messages” (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002, p. 495). For instance, I often experience challenges in academic writing or professional life due to dual language use (Mandarin and English) (Griffiths, 2012). However, if I allow myself to feel the uniqueness and to experience the benefits of my dual cultural background, it may spark creativity and shift the hegemonic reality in life and education. Thus, I explore my realization of
biculuralism in this self-study by constructing poems and land-based reflection, and how I identify myself as a bicultural learner, and the possibilities it brings.

2.7 Liminal Space

The liminal space (Arnold van Gennep, 2019) is my third concept as part of my theoretical framework used to explain the cultural boundaries I encounter in my education across contexts. I draw from the term liminal space or liminality initiated by Arnold van Gennep, a sociologist in his book The Rites of Passage. Van Gennep (1960:1) explains that:

Every society as it moves from lower to higher levels of civilization becomes accentuated and distinct with clearly marked social divisions. These divisions become markers and have levels of passages one must fulfil. These are the rite of passages. He documents in his book a number of them, namely pregnancy and childbirth, birth and childhood, initiation rites, betrothal and marriage and funerals. These rites have clearly marked ceremonies whose purpose is to enable the individual to ‘pass’ from one stage to the next (p. 1).

Liminal space as an interdisciplinary term that has been defined and elaborated in many different fields through thoughts and experiences. I see liminal space as a guide when seeking answers towards the question “What does it mean to be human and alive” (Black, 2010, 1:02:02)? I am also considering this liminal space when thinking about the reasons behind my school choices both in China and Canada, the different transitional period in my educational journey. How I make choices and understand the meaning of education through liminal spaces offered in education. I wish to explore how liminal space plays a role when it comes to my goal and purposes through education. For instance, how
the definition of complete and successful education is shaped by the influence of globalization and world culture theory (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). To be more precise, world culture theorists are arguing that schools, rather than diverging and diversifying across nations, that schools converge toward a single global model (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). To be more precise, schooling is perpetuating binary thinking that positions global educational worlds as the ‘West and the rest’. In other cases, there are similar binary labels made in educational environments such as referring students as domestic or international. I argue that these labels demonstrate the potential of liminal space in today’s educational system. In my experience, liminal space in between my domestic and international identities and positions have opened doors for me to realize the multiple meanings of pursuing education outside my culture, and the in-between space between places and periods.

**Entry to Exit**

I know schools are places I need to be,

Where else could I be?

There is no other option. I go to schools and ask for entry tickets,

Tickets offer me access,

To the ‘better’ places.

Afterwards, I look for exits,

I pass to the next stage.

They are the missions I must complete.

What if I cannot attain my degree?

What if I cannot go to schools anymore?
The consequences are clear,
I fall off my trajectory of life.

Entry, Exit, Entry, Exit…
Are these the only road I could take? (Pang, July 2023)

My experience of the liminal space seems more noticeable in the post-pandemic world. International students in “COVID times” are facing increased challenges such as being questioned for valuing remote learning, problematizing of their competence and self-efficacy, and facing difficulty finding support academically and socially (Ge, 2021). Meanwhile, international students also cope with sudden changes, having to make difficult choices, and possibly being distressed in a foreign country (Chan et al., 2021). Therefore, I believe the proximity to the learning space becomes another factor of experiencing the liminal space in education, which causes confusions, and sometimes lack of clear pathways in learning environments. For example, I experience these types of limitations in how learning opportunities became fewer and limited during pandemic. Liminal space as Van Gennep illustrates is being challenged as there are unfamiliarity and unknowns during critical stages in life.

I uncover how my experience of liminal space make sense to me by recalling my learning experiences at places that are not my home. I also capture the liminal space while I write poems and narratives in my second language (English) and negotiate in between cultures and languages. Liminal space is a spatial metaphor that I believe fills a void in my educational journey. Liminal space reminds me of the importance of context
and the overall environmental space of learning, which entails embodied knowledge. I do not want to make liminal space as a happy point or surrogate for complexities and confusions that people come experience in education. Rather, liminal space has served as a tool for me to push the boundaries and cross borders when I have faced difficulties finding my voice in the learning space. Lastly, liminal space has also helped me with retrieving previous acquired knowledge and making them anew.

2.8 Concluding Thoughts

By providing a review of different literature used to guide my work, and furthermore by drawing connections with the film Schooling the World, I develop new understandings about education through this self-study. By considering the creative writing approach with embodied learning and knowledge, I draw attention to my understanding of education (locally and globally), which is highly relevant with the context of this self-study. Also, critical education guides my thinking about the liminal space and tensions exist in my experiences of education, they are questioned in both the film and various literature related to this subject and theme. Further, I elaborate on the meaning of embodied learning and knowledge and its connection with the silencing nature in education. Lastly, I dive into resilience and define how it is represented in my own learning across contexts. These texts and the film, Schooling the World provide my work with a foundation to develop my own narrative accounts in the form of a self-study.
I situate my thesis using the above theories: intersectionality forms the outer circle, followed by biculturalism, liminal space, and myself. All these three theoretical frameworks provide me with interpretive and analytical lenses to look at my educational experiences as they are transformational and embodied. These theoretical frameworks are my guides and methods to explore embodied knowledge, learning across contexts, and resilience representations during the process of getting knowledge. I use creative writing approach with them to demonstrate how knowledge and learning are dynamic and can be realized otherwise. Intersectionality explains how different domains of power are embedded in education, and we are influenced by them constantly, as they become the regulatory norms in life (Collins & Bilge, 2020). Then, biculturalism allows me to examine myself as complicit subjects intertwined with different cultural contexts. However, it is through self-determinization that I gain better understanding of the
embodied learning in education. Further, liminal space comes in with care and provides me with space to reflect on the tensions and confusions in learning. I employ these frameworks critically to make sense of my own schooling experiences as an Asian student learner to address how education should be a life by itself and the significance of it. It is in this capacity, I reflect on the possibilities and realize the coexistence of multiple forms of education, and education as a transformative and embodied journey.
Chapter 3: My Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide a justification for my use of a self-study approach for this thesis that draws on self-reflexivity. From an ontological perspective, self-study (reflexivity), is one approach used to examine selves from the past, present, and future, and to have a mindful view of the selves and others. According to Pace (2012), self-study requires researchers to constantly reflect and explore their personal experiences and interactions with people around them. I embrace a self-reflexive perspective to this research because it brings the transformative power to have the retrospective look through my lived educational experiences and learning.

As I adopt a creative writing approach by constructing poems and land-based reflection with the photos I took, I explore the power of writing the self (Ettorre, 2017). Thus, I have a dialogue with my own writing from different contexts and times and discuss my educational experiences through its cultural and social understanding. I am aware of the close connection between autoethnography and self-reflexive strategies while I consider my educational journey with different cultures. I draw on Margaret Kovach (2009) as she notes, “autoethnography, an approach with its foundations in ethnographical research, brings together the study of self (auto) in relation to culture (ethnography)” (p. 33). Further, Ergas and Ritter (2021) state, “shifting from the autoethnographic modality we briefly sum the points made in respect to the treatment of self in self-study, which we believe has been overlooked in ways that tend to limit this discourse and its broader educational potential” (p. 18). Meanwhile, self-study is considered as “a look at self in action, usually within educational contexts” (Hamilton,
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Smith & Worthington, 2018, p. 17), which allows me to explore the intersectional and complex selves across different educational contexts.

3.2 Critical Understanding of Self-Study and Autoethnography

In following Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018), and other scholars in the field, I provide my understanding of self-study and autoethnography as a research methodological approach in this research. Hamilton et al. (2008) suggest that self-study takes researchers closer to autoethnography itself, which is to push the boundaries of our understanding of selves at different phases in life. Autoethnography and self-study (reflexivity) are both built on the foundations of qualitative, naturalistic, and ethnographic inquiry (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). From an ontological perspective, educational and social worlds are complex with interconnections of human-beings, qualitative research entails multiple meanings, the realities are holistic and unpredictable. Specifically,

meanings used by participants to interpret situations are culture- and context-bound, and there are multiple realities, not single truths in interpreting a situation. History and biography intersect – we create our own futures but not necessarily in situations of our own choosing (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018. p. 288).

From this self-study perspective, I provide my understanding of the intersections between autoethnography and self-study in Table 1 as I see them fit with my inquiry in this research. My goal is to extend some features of autoethnography to a self-study
because I wish to have a critical and much closer understanding of myself in my own educational contexts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Autoethnography</th>
<th>Self-study</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wish to explore and understand cultural experiences based on different and unique personal experiences.</td>
<td>Self-study treats education as a journey into and of oneself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The study focuses on the researcher’s experiences for further consideration of social, political, economic, and educational aspect of learning.</td>
<td>The researcher/author starts with the research with deep consideration of their cultural values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The self, often the research is placed in the center of the research within a specific social context.</td>
<td>Researchers who write self-study often put emphasis on their role during the process of writing. They also believe research should focus on both the process and the product.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is often focused on transformative changes to the researcher.</td>
<td>Self-study focus on the relationship between the researchers and their cultural contexts, values, and educational experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is written in the first-person narrative, and write mainly from researchers’ passion, feelings, and struggles.</td>
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Table 1: My understanding of the similarities and differences between autoethnography and self-study. Summarized and paraphrased content from Cohen Manion and Morrison (2018), and Ergas & Ritter (2021).

In Table 1, I develop a deeper understanding about how autoethnography places the researcher at the center of the study which then becomes part of the process and product of the research. It is important to note self-study as being the study of oneself, one’s actions, one’s ideas, as well as the ‘not self’. It is autobiographical, historical, cultural, and political ... it draws on one’s life, but it is
more than that. Self-study also involves a thoughtful look at texts read, experiences had, people known, and ideas considered (Hamilton, 1998, p. 236).

In this research, I carefully examine my understanding of my purpose of education across contexts, the different tensions within my education when encountering difficulties at the intersections of liminal spaces of learning.

Through self-study, I attempt to expand the boundaries of my thinking and desire for a deeper understanding of the research questions I ask throughout this thesis. I interact with the film *Schooling the World*, my experiences, and stories when I learn at different schools in different cities. I realize knowledge engage various forms of poetic and narrative expression. For instance, writing reflections and poems guide my reflexive practices, which help enhance my understanding of the environment and contexts which I write poetic entries as a practice to express my embodied language and to explore my research questions through a particular narrative lens. Finally, I reflect on the process of my educational experience across context to build an understanding of the uniqueness and validity of my thinking. This helps to better center the self-study perspective to this research.

### 3.3 My Approach to Creative Writing

#### 3.3.1 My Approach to Creative Meaning Making and Writing

My use of creative writing in this thesis builds on Graeme Harper’s (2020) book *Discovering Creative Writing*, its beginnings, structure, movement, flow, process, knowing and endings. His approach to creative writing offers understanding that recognizes how actions and human creativity get applied to words (Harper, 2020). For
instance, our memories and experiences inform our thinking, the dialogue we engage in, the natural beauty we enjoy from the surrounding environments. Beauty exists without human actions and input, but they could become expressive in written languages. Harper suggests (2020),

Beauty exists in the world but that some things we create do rely on our specific and distinctive human actions, and that we define such art according to the application of our human ingenuity and creativity. It is the application here that is important – creative writing involves human creativity applied to words (p. 2-3).

However, we must write creatively with acknowledgements to all the experiences we had from the world (Harper, 2020). Specifically, creativity can be inspired by the environment and the formation of rocks, shape of the mountains, water flowing, color of the flowers, and the contexts we are situated in. In this manner, I draw from different forms of knowledge to inform the creative writing used in this self-study.

According to Harper (2020), “creative writing is the combination of imagination and intellect” (p. 3). Breaking away from the conventional way of writing requires imagination and the voice of difference. Nevertheless, I am not confronting, challenging, or dismissing other forms of writing, but acknowledge that creative writing offers me a voice that expresses different ways to teach about knowledge and experience. For instance, Virginia Woolf was keen to ask the where, why, and how “knowledge is produced, performed, and proclaimed as particular kinds of truths in institutions of power and authority, including academic writing” (Mackinlay, Madden, Mickelburgh & Green, 2022, p. 333). Therefore, knowledge should be taught and perceived in a dynamic
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New knowledge emerges when we become open to different possibilities of learning. I start to reconsider the relationship I have with knowledge as gained through life and educational experiences, then I wish to realize new perspectives from my creative writing.

In addition to this, it is also interesting to notice that “cultural conditions influence how we view genre and how we understand different forms of writing” (Harper, 2020, p. 4). To be more specific, my style and my tone of writing are influenced by my traditional Chinese culture and the cultural environments that I am situated in. When approaching creative writing, we must provide room for our own cultures to exist, lead, and assist through the writing process (Harper, 2020). It is equally important to notice the cultural appropriation before writing, the audience and the distance between me, the author, and my audience. Uniqueness and difference are within different individuals, and it is important for us to realize how different cultures shape people in diverse ways to avoid hegemonic thinking. Here, I draw on Harper’s insights about the three big questions we consider when diving in creative writing: “Why a particular area of investigation could give you the information you seek, what discoveries can be made and what their significance could be and how you can use discoveries you make to improve your own writing” (Harper, 2020, p. 13). I do consider my thinking process as part of this work because every step that takes me to the final product should be considered valuable. Thus, creative writing allows me to be aware of the term ‘self-study’ as not merely entailing the concept of knowing yourself (Harper, 2020), but being more self-aware; it is rather clues through which I can find answers to the bigger questions I ask throughout my writing.
Lastly, creative writing is about making discoveries, taking initiative with the knowledge I hold, and exploring things not yet defined that have long existed. The process of writing and creating is never completed by itself, but in conjunction with the audience. The determination I have with creative writing, and my inquiry through self-study is to make discoveries about myself and the education I have experienced so far. The entry and the exit of taking the road of creative writing is decided by me. I am responsible for my own discovery. Harper (2020) explains.

The decision to write creatively is thus the beginning of a way of engaging with observation or feeling, ideas, and emotions either in the making of a single piece of work or, indeed, as a guiding way of approaching much of your writing (p. 25-26).

3.3.2 Who I am, My Inquiry, Major Decisions and Challenges

In her own approach to storytelling, Brunette-Debassige (2018) writes about the importance of self-location using as an entry point for writing and research. She starts with her unique story based on her cultural and geographical background and her wish to realize research as an embodied journey (p. 162). I resonate with her approach towards storytelling practices, then fostering self-determination through an embodied pedagogy (Brunette-Debassige, 2018). Further she demonstrates her own embodied journey, which is inspirational, transformative, and could be expanded further in life. Similarly, I begin by positioning myself and who I am in relation to my inquiry with learning and education using poetic device (i.e., composing poetry). Then, I trace back to my educational experiences as they are important for this self-study, specifically highlighting my decision to seek education abroad. Lastly, I paint the picture of an international student seeking education during COVID, and the time spent studying in Canada.
In the poem ‘The Process’, I sketch a picture that illustrates the scope, contexts, and purpose of this self-study. I take a closer look at my own education and examine how different forms of embodied knowledge and learning are produced in different contexts of education. I identify my learning as situated in both China and Canada, which gives me a deeper understanding that education is not only shaped by different landscapes and contexts, but also influenced by larger political movements (Morrow & Torres, 2022). For instance, the land acknowledgement in Canada provokes my thinking about the decolonial approach of higher education (Stein et al., 2019). Additionally, the pandemic which hit in 2020 had an impact on education on a global scale. Then, I recall my educational experiences, as there are people intertwined in my stories, recognizing how these interactions produce a form of embodied knowledge. Therefore, it is true that the sharing process during embodied exploration is needed because individual transformation can be extended beyond the borders of self and serve as a model for inspirational change (Brunette-Debassige, 2018). I realize how these encounters with education might have influenced my perspective on learning and ways of looking at problems. It is through self-study that I seek to understand my shifting identities as a student when I learn at different places in China and Canada.

The part of the poem that I devote to Confucianism is significant in my learning as it is deeply rooted in Chinese education (Bush & Qiang, 2000, as cited in Sit, 2013) which has influenced me since the beginning of my education. Thus, I have a traditional Confucian cultural background, which in my opinion centers modesty and diligence, emphasizes order, respects authority, and values practical knowledge acquisition. Therefore, adopting a creative writing approach and writing poems as my expression of
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Embodied language is an exploration of a different way of understanding knowledge that functions outside of conventional academic writing. Then, as the doctrinal status of Confucianism in China was challenged by modernization and the influence of Western models of schooling since the late Qing Dynasty (1840–1911) (Deng, 2011), seeking education abroad became more common. I make connection with the influence of modern education in the film Schooling the World, which impacts people, languages, cultural values, and knowledges around the world. In this case, education is indeed influenced by larger political movements (Morrow & Torres, 2022).

So, the inquiry into my own education has become complex with challenges emerging as I travel across contexts and learn. The backgrounds and contexts are based first on my seventeen years of learning that were situated in China as a domestic student in my home country, then the six years of my undergraduate and graduate studies as an international student in Canada. Thus, learning in a culture that is different from my own, helped me identify the resilience and liminal space of my learning. I also realize my shifting status from a domestic to international student and the different proximity I have with knowledge (Stein et al., 2019).

While I am on the path to an embodied journey of education, I keep pondering the questions posed in the documentary, Schooling the World, which resonates with my educational experiences. In the film, many students from India left their hometown for modern education without knowing the destination their education would lead them. Based on my experiences of leaving home for education, I ask What is the meaning of going away from home, from families, and pursuing education in a different place that is in total alienation of yours? I seek to understand this question and to realize the major
challenges I encounter in different places of learning. I engage new enquiries about liminal space (Van Gennep, 2019) and embodied learning in my exploration of creative writing. Embodied knowledge, education, and the self, as discussed in the film *Schooling the World*, is not only situated in written words or material success. Rather, it is also about learning the importance of kindness, compassion, and thoughts beyond prescribed text (Black, 2010). It is my purpose to explore multiple forms of my own learning occurring across spaces and time. To be more precise, “it is through a personal engagement with the affordances of material resources (the stuff of life) in dialogue with historical traditions (the valued) and future possibilities (the not yet thought)” (Addison, 2008, p. 6). Perhaps, education is not only about surviving in one or more cultural contexts, but it is about learning and knowledge themselves. Through a creative writing approach, I define the process of becoming aware of my embodied self through my educational journey.

### 3.4 Embrace the Unknown: Methods Justification

#### 3.4.1 Use Poetry as my Embodied Language to Seek Answers

The opening poem *A Weird Place*, presented at the very beginning of the thesis is the first poem I construct for this study. The poem echoes my experience of learning through education. The word ‘weird’ in the title is a thought-provoking choice, and many people are curious about the reason behind the word choice. I cannot find explicit reasons for the choice of word because it means different things to different people in various contexts. The interpretations of this word choice may change as I gain more experiences in life, whether these experiences are coming from education or other aspects of life. I consciously leave space for others to reflect and imagine what my poems mean to
themselves by not giving much explanations to the poems I write, and believe that is the beauty of poetry. Sheila Stewart (2018) says that “

many poets try to be with and write from the senses, bodily awareness, context, as well as from their poetic interests. Poetry also occurs between the psyche and the social, a place of bodily knowing attempting to become words, with both unconscious and conscious aspects of mind engaged” (p. 281).

Inspired by Sheila Stewart and her article, Poetry, Learning through Embodied Language (2018), I use poetry as both theoretical and methodological tool for this self-study. I understand Stewart is not the only person who is keen to use poetry to express emotions, knowledge, feelings and memories, poetic inquiry has long been adopted as another form of language to embark meanings in life.

Lisa Patrick (2016) also argues that “poetic methodologies in literacy research and argues for the inclusion of poetry in social science research writing” (p. 384). I wish to demonstrate this inclusivity of knowledge by using poetries in this self-study. When I consider the purpose for writing this self-study, I gain new understanding from what George Eliot says, “Every end is a beginning”. The process of going back offers me courage to understand my educational journey as it is transformative and embodied. I define poetry writing as a form of creative writing, which invite different viewpoints and interpretations, both from myself as an author, and to my audience (Sarti et al., 2014). Also, writing poetry requires my ability to recall parts of memory, which is significant for reflexive work (Sarti et al., 2014). To be more specific, reflective work is practiced in schools, such as writing diaries and reflective essays. Thus, it is a process of
understanding the combination of ourselves, others, culture, and experiences. However, the benefits of writing poetry have been overlooked, especially in academic writing (Patrick, 2016), and I believe the purpose of education would be better fulfilled if there are teaching around learning ourselves.

Sheila Stewart (2018) highlights that the experiences of our own and other people’s bodies are shaped by different social context, dominant discourses, and material realities. It is challenging to work with multiple realities, such as learning in a new cultural environment. By seeking education across context, I learn how to fit in cultural environments I do not familiar with, speaking a second language or involved in different dialects, and learn the knowledge I do not fully understand. I recognize them as my own version of cultural bomb. Precisely, the concept of cultural bomb is described by Wa Thiong’o (1986), as he writes “The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people’s belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves” (p. 3). These scholars prompt me to consider the tensions emerged for me as I learn through liminal spaces, often unsettling.

Poetic inquiry provides me with freedom to work with words with imagination and freedom, which gives opportunities for different ways of learning and knowing. Constructing poems also offer me paths of understanding my own versions of cultural bombs as they speak to my struggles in education. Also, it is an art-informed approach that provides me ways to understand different emotions when encountering challenges across social differences (Stewart, 2018). Poetry at the same time has the power to unpack knowledge that are subtle and less likely to share in the public. I relate this
concept with the documentary *Schooling the World*, as the film speaks about the shameful emotions people have towards their own culture. With poetry, it has the power to trouble the discomfort and hidden feelings we have towards life and education (Stewart, 2018). Shame could be a potential barrier for learning and help unpack the unknown, yet it is irony because learning seems like the only way to come across the unknown (Stewart, 2018). Therefore, it is essential to find multiple approaches to create meaning. Poetry is one way to achieve that.

Poetry writing is also a way to challenge the binary thinking in education (Stewart, 2018). From Stewart, poetry has the power to ask, “What counts as knowledge” (Stewart, 2018, p. 287). Academic writing and educational research give privilege to literal and prose writing implicitly (Patrick, 2016), and poetry could be a way to demonstrate there are other forms of writing that are equally meaningful, as all forms of education are unique and could embark meaning. Meanwhile, the meaning of doing research is reconsidered through the perspective of poetic inquiry. Stewart (2018) describes the process of writing a poetry as visceral experience, which deepens the embodied inquiry. I believe the process of writing poetry also speaks to the purpose of doing research, which is to explore, listen, create, and care about knowledge.

It is by writing this self-study, I am familiar with the concept that writing poetries as a form of data collection method in academic writing and research offers different avenues for meaning making that are new (Patrick, 2016). Precisely,

making a poem is a different process, using words to create a cluster of meanings; an energetic working with words draws in the reader, often evoking sensory experience
and memory. I use poems in academic writing to bring in more of the body, the
difficult-to-say, other modes of knowing, and the unexpected (Stewart, 2018, p. 286).

Writing poems bring me courage to explore resilience, liminal spaces of learning and
critical understanding of pursuing education at different contexts in a more direct and
conscious way. Poetry could be my prompt, my beginning to ask the questions I have
with my educational experiences.

Lastly, poetry helps express experiences in powerful ways, without a specific
conclusion or explanations, “It invites embodiment, opening space for multilayered
learning and supporting possibilities for personal and social transformation” (Stewart,
2018, p. 293). Moreover, poetries are in close alignment with the different themes I
intend to explore in this self-study, which is to demonstrate the process of realizing my
learning is transformative across context. Poetry then serves as journeys to grasp the
process of realizing and decolonizing the process of my learning. Stewart (2018) explains
the highlights of using poetry, that it leaves room for readers to interact with words and
knowledge in different ways, and guiding contemplation after writing. My educational
journey is by itself unique and transformative, prompting me to ask questions constantly.
I wish poetry would help me to explore this journey through imagination, creativity and
beyond prescribed texts. I embrace another form of embodied language by writing poetry.

3.4.2 Four Land-Based Reflections

“A pedagogy of Land refers to the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual aspects of
Land. Land as sentient” (Styres et al. 2013, p. 37). Land-based learning has been focused
on the concept that “land as first teacher, place of reflection, centering relationships, and
illustrate wholistic perspectives of learning” (Bowra, et al., 2021, p. 135 & 136). This closely aligns with the self-reflection nature of this study. Particularly, land-based learning is first practiced by Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island, which is demonstrating “human, culture, and traditions are all extension of the land” (Bowra, et al. 2021, p. 133). However, land-based learning has been interrupted and marginalized because “Eurocentric education systems fail to acknowledge Indigenous histories and non-western ways of knowing, bring and learning” (Scully 2012, as cited in Bowra, et al. 2021, p. 133).

As a non-Indigenous person, I acknowledge the importance of recognizing the importance of land-based learning by reflecting on the different places I pursue my education, including China and Canada, and understand how knowledge is realized through embodied learning. Self-reflection allows me to relate with the place and spaces I have lived and studied at, including the places I call home, and the places that I feel are alien to myself. I specifically focus on these four places and capture the educational moments at these places, they are Ji’An (吉安), Jiangxi (江西), China; Wuhan (武汉), Hubei (湖北), China; Langley, British Columbia (BC), Canada; and London, Ontario, Canada.

The importance of understanding land should not be overlooked, and it is my wish to decolonize my educational practices through these reflections, which I often take-for-granted without further consideration of its impact. In addition to this, I connect this concept with the film Schooling the World, as it is also illustrating the importance of understanding and appreciating traditional culture and teachings about the land, and how
we develop this knowledge and knowing through education. I engage land-based learning through writing land-based reflection and learn about my relationships with the land more deeply, and the lessons it teaches in Chapter 4.

3.5 Critiques and Limitations About My Research Methodology

Besides the important benefits of writing a self-study and autoethnography, there are also critiques of these approaches. In this section, I summarize these different challenges and critiques given to self-study organizing them into three categories; 1) inaccuracy of data, or lack of empirical data, 2) vague consent, and 3) validity of knowledge the study creates. I also put forward my understandings of using self-study and autoethnography as my methodology despite these criticisms. And finally, I demonstrate how I have used appropriate research ethics in this study.

To begin, there are critiques and concerns about self-study research and autoethnography. For example, generating research through self-study and self-reflexivity primarily focuses on personal memories, narratives, and experiences of particular social issues (Méndez, 2013), which can rely on inaccurate and vague memories that can become challenged and critiqued. Autoethnographic studies have long been criticized for not employing rigorous standards compared to other qualitative research approaches such as interviews and observations made of/with participants (Méndez, 2013). However, I believe that educational research needs autographical researchers to break through the colonized binary thinking about knowledge, as simply objective.
Autoethnography has also been criticized as less ethical because the vague consent process to protect the researchers and the people in relation with research. For example, Méndez (2013) discusses the ethical principles of doing self-study, noting that it is important to consider “...how close we choose to position our readers” (p. 814). Negotiating consent is also an important practice when doing autoethnography and self-study, even when researchers themselves are the primary research source. For example, even when the researchers themselves are the main source of data, they sometimes can be unconscious of the presence of other people and their stories in the study. To be more specific, when researchers describe critical periods of their lives where others may have been part of the experience it may be complicated to go back retroactively and ask the people involved to consent to their participation in the research. Thus, consent becomes the critical site of criticism in many self-studies.

In this research, I understand that I need to acknowledge other people and the different cultural contexts I interacted and gained experiences with, as they have helped me gain new insights and knowledge not only in this work, but also in education and life. However, it is because of the ethical limits when writing a self-study that I cannot write about other people and their experiences without their consents and permissions. Therefore, the writing and sharing of my experiences becomes a delicate space. Some scholars might view the research process as incomplete or lack of generalizability, but I believe a self-study methodology offers a different kind of rigor that is also significant as a research strategy. Thus, “the value of self-study depends on the researcher providing convincing evidence that they know what they claim to know” (Hamilton, 2005, p. 274).
In my work, I draw on three well-known ethical dimensions “procedural ethics, situated ethics, and relational ethics” identified first by Ellis (2007), then indicated in Richard (2021, p. 3) in her article Ethical Autoethnography: Is It Possible. Thus, checking in with the people that were involved in the writing constantly is necessary. It is equally important to consider myself while writing, because a self-study remains truthful and honest when thinking about the past and consider the writing process as a part of the ongoing research (LaBoskey, 2014). Further, Ergas and Ritter (2021) argue that “self-study scholars are engaged in the arduous attempt to establish the rigor of that ‘dubious’ first-person perspective, seen by a scientific community for its notoriously flawed ability to offer something worthy of the term ‘knowledge’” (p. 10). Through this scientific lens, it appears that the validity of knowledge is mostly defined through objectivist outcomes. Autoethnography is considered less critical, and not belonging to the realm of “legitimate social science” (Ellis, 2009, p. 371). People working in the academy and the field of education are eager to prove their hypotheses with evidence-based research. Thus, when writing a self-study, it is not always about providing scientific outcomes, which might result in people think less of its value. Meanwhile I agree with Gannon (2020), who concludes: “Above all, autoethnography is a writing methodology. It is not a matter of ‘doing’ research, then ‘writing it up’ as though these are separate phases of knowledge building” (p. 320). I am aware of the aim that writing an autoethnography or a self-study is devoted to the writing process itself, the knowledge I produce throughout the writing process becomes explorative and emergent.

In doing this research, I draw on arts-informed pedagogies (McGregor, 2020) by writing poems and land-based reflection, which demonstrate my exploration in creative
writing approach and understanding of writing a self-study. My intention of writing about my educational experiences as a student across contexts comes from my desire of understanding myself, and the reasons behind my struggles in educational environments. Doing a self-study about my educational experiences is meaningful and inspires me to tackle concepts that are subtle to realize, such as embodied knowledge and learning, liminal space in learning in unfamiliar environments, and the tensions of building resilience. Therefore, I am inspired by Ellis (2009) and her passion for writing research using autoethnography. She writes, “What I find meaningful is what inspires me to go on” (p. 374)! I start from here and search for the meaningful fragments in my educational experiences.

3.6 Emergent Methodology as a Process and a Product in Self-study

I recognize the emergent nature of doing a self-study; the constant self-reflexivity that allows me to explore the uncertainties and in-betweenness I encounter in education. Emergent theories are widely used in social inquiry, which help develop a strong sense of self. The process of writing a self-study is a slow process of collecting important fragments in life experiences. I view the data collection for writing a self-study as challenging because it encounters liminal spaces where there are silent or voiceless moments (Thomas, 2018). To be more specific, self-study relies on voice that is often within the researchers, and it is not similar with speaking, but a dialogue between researchers’ personal experiences and expressions (Thomas, 2018). When there are disconnections and voiceless moments during writing of a self-study, there are liminal spaces to knowing and hearing one’s authentic voice (Thomas, 2018). Thus, I explain
how emergent methodology has helped me overcome these challenges and approach my writing as both a process and a product.

I encountered the liminal space of uncertainty numerous times while writing this self-study. Emergent methodology provided me with other options and approaches to answer my research questions; and provided me with a mode for exploring new research tools and lenses for uncovering information and insights to enrich my research practice (Biber & Leavy, 2008). From an emergent perspective, I pushed the limits of my own knowing to provoke meanings of knowledge through my educational experiences across different context of learning.

I drew on emergent methodology as it allowed me to be creative, have intellectual encounters, and approach my research through multi-modal research imaginations (Biber & Leavy, 2008) and discover different research tools for answering my research questions. Through data collection methods (e.g., developing and writing poems and vignettes of short self-reflection), I used arts-informed methods to engage my self-study. Emergent methodologies welcome modifications and revisions to writing where possible (Biber & Leavy, 2008). This feature of emergent methodology provides flexibility with the presence of interconnections between epistemology of the knowledge I know and the knowledge I gain while writing. This approach encourages me to make changes while writing. Figure 2 portrays my understanding of the role of emergent methodology in this self-study.
Figure 2: My understanding of emergent methodology
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In Figure 2, I illustrate and explain how emergent methodology informed this work, and how I made it visible in this self-study. Based on the diagram created by Biber and Leavy (2008, p. 3) in *Handbook of Emergent Methods*, I recognize education happens in complex social contexts, and the purpose of education is to acquire knowledge from different aspects of life. In my case, the educational environments have been turbulent and changing as I moved to different cities and countries to learn. For me, the educational environments sometimes felt unstable when adapting to new political, economic, social, and technological contexts. Therefore, theoretical, and methodological concepts were applied to real life encounters in my educational journey, such as academic and social life in schools. I began to realize how my epistemology was being reshaped by the education I received. Thus, I sought new understandings of the cultural differences between these places, and to have gained a better grasp of the knowledge coming from these places.

However, when I travelled across contexts and sought education overseas, I noticed knowledge gaps in understanding of education in different contexts. I refer to these gaps as methods gap drawing on the concept put forth by Biber and Leavy (2008). Specifically, I changed my understandings about learning over time as I could not simply apply my previous learned theory about learning to a new environment that situated in different cultural background. The learning methods and backgrounds between places are distinct, which innovate new understandings. According to Biber and Leavy (2008), “methods innovations emerge to meet the insights and challenges posed by new theories. This is the point at which the “scientific landscape” changes while paradigms experience ruptures, shifts, and revisions” (p. 4). The learning methods change when I moved to an
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unfamiliar educational environment, which may be different from my previous learning environments and are no longer viewed as applicable. This concept is also in alignment with the film *Schooling the World*, which claims that there is no single educational system applicable for all cultural environments.

Further, doing a self-study work made me remain flexible where possible, and view myself as both insider and outsider to my research simultaneously. I refer to this concept of multiple subjectivities raised by Trinh T. Min-ha (1991, p. 218).

Working right at the limits of several categories and approaches means that one is neither entirely inside nor outside. One must push one’s work as far as one can go: to the borderlines, where one never stops, walking on the edges, incurring constantly the risk of falling off one side or the other side of the limit while undoing, redoing, modifying this limit (As cited in Biber & Leavy, 2008, p. 4).

While I am writing this self-study about my educational journey, along with my understanding of embodied learning and knowledge, resilience, and liminal space I changed places of learning. It was not my intention to conform to or challenge any cultural contexts I entered; instead, I looked for understandings of the embodied forms in different social environments. I invited myself to think with an open heart and embrace multiple meanings that my writing required which contributed to the emergent nature of my self-study.
3.7 Data Collection Method

My research methodology drew on a multi-modal approach to data collection because it involved writing poems and vignettes of short self-reflection where I strived to answer my research questions.

- First, I journaled and responded to the documentary *Schooling the World*. The purpose of journaling was to engage in self-study and make journaling a process of reflecting about important themes throughout this research. Bourne (2008) indicates the benefits of journaling, which is used to reflect on our experiences constantly as we explore transformative learning. Journals served as my primary data source and a window of doing retrospective thinking.

- Then, I wrote poems and embedded these poetics throughout the thesis as they help create new meaning making for me and my understanding of how education is transformative and embodied. I provide a brief discussion of these poems in Chapter 4 to explain the intersection of cultures and languages, also the liminal space while writing the poem. Specifically, I make connections with how these poems illustrate the important themes explored in this self-study.

- Afterwards, I wrote four land-based reflections found in Chapter 4 focusing on the four places I have received my education. My intention here was to consider the knowledge gaps between what I experienced through formal education with other places and concepts of learning.

My vignettes prompt different themes in this self-study. I see the vignettes as providing a form of evidence to indicate my thoughts and support them. I see the final component of this self-study as serving as a manuscript that demonstrates art-informed representations.
inserted throughout. The poems and the vignettes are significant in providing guidance to my reflexive process in this self-study.

In writing about the four places - Ji’An (吉安), Jiangxi (江西), China; Wuhan (武汉), Hubei (湖北), China; Langley, British Columbia, Canada; and London, Ontario, Canada - I have lived and studied, and drew on land-based reflections. I present each reflection with a picture taken at the site by myself. The photo represents a part of me at that moment in time. I come up with one passage for each site, the passage builds on unique stories that help me remember and understand the tensions and paradoxes I encountered journeying across diverse learning environment, both as a domestic and international student.

After writing vignettes based on short personal self-reflection and land-based reflections, I wrote poetries to delve deeper into topics and realize how my educational journey is embodied for me to understand the notion of self. Embodied practices use the body as a tool for healing through self-awareness, mindfulness, connection, self-regulation, finding balance, and creating self-acceptance (Madeson, 2022). Poetic writing is considered innovative; and it is a conducive inquiry to self-reflexivity, which is essential when locating personal experiences (Pelias, 2018). Specifically, poetic voice provides space for critical understanding of different culture and education.

A way in, an entry into a lush labyrinth, turning and twisting on a line, curving into the center, into the heart, beating, beating its way, in anticipation, into its seductive surprises, into its delightful and disturbing displays, insisting that more be carried on the way out (Pelias, p. 36).
Poetry writing leaves room for imaginations and continuing explorations of myself and my own situatedness in education, which is key to this self-study.

3.8 Conclusion to My Methodology

In this chapter I have provided my rationale for using both self-study and autoethnography as my methodology in this thesis. They entail the emergent nature of retrospective thinking and help generate the knowledge I carry as a student seeking education across context in China and Canada. In the following chapter, I present my four land-based reflections, poetries, and vignettes to enlighten the overarching concepts of this thesis. I believe the purpose of education should not be normalized, and I offer a voice of difference through my transformative journey of education to ask the meaning of education, its context, manner, processes, and goals.
Chapter 4 An Embodied Realization

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I answer my research questions with poetry and land-based reflections. The four land-based reflections are situated in the four places I receive my education. The poetries and the land-based reflections all intersect with each other and are the meaning-making processes for me to realize how education is a transformational journey. They represent my data stemming from my continued self-reflection of my experiences across different educational contexts. My narrative accounts used throughout this chapter are based upon my critical understanding and consideration about the experiences I have had through education.

In terms of the overall structure of the chapter, I answer the overarching questions and sub-questions to this self-study, I include poems as my process for engaging these research questions. I also present the excerpts of my reflexive journaling as I write the four land-based reflections according to the different places I receive my education. I focused on the process of reflecting on my embodied experiences throughout different phases of my time as a student and within different schools such as, private, public, and international systems of schooling. I offer my voice about my educational experiences as it illustrates resilience, liminal space, education across contexts, and the understanding of embodied learning and knowledge. I also compose different passages and how different thematic categories interact with them. I use different data collection methods (vignettes, land-based reflection, poetries) to respond and reflect on my educational journey, realizing this writing process as embodied and transformative.
My goal is to enhance a greater understanding towards the meaning of pursuing an education locally and globally, and how the different cultural tensions and liminal spaces I encounter, inform embodied experiences as a student across contexts. I also wish to bring forward my unique definition of resilience and embodied learning and knowledge. It is important to acknowledge the teaching of contexts, since they are our surroundings that constantly teaching us in an embodied way.

4.2 Overarching Questions in the Film *Schooling the World*

4.2.1 “What does it mean to be human and alive” (Black, 2010, 1:02:02)?

**A Dream**

I am on a journey with possibilities,

No desperation,

No frustration,

No fear.

I was born with meaning.

I could be different,

I could be read differently from any angle.

Let me be me,

Not only in dreams. (Pang, June 2023)

This is one of the overarching questions initially raised in the film that I want to answer. The question is answered by one of the speaker Wade Davis from the film. He says, “When they answer that question, they answer it in ways that have allowed them to
live sustainably on the planet, for, by definition, generations” (Black, 2010, 1:02:08).

From a creative writing approach, I believe to be alive is to find meaning in life, to learn and to find balance with everything else in the world., Harper (2020) illustrates “creative forms, exist in the world without human input. We acknowledge bird song, the way the sea shapes driftwood, the structures created in rock formations by the wind and rain” (p. 2). Thus, I do not want to make a huge distinction between human and other beings in the world, I also do not want to over-privilege humans since I believe animals and the natural world are equally important and valuable. To be human and alive is to learn and create through the surrounding environments as they are constantly teaching as about embodied forms of knowledge.

On the one hand, I believe being a human allows me to dive in the beauty of words, to appreciate the world from different aspects, and to have the courage to explore the unknown. Being a human does not mean I have answers for everything, nor does it grant me power to change others who are different from myself. On the other hand, being human is sometimes challenging as there are stages in life that seem to be already regulated for me such as *The Rites of Passage* states (Van Gennep, 2019). I must be accountable for myself as I constantly face major life decisions and cope with changes in my life. Being human is to be responsible to ourselves and decisions we make. I recognize it is always the major tasks as a human to find your purpose in life, and that is often defined through education, which makes education as essential part of human life. Thus, finding the purpose in my life is a life-long and continuing course, and I am taking it every day. Baumeister (1991) argues in his book that education offers people with richer options for living a meaningful life. I could easily make connection with the film
Schooling the World, as the movie confronts and challenges the notion that learning and education are not all about how people can make the most money, the core of education and learning has been turned around (Mitchell, 2020).

Consequently, what does it mean to become human and to be alive is another question this work takes up. Thus, it is not about finding meaning and then living a life, it is about living, experiencing the beauty of life, seeing world at where I want my life to expand. Then I will eventually give myself a meaning that I am satisfied with. This is my definition of being human and alive. Nevertheless, I realize these definitions I have are deeply influenced by the education I received, and the different places I have lived. I am sometimes trapped in this world and the education I received, where I must find success and the right path for my future. It becomes the norm in education that it is secular and goal oriented (Baumeister, 1991). Finding the right path for the future is often realized and achieved through education (Bergstrom, Cleary, & Peacock, 2003), which leads to the next question: Am I in school to learn or to survive?

4.2.2 Am I in school to learn or to survive?

The Journey Starts

In front of the test results?
On the train to another city?
On the plane to another country?
Sitting in the classroom?
Reading, listening, and nodding?

It becomes the pattern,
The norm.

The happy faces of my families,
The applause from my teachers,
They lead to a golden future?

I am learning without knowing,
I am thinking without contemplating.

At least, I start,
That’s a good thing,
Right? (Pang, June 2023)

I started going to school at the age of three until now. I have been to different places for education at different stages from kindergarten to graduate schools. So, I wish to start answering this question from my schooling experiences. Drawing on the film, *Schooling the World*, I reflected on the ways that the issues of assimilation and colonization through education impacts students both physically and psychologically. Schools are places that offers knowledge and to learn, but students in the film also view schools as places that help them better prepared for the scarce jobs in the society. From this point of view, schools are preparing students to survive in a future with practical skills learned in schools. Is that all schools do, I wondered? Is that mean people who go to higher-ranked schools are better learners? Is it true that people who have been in schools for a longer time will get access to success in life?
Based on my educational experiences, I have attended schools in different places and countries, and I have experienced schoolings within diverse cultural settings. I believed that schools are places where people can thrive and find purpose and success in their lives. However, I questioned how schools have taught me about my own culture, and to better sustain my life? For instance, Vandana Shiva who from the central Himalayan region speaks about her view of modern schooling in the film *Schooling the World*. She mentions that today’s education does not pay much attention teaching “about your local ecology, your local culture, your local economy, or your ability to be productive” (Black, 2010, 33:21). Instead, schools become places that teach about economic success, which tends toward a single direction. Also, schools are “teaching you to be a semi-literate for another system to which you have no entry because you don’t belong to the right class, you don’t belong to the right privilege” (Black, 2010, 33:33).

This reminded me of the previous question about being human and alive without knowing how to live sustainably with one’s own culture. The learning situation in the film left Indian children wondering the purpose of their education while disregarding the values of their traditional cultures.

During my time in schools, I have often felt that there was something missing, as we too cherished the final products, such as the grades and ignored the processes of getting to these achievements, which is the process of becoming. When I entered university, it seemed like people in schools were there to learn to survive in a competitive market.

**What is missing?**

I remember sitting in computer lab,
Searching for natural sceneries.

I remember sitting in chemistry lab,
Messing around with different liquids and beakers.
I remember sitting in the classroom,
Learning about photosynthesis.

I fill up forms and checklists,
Choose my courses, majors, and schools for the next stage,
I just listen to what my teachers say,
I just do what others do.

I cannot recall anything I learn in these rectangular rooms,
I forget them immediately after exams.
I hold my textbooks,
Trying to learn.
I Step out the classrooms,
Knowing nothing.
What is missing? (Pang, July 2023)

I elaborated on spirituality and holistic education to further answer this question:
Am I in schools to learn or to survive? Inspired by an article Holistic art education: A transformative approach to teaching art written by Laurel Campbell, I reflected on my own experience. Campbell (2011) speaks about the constraints in today’s education that focuses only on academic skills testing in high-stake assessments while overlooking many other aspects of students’ developments in schools. Schools can play a role to help
students know themselves, specifically to examine one’s relational self in connection to the outer world (Campbell, 2011). This self-development could associate with the strive in life such as the search for the ultimate meaning and purpose through life (Wright, 2000).

The article written by Campbell in 2011 helped me answer the question raised in the film and continue to build the foundation for this self-study. To learn or to survive in schools have the possibility of not standing in contradictory positions to assessments, this learning happens simultaneously, and could be considered differently within different cultural backgrounds. Schools are not the only place to learn, and schooling is not the only path for us to survive after graduation. However, as education is essential part of my life, I then wondered: what is my purpose in life, educational concerns such as multiculturalism, diversity of perspectives, respect for the individual learners, and the transformational journey to discover ourselves?

4.2.3 What’s the meaning of going away from home, from families and pursue education in a different place that are in total alienation of yours?

**My Relationship with Contexts**

Indeed, they are different from place to place,

They are all unique to me.

They are my first teachers in this world.

Not in the textbook, classroom or exams.

Then, I lost my memory,
Like I lack knowledge about where I stand,
While absorbing knowledge from these places, greedily.

Their way of teaching is embodied, connecting mind, body, and experiences.

They are more than place I stand, and build shelter,
They are where knowledge starts shape.
They are physical, abstract, naked, and challenging textbooks to me.

My relationship with contexts is in searching,
The meaning-making process,
The recalling memory,
The gathering of fragments of experiences. (Pang, May 2023)

The film *Schooling the World* focuses on the idea that modern education tends to teach people to pursue education at places that they are not familiar with. In the film, Ladakhi students shared about their experiences in the Moravian Mission School, which is system founded by German missionaries. The school is considered as one of the ‘best’ schools in Ladakh. German missionaries founded the school believing that local people could be ‘saved’ by the influence of Western education. During the interviews, students were asked if they would like to pursue education outside of their city or country; all of them said yes as it is the only path for getting knowledge, and they have the great hope for modern education. Meanwhile, some of the students expressed fear of the idea of going away from home and pursuing education in a different place. Many Ladakhi
children described these places as alien to them, and very far away from their home. At the same time, students from rural India were certain about the need to be educated far away from home; in places that focus on English, which they believed was important as English is the language that dominates the world it was viewed as superior and powerful. I noticed the colonial expansionist nature of education in watching the interviews in the film, which was using Western education as an agenda to pull people away from their local cultures and educating them in a uniform way. For instance, their textbooks taught, “As the mass of population are uneducated, illiterate, they…will remain backward and follow old and religious superstitions.”—Ladakhi economic textbook” (Black, 2010, 26:19). With these ideas being taught, rural Indian students were gradually developing a sense of inferiority, and these books were teaching “western, urban, consumer culture as progress—as the only way to be—and the end result is that children will have a feeling that their own culture, their language, their way of doing things is backward, primitive, and shameful” (Black, 2010, 26:47).

The idea of going away from home for education is elaborated through my experiences of seeking education across contexts. I recognize that the education I received during my formative years differs from the different places I have studied as an adult. I received my K-12 education in my hometown, Ji’An (吉安), JiangXi (江西), China, before attending school in Wuhan (武汉), Hubei (湖北), another city that is a little further away from my original home. I was there for both middle and high school. After completing my high school, I went to Langley, British Columbia, Canada for my undergraduate study before enrolling into the Faculty of Education at Western University of Ontario (London, Ontario, Canada) to pursue graduate studies. The decision to pursue
an education outside of my hometown meant first going to another city (Wuhan, China) and later studying aboard, which was inspired by the notion to seek enriching educational opportunities through various educational programs, locally and internationally, these are the initial reasons I went to Wuhan for education, which I believe are relevant with the film, *Schooling the World*. Next, I provide a vignette of my learning experience in Wuhan.

### 4.2.4 Education in Wuhan—Where I Start Considering the Purpose of Education

*When I was studying at my middle school in Wuhan, I could not help but make comparisons between my hometown and Wuhan, especially with the differences I noticed in the classroom.*

*There were so many rules and disciplines I needed to follow, and I had a hard time adjusting myself to these changes. I also felt embarrassed when I didn’t have an answer when everyone else knew the answers to the questions without further explanations from the teachers. I wondered if it was because my classmates were born in a city that held more knowledge than my own. With this thought in mind, I remembered feeling awkward to tell my classmates where I was from. I realized the reginal disparity between my hometown and Wuhan. I knew there were things I had never seen and experienced before in education and other aspects of my life. These experiences were all very overwhelming at the time.*

*Now, I see myself trapped in the unknown again. Instead of discovering and enjoying the excitedness of the unknown in my educational journey, I experience tensions caused by similar cultural differences, and I face difficulties when I came across these tensions. Looking back, I see how my education in Wuhan was transformational, as it provided me with opportunities to connect the dots with the themes talked about in the film *Schooling the World*, which is part of experiencing education across places that do not coexist, they are competing with one another.*

*When I was a 12-year-old, and new to the educational environment, I could not comprehend the differences I felt between my hometown and Wuhan. The only thing I felt was that Wuhan was a bigger city with better opportunities for education. At the same time, I devalued the education and cultural values of my hometown, as I saw them not supporting my learning when I was studying in Wuhan.*

*While I consider the tensions caused by different educational contexts, I remember words I have repeatedly heard from a young age, which are “it’s important to fit in”. Others have told me that I must find a sense of belonging in whatever find myself in,
and that the easiest way to achieve this belonging is to “fit in.” How can I fit in when there are continuing tensions and paradoxes? Is developing resiliency about assimilating myself in relation to diverse educational environments? As I ponder on these questions, I find myself grappling with the feelings of “in-between” that exist across my traditional culture and the culture(s) of the new environments which I find myself studying in. The film Schooling the World suggests that the modern education systems are developed merely to train people with skills took on scarce jobs and labor market, schooling is aimed at teaching workers to forget about how to live and thrive in their (our) own environments. Consequently, education becomes about molding people into the same type of character, and the idea of learning becomes lost. To be conditioned to “fit in” often becomes the priority of learners studying in environments that are not our own. (Pang, May 2023)

4.2.5 Concluding Thoughts on the Over-arching Questions

**Finding myself**

Are you asking my name?

Are you asking my family?

Are you asking my hometown?

What do you want to know?

I do not see where am I going?

I only know the name of the place I go.

Where is my destination?

Schools do not teach me that,

Schools do not answer my questions,

Schools do not teach who I am,

Schools teach knowledge that is untouchable.

Lear OR Survive,

I lean toward surviving.
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Shocking!
Doubtful!

Why I leave my hometown,
Do I find my place of learning on a foreign land?
I do not stand still,
I combat the alienation,
Where is my place in learning? (Pang, July 2023)

4.3 The Sub Questions

4.3.1 When and why did I start to rethink critically my understanding of education?

How it all Starts

A girl has different uniforms is telling people she is learning at different schools,
With several suitcases, she goes on the voyage,
Vague destinations ahead.

“Everything will be just fine.”
“What if I do not pass the exam?”
“What will happen if I have no entry to schools?”

Voices sound loud in a twelve-year old girl’s mind.
Unfamiliar place, unfamiliar people.
Why is everything so different?
What do I need to learn to get the knowledge I need?
Resilience?

Where is the entry point for me to start?

Everything starts here, and I must go on pondering more confusions. (Pang, June 2023)

**The Process**

A Chinese, Han, female, and a student.

I’m more than these, but I start with them.

Confucianism, rooted in my way of learning and knowing,

They are both foundations and yet boundaries.

Ji’An-Wuhan-Langley-London

I learn with choices and freedom,

Within multiple cultural contexts,

Through various forms of learning methods.

Along the way, they come unexpectedly,

Resilience,

Liminal space,

Confusions,

Proximity to knowledge.

I try to understand.

But,
I am the intruder to the learning place.

I am in alienation of myself.

The single story,

Added with The Pandemic,

And the separation.

I am in China to learn Canadian curriculums.

What context should I follow?

I am still,

On the way to an embodied journey. (Pang, July 2023)

4.3.2 What tensions emerged for me as I learned across contexts and in liminal spaces between cultural understandings?

Cultural Baggage

Why I feel burdened when I carry no weight?

Why I feel insecure when I got clothes?

Why I feel bitter when I have food?

Check in, please,

What does that mean?

Bring what you need and come with an open heart.

So, I did.

But, wait,

People are bringing forbidden things, and some people got nothing.

People are reluctant of talking to each other,

There are no answers to my questions.
The weight is heavier when the playground is tilted.

If I lose the baggage, I might gain freedom.

If I carry them, I might also gain freedom.

So, being bicultural is really just a choice. (Pang, June 2023)

**The Clashing**

This is blur,

I know nothing.

Go to that place, finish your work, get the grade, then you done.

No one ever told me these tasks,

They are buried in the hidden room called ‘policy’.

English, Oh! English!

I need that to understand, to communicate,

To Survive!

Why can I read without comprehension?

Why can I speak without communication?

Why can I write without understanding?

Why can I listen without responding?

The rules are different everywhere,

It is hard to make twists, to adapt.

I just obey.
Are there people out there really understand me?

Am I understanding others?

I am clashed by differences,
I am situated in a maze with clashing powers. (Pang, July 2023)

**Challenge the Binary**

Knowledge flow within me,
I am in the flow of knowledge.

I have no guts to say I’ve got enough knowledge in life,
I continue a life seeking to take on something adventurous.
I travel across places to gain new education.

I shall cast no judgement on anything new to me.
I accept the confusions and the challenges,
I am against the contradictory relationship between the ‘mainstream’ and the ‘others’.
They exist for a reason, the only thing left for me is to learn.

My way of challenging the binary is to see every experience as a gift. (Pang, July 2023)
4.3.3 How has pursuing an education away from home contributed to new understandings of education, particularly embodied learning?

**Embodied Knowledge**

I never see the definition of embodied knowledge printed in textbooks,

What is it then?

How do I figure that out?

Teachers are not talking about it,

There is no teaching around it,

But it seems important.

I know every word in the dictionary explaining it,

But it’s like a puzzle when words are put together.

I still don’t know what it is,

But I feel it is happening in my learning.

It could be literal,

It could be figurative,

It could be texts,

It could be music,

Anything, anything that I think is teaching me.

I am still searching,

The definition of embodied knowledge. (Pang, May 2023)
4.3.4 What is my definition of resilience, and how is it represented in my educational journey in different places?

**Resilience is a Must-Have**

Resilience is another fancy word for conformity.

By achieving resilience,

I must give up on my language and culture.

I must learn things that I do not understand.

Why do I need resilience?

Resilience seems to me a must-have.

When I move to another place for education,

Perfect scores demonstrate my ability to be resilient.

Being involved in my learning community demonstrate resilient.

Being happy is also demonstrating resilient.

What about the stories of getting resilience?

Does it really matter? (Pang, July 2023)

**Coping Strategies**

Silence.

I have no words,

Silence is my protection.

The knowledge I hold are fragmented,
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No instructions are taught.

I come differently,
I see it as weakness.
The reasons I do not understand.

Fit in and become the same.
Prove I’m no different!

Silence and blend in,
A pattern I developed.

To survive is more important than learning itself. (Pang, May 2023)

4.4 Concluding Thoughts on Sub-questions

I answered the sub questions of this self-study throughout the poems, and I intend to leave space for further reflection both for myself and the readers. As Sheila Stewart (2018) writes, “Poetic inquiry may help us use language in ways that are less grasping, that unsettle some of our dichotomies and desire for certainty” (p. 301). I write different poems to express my desire, hope, and emotion I experience through education, instead of offering a stated fact, and put in this self-study as it is a status quo, my poems are supposed to leave room for interpretations and contemplation.

To sum up, I wrote these poems to answer my research questions while came across intersectionality, biculturalism, and liminal space. I realize there are pieces
missing when I express my understandings in English while having a Mandarin (My mother tongue) mindset about different topics explored in this self-study. The meanings are slightly different if I compare what I wrote (English) with what I thought (Mandarin). Thus, I have a better understanding of my theoretical frameworks by writing poems, which is also a way of learning by doing. The process is emergent for me as I gradually realize this challenge of translating and understanding between different cultures and languages in research (Van Nes, Abma, Jonsson & Deeg, 2010).

4.5 Four Land-based Reflection

4.5.1 Ji’An (吉安), Jiangxi (江西), China

Photo 1: I took this picture in 2020, which is of a bridge near 贛江 (The Ganjiang River), a famous river in Jiangxi province. I often walk on the bridge near the river with my parents and other families after dinner.
Each time I visit the river, I see new and changing colors of the river from the city lights reflecting over the bridge.

4.5.2 The Passage: Education Has a Lagging Phase

Ji’An is my hometown, the place I was born and raised, and where I first started my education, not only situated in schools, but in the place I learn. My city is a small city situated in the central region of Jiangxi province of the People’s Republic of China, and is famous for its historical background, its county-level city, which is known as the cradle of the Chinese revolution. This city is part of important political movements led by chairman Mao Zedong.

The photo I took in Ji’An (吉安), JiangXi (江西), China reminds me of the time, I spent in my hometown when I walked on the bridge almost every night. Sometimes, I biked with my father near the river on and off the bridge. The brick on the bridge would loosen each time I stepped on it. The trees growing by the bridge near the river grew bigger and stronger each year. I started walking by the river from a young age since I first learned to walk. I learned the name of the river from my father. I know the bridge is a place for walking and playing. I have memories of the river and bridge in every season. I remember the clicking sounds when bricks loosen clashing together as I walk on the bricks on the bridge, with a foot or the wheels of my bike. I remember the sound of the wind blowing through the leaves on the trees. I also remember the flow of the river’s water as it tells me its stories. All is alive, I feel connected with this land that nurtures me.

I want to know more about the bridge, the sound, the trees, and its stories in school, but textbooks do not tell me the story of land. It seems I am not encouraged to
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discover the relationship I have with the land, the place that holds my life. Again, the knowledge becomes untouchable, knowledge is only situated in the classroom and textbooks. How can I understand knowledge without learning about my environment? How can I reflect on my experiences of learning, and enlighten myself with meaning lacks a connection to experience?

Back in 2020, I went back to my hometown, and I walked on the bridge with my parents. I had the feeling that the bridge was narrower and more crowded. I didn’t hear the sounds I remembered when cycling with the bricks knocking against each other, then I looked down, only to see that the bricks were replaced by paved roads. Then, I looked over to the other side of the bridge, the city lights, and the moonlight mixed together (shown in Photo 1). I saw fewer trees, and more buildings. These changes made me realize that the land is giving me signs that my formal education does not offer. Land is not done teaching us, and I am still and will always be listening. Through these moments, I realized education has a lagging phase, and the knowledge I learned as a child will come back to me sometimes later in life, often unexpectedly. The only problem is we haven’t learned or haven’t been learning. The walk on the bridge reminded me of this.

The idea that land is the first teacher offers me a way of knowing that is awaiting to be read and felt. Bowra et al. (2021) discuss this concept, “when the land is acknowledged as the first teacher, natural elements and sacred teachings reveal themselves as they wish directly to the learner” (p. 135). I am excited that the land is teaching me in different ways, which suggests that education is circular, and the knowledge will come back in multiple ways if I remain open to learning. Education is a
journey, like each time I visit the bridge and the river. Education is embodied as it is revealing itself through various forms in the water and to the sky.

**A ‘Simple’ Place**

School is my playground,

Where education is circular,

I learn from the sound,

By the pound!

I am amazed by the beauty of the flowers,

I am intrigued by the changing of seasons,

I am surprised by the rhythms of rain drops.

Learning comes to me in changing forms,

They come effortless,

Left me with pondering thoughts.

It’s indeed a simple place.

Of learning,

Of creating,

Of reflecting,

And

Of knowledge itself. (Pang, May 2023)
4.5.3 Wuhan (武汉), Hubei (湖北), China

Photo 2: I took this photo in 2016 at Donghu (东湖) in Wuhan. A lake filled with memories. Trees, animals, water, and bridges at the place are interacting with each other, and are changing over the seasons, over the years.

4.5.4 The Passage: Resilience and Self-reflection

My memory in Wuhan is inseparable with Donghu (东湖). I have visited this place in Wuhan every summer with my mother sometimes with my grandmother. My families really cherish our relationship with each other. For instance, I am very close with my aunt who has been living in Wuhan for many years. It is because of the love from my families that I treat Wuhan as my second home, and I feel warm and welcomed there.

Like the lessons I have learned from my hometown, I learn from the land, and I am
finding the balance between everything that the land holds. I have come to realize I carry embodied learning and knowledge. Land embodies knowledge, and reveal its lively nature, and by being with the land allows learners to engage in a transformative process of learning (Bowra et al., 2021). Donghu (东湖) is one of the places in Wuhan that helps me understand this notion.

As I shared in the reflection of my hometown Ji’An (吉安), JiangXi (江西), I believe education is a transformative journey that happens at any time and place. However, I did not feel the extension of embodied learning and knowledge in the classroom when I was studying in middle school in Wuhan. I felt struggles and encountered the liminal space of understanding, especially with the purpose of learning in a place that was so far away from my hometown. The film *Schooling the World* asked: are we in schools to learn or to survive? Surviving seems more important than learning when I started my education in Wuhan. The main thing I worried about when I walked to the school was finishing my assignments on time and passing the exams. The city used to be my second home, but I felt a sense of alienation in school. I felt embarrassed when people asked about my hometown, I also felt a sense of shame when I could not earn higher marks in school. These feelings are described partially in the poem “Finding Myself”. I was in school to learn, to survive, and I was taught to compete. There was less room for self-reflection, and for opportunities to learn outside of the classroom. I felt the fine line between different forms of knowledge, and they were not interacting with each other. Unlike the birds, water, bridge, and trees always interacting and interconnected in Donghu (东湖), the knowledge I learned in these schools did not connect, they separated, and did not inspire my imagination or creativity.
However, I believe education has the power to change my perspective of learning. I used to be proud of my ability to imagine and create from what I learned in the natural environment. I could imagine how animals, land, water, and other beings interacted with each other, and how they communicated with each other, and this always fascinated to me. However, these stories were not taught in schools, there were little spaces for me to express these authentic feelings outside of the textbooks. Walking in the hallway and sitting in the classroom with knowledge that I cannot touch, relate to or practice is not embodied. I lost the wholistic perspective of learning, which is considered the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual aspect of human interactions (Styres et al. 2013). I became trapped in a knowledge system that I did not understand, and the deeper embodied places or encourage self-reflection.

I struggled with these feelings, and my parents suggested that we take a walk to Donghu (东湖) one weekend. Then, I went, and I did what I used to, I just sat there with my surroundings. By pulling myself out from the textbooks and confusions, I found strength and inner peace, and I again realized learning is not only situated in the classroom. I call this realization, my resilience, and it has helped me adapt to new learning environments. Like Noah and Healey (2010) indicates the “concept of self, which is derived from the land, is strongly tied to cultural and social identity, both of which bring people a sense of cultural pride and community confidence” (As cited in Bowra et al., 2021, p. 137). I have developed and used this resilience over time when I have been situated in different environments that I am not originally from. I pull myself out to be with the present and let the context of place teach me.
A ‘Better’ Place

Everyone is telling me it is better,

So, I believed it is better.

How exactly?

Bigger city,

Larger classrooms,

Higher ranking,

More opportunities,

I guess they make the place better.

Better for what, whom, and how?

Do I get to learn knowledge that are embodied?

Do I get to the answers to all my questions?

The truth is,

I encounter changes, difficulties of ‘fitting in’.

I feel I am different, and the need to prove that I am not.

It’s a set pattern.

I learned a word called ‘resilience.’ (Pang, May 2023)
4.5.5 Langley, British Columbia, Canada

Photo 3: I took this photo in Trinity Western University (Langley, British Columbia, Canada) in 2017, where I went to study my undergraduate degree. The picture shows the entry of the university in the fall season. For me it symbolizes the entry to new understanding of education as a transformative journey, which is illustrating embodiment and differences from place to place.

4.5.6 The Passage: The Process of Learning.

My university is like a forest, surrounded by tall trees, different kinds of flowers and animals. I am talking about animals that I have never seen before in China, such as deer and bears. I felt I was living and learning in a forest. When I first came to the university, we were introduced to a ‘Land Acknowledgement’ document by an Indigenous leader of Stó:lō People, which told me that the Langley campus is located on is the traditional ancestral unceded territory of the Stó:lō People. Besides this acknowledgement, the document shared the importance of knowing from the land that we were situated on and reminded me to appreciate the unique relationship humans have
with the land. This perspective of learning was new to me as an international student from China.

Before I traveled to Trinity Western University in Langley, British Columbia, Canada, I had no knowledge of its historical background, the only knowledge I had was from the university website, and the flyers about the school. After I came to the university, I realized learning could happen in an embodied way situated in place. After four years of situated learning in the place of my university, the teaching and the learning continues. There continues to be places to explore, there are people I never got the chance to meet, there are knowledges I never got the chance to practice. For a long time, I believed learning was done only at a specific place through attaining a diploma or certificate, but learning is much more than this. The process of learning at a university is ongoing and significant to recall as it reveals my understanding of education locally and globally, the definition of embodied learning and knowledge, and context as teachers in every learning process.

Outside of the university campus, there is a place with even more tall trees and all kinds of flowers and animals. I never explored this place after three years of living by it. I was too occupied with schoolwork and believed that reading and writing was all I needed to learn. However, the importance of knowledge embedded in my learning context cannot be fully or even partially be expressed through university curriculums, student research or other NGO and government researcher partnerships. There is a liminal space for learning and understanding only through textbooks. If the knowledge is only situated in textbooks and presented as different documents, I cannot see the meaning of pursuing education in a different place from my home. We can all learn through internet if learning is simply
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achieved by sitting at a desk and reading from articles. What is the point of going away from home and pursuing an education abroad if the education is not tied to place?

We often claim we are people living by the water, mountains, or forests, but how much are we really connected to them? To walk at the place surrounded by trees and animals enlightens me to consider my connection between myself and the places that I have traveled for my education, which becomes a reciprocal relationship between me and the contexts of learning. I appreciate these process of learning, and how unexpected and random they can be in my life. Each time I think about my education, I think about it differently, at different places, and time with different surroundings. When I visit an old place, when I read an old book, when I meet an old friend, I will gain new perspectives about learning as an embodied process.

A ‘Joyful’ Place

I made my own decision,

I came to Canada by myself.

The journey begins,

Without further thoughts,

I step on the unknown.

Everything is happening so fast,

Everything is so unexpected,

Yet,

Powerful.
I blend in,
I pull out,
The battle is silent and consistent.

It is necessary, my longing to understand and being understood.
I desire a joyful place. (Pang, May 2023)

4.5.7 London, Ontario, Canada

Photo 4: These are two photos taken at Western University of Ontario. The left is at the front of the Faculty of Education in May 2022, and the photo on the right was taken at the front of Thames Hall in October 2022. I have the habit of recording the changing color of trees, and everything that are transformative.

4.5.8 The Passage: A Transformative Journey

I have the habit of taking walks. I have been doing this since I was a little child back in my hometown. Along the way, I record what my eyes see by taking pictures.
Sometimes I record a video so that it has the sound of the environments I have visited. I am always amazed by how seasons change in a blink of eye, and how London, Ontario is so different from Langley, British Columbia. Their geographical differences make me curious to find out more about the deeper knowledge implicit in my context of learning. From Wuhan (武汉) to London, I am always a newcomer to these places, my educational journey is unknown and transformative.

I came to London, Ontario in 2021 to study my master’s degree in education, during the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. I have been studying and living in London for two years now. Besides academic learnings that are mainly situated in the classroom, I have also gained a better understanding of what John Dewey (1897) has argued “education as a continuing reconstruction of experience, that the process and the goal of education are the same things” (p. 82). The process of gaining knowledge, the process of realizing different learning experiences, and the process of developing resilience and new understandings of education across contexts. These processes are equally significant with the goal of studying abroad. I believe there is no end to learning, and education is, a transformative journey.

I also realize the need to focus on the process of gaining knowledge, and I harnessing this mode of thinking during my walks and self-reflections. By looking at the growth of different trees changing seasons over two years in London, Ontario, I noticed the resilience of trees and their abilities to grow in different seasons. Despite the changing climate and its unpredictability, trees grow no matter what. I learned from the spirit of trees that I have also grown and developed coping strategies in the foreign
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educational contexts by walking in these places. Through walking I developed social and academic resilience in contexts that I did not feel a sense of connection and belonging. Through walking, I felt calmer. I pulled myself out from the classrooms and explored different places and contexts that inspired new understanding of knowledge.

I often ask myself: who are we to judge the value of culture, the value of knowledge, and the value of land? I understand I am an extension of land and the land shares knowledge. From this perspective, I gain a new kind of education that is embodied and transformative. I also gain a new perspective of the meaning of going away from home, traveling away from families, and pursuing an education in a different place that is alien to me. The purpose of learning can be interpreted differently, and it is mainly through my education that I come to reconsider my answers to this study’s questions. Stepping into an unfamiliar place and lands provided me new insight to transform my way of learning that was so firmly rooted in my own culture. I also gained new understandings of the knowledge I learned previously, because these new experiences contributed to my life. I cherish this transformative learning process.

A ‘Different’ Place

From West to Western,

I thought nothing would change,

I already get the gist of it.

I observe,

I mimic,

I do it.
When questions come,
I stack them and hide them,
I am afraid to ask, when I do not know.

There is no such thing as “There are no stupid questions”,
If it is true,
Why do I still feel “stupid” when ask questions.

I desire a different place that accepts the fact that I am different.
And telling me that it is ok to be different. (Pang, May 2023)

4.6 Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I shared four land-based reflections focusing in four distinct places I have studied in China and Canada. I also composed a series of poems as a mode of expression building on the reflections. These are my way of expressing embodied language and learning that speaks about my shifting understanding of the education I have received locally and globally. Learning across liminal spaces I have developed personal resilience in academic and social environments and developed new relationships with different educational contexts. Finally, I use poetry as a vehicle to seek out answers to my research questions. I deliberately provide little explanation about the poems so that there is room for the reader to interpret, because people have different interpretations according to their own experiences in different educational contexts. My intention of doing this self-study was to provide my own understanding of how education is emergent, and it is a process, and a journey. It is through embodied learning and
knowledge that we can achieve what John Dewey (1986) argues as a way of learning by doing and realize education in multiple perspectives. I now leave room for others to do their reflection.
Chapter 5 Conclusion

5.1 Summary

In this thesis, I have demonstrated an approach to self-study drawing on creative writing and land-based reflection and poetry to explore different understandings about learning and education. Building on significant questions raised in the documentary *Schooling the World*, this thesis examined how education in different cultural contexts provokes new questions about learning and meaning making. By responding to the overarching questions posed in the film, I have examined my own relationship with education, in the past, present, and into the future. When considering the potential taken-for-granted assumptions one might have about their own education, I started with myself. I questioned my understandings of education and learning over time. Then, using poems and land-based reflections, I attempted to answer sub-questions in this self-study. Through this process, I have gained deeper understandings about embodied learning and knowledge, the tensions and liminal space of understanding when learning across contexts, and I have developed deeper appreciation for my own resilience when traveling abroad for my education. This study demonstrates the value of retrospective thinking and constant self-reflexivity in education and life.

During my writing process, I also reflected on my experiences connected to three core theories: intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2020), biculturalism (Schwartz & Unger, 2010), and liminal space (Arnold van Gennep, 2019). These concepts were used to help guide my thinking and creative writing. As I wrote and reflected on these concepts, I learned by doing, and I stepped out of my comfort zone and reconsidered my educational experiences from multiple perspectives.
5.2 Moving Forward

This self-study is only the beginning for me in exploring the embodied and transformative nature of education. I have many lingering questions when contemplating the process of my writing. I identify the intersection of different languages and cultures as I write poems and construct vignettes (narrative account and land-based reflections). There are pieces of meaning that I lose when I shift my mindset and translate between English and Mandarin. I recognize the liminal space of translation and my limits in expressing myself across languages. For instance, when I translate my poems from English into Mandarin via Google translator, the Mandarin version of the poem does not capture my full meaning. I am interested in continuing to explore the challenges of communicating across languages and the challenges of liminal space in research. Most importantly, I understand how contexts shape knowledge and education and recognize how biculturalism and resilience have helped me study abroad and understand the nuances between different languages and cultures. One thing I am sure of is that I will always be passionate about the unknown and keep reflecting as a habit because I see these practices as vital aspects of learning in life.
References


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Appendices

Appendix A: My Primary Research Questions

- When and why did I start to critically rethink my understandings of education?
- What cultural tensions emerged for me as I learned across contexts and in liminal spaces in between cultural understandings?
- How did I cope with the tensions and paradoxes I encountered journeying across diverse learning environment, both as a domestic and international student?
- How has pursuing an education away from home contributed to new understandings of education particularly embodied learning?
- What is my definition of resilience, and how does it represent in my educational journey at different places?
- How do I define the embodied self and knowledge through my education, and how do contexts mentor me, and help me with a more profound realization of them?
# Curriculum Vitae

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<tr>
<th><strong>Name:</strong></th>
<th>Yixuan Pang</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post-secondary Education and Degrees:</strong></td>
<td>Trinity Western University</td>
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