Using Creative Writing to Explore Identity Formation:

A Participatory Study with Adolescents in Post-Conflict Colombia

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Abstract

This thesis explores Colombian adolescents' identity formation through a creative writing programme within a school context. This research investigates how this programme aids the exploration of adolescents' identity formation focusing on the youth participants' perceptions, as well as on the identity formation aspects they portray in their creative writing. Underpinned by social constructionism, this study stands on the ontological premise that social interaction precedes the construction of knowledge, and places language at the centre of identity formation. In particular, this study uses Dan McAdams' narrative identity theory and Kenneth Gergen's concept of *relational being* as key conceptual schema. The fieldwork took place in a public school in Colombia and lasted for 19 weeks. Fifteen ninth grade participants (14-16 year-old students; or equivalent of UK Year 11) volunteered, eleven women and four men. The research design was built upon a participatory mixed qualitative research design, which joined methods from arts-based research, educational practice and the social sciences. The six creative writing workshops were designed within a project-based learning structure and were complemented by more established qualitative research techniques like interviews and focus groups. The book, together with the interviews and the participants' reflective narratives on the process, were chosen as the main data for analysis. The findings highlight the fact that creative writing programmes aid identity formation by providing opportunities for authentic self-expression. The role of the researcher as a facilitator is highlighted. The adolescents' creative writing reveals identity is constructed around trust and the constant negotiation of inner emotions with outer expressions of the self. The findings evidence implications for research design, data use and analysis and educational practice. Most importantly, this research argues for shifting the focus to authentic expressions of identity (versus notions of positive identity), by valuing agency in mid-adolescents.

Acknowledgements

As I reviewed and organised thousands of minutes of audio, I stumbled upon one of your secret messages three of you recorded on an April morning back in 2018. And skipping all the beautiful compliments you gave me, two of you said:

T: *And we wish you the best when you return to England for your projects.*

N: *For the doctorate, right?*

laughs

T: *When you grow up, in this life, you will remember us with appreciation.*

N: *Yes! Because we saved her life!*

T: *Literally, yes! Because this is all thanks to us!*

laughs

N: *This is not for free, you know?!*

Believe me. I know. And you were right, as always. I think of you every day (although I hope I never get to grow up), you did save me, and this is all thanks to you: 15 adolescents who thought about giving this crazy idea a shot. When we published our book, I thanked you last, today I thank you first. Without your authenticity, time, stories, and trust in me, this PhD dissertation would have never seen the light. Today I write to you and for you. You inspire me, you teach me, you enlighten me.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the rationale for my research in exploring Colombian adolescents' identity formation through a creative writing programme in a schooled context. This chapter also provides a brief overview of the research field and theoretical perspectives used in the study, as well as what my work contributes to knowledge. Finally, a summary of the dissertation's structure is presented.

1.1. Personal reflection and rationale for the Study

After I had worked in the field of psychology for a while and led the coordination of pastoral care in a high school, the Head Teacher asked me in 2012 to temporarily cover an English class for one year. I loved it so much that I quit my pastoral role to commit to being a full time English language teacher. I taught English language classes for four years and during this time I became convinced that connecting creative reading and writing for pleasure in the classroom, could have a significant impact on students' development and academic engagement. I observed students that struggled with language learning become engaged and excited about learning when they discovered characters and narratives that they could connect with. In these lessons, the students began bringing in examples from home, doing work in their own time and enjoying working hard in class. I felt this was all driven by their ability to connect with the content of the narratives. These ideas have become central to the research that I have subsequently conducted.

Throughout the summer of 2014 I did my CELTA course with the British Council and realised that there was a lot I still needed to learn about being an effective language teacher. I came to the UK to do a Masters in TESOL. I specifically chose to pursue a Masters that would further my pedagogic knowledge and enable me to fulfil my goal. I love to explore the ways in which individuals interact with literature and make self-to-world connections. I truly believe in the power of literature and narrative to bridge gaps between people. Hence, the focus (and title) of my Masters dissertation was: 'The Impact of Pleasure Reading in English as a Second Language on Colombians who have a Postgraduate Level of Education' (Fuentes Díaz, 2016):

> Pleasure and Extensive reading practices have been widely researched mainly with adolescents and college students, as tools to support English as a Second language (ESL) learning and teaching. However, most research done in the area had been quantitative and little had been researched with postgraduate students in particular. My dissertation focused on evaluating the impact that second language (L2) pleasure reading has had in Colombians who have or are currently finishing a postgraduate level of education. A cross-sectional qualitative study was proposed, and data was gathered through 4 focus groups, 2 in Colombia with Colombians that had already finished studying a postgraduate degree, and 2 in the UK with Colombian postgraduate students. Seventeen Colombians participated in total, 9 women and 8 men. Results suggested that L2 pleasure reading habits can be established at any point in life, but once established it impacts three major life spheres: personal, academic/professional, and linguistic. A possible new dimension to L2 reading motivation was identified: authentic connection to authorial voice. Colombian postgraduates established a dynamic and complex relationship with L2 pleasure reading, suggesting that reading in English can shape personality, or be in itself, a personality trait of postgraduate students (Fuentes Díaz, 2016, p. v).

The study allowed me to conclude 'reading should not be confined in the language classroom as a set of skills and subskills that need to be taught and practiced, but rather, as a tool for comprehensive human development' (Fuentes Díaz, 2016, p. 71). Upon completion of my Masters I attained a PhD studentship that afforded me the freedom to focus on the observations and fascinations that I generated during my teaching practice with adolescents in Colombia, and therefore, continue to explore the value of reading and writing for pleasure for identity formation. I finally had the opportunity to formally and systematically explore the hunches that I had developed regarding the connections between literature and learning all those years ago.

I have always aimed to use my studies to better understand the context of my own country - Colombia. As a Colombian researcher and as an educator I cannot separate myself from the realities of my nation. I have always felt the responsibility to develop research that can contribute to practice, and maybe, one day, policy, in language education in my country. We are going through a delicate and important political moment where polarisation has become the norm. A norm that distances us, that stops dialogue and does not allow us to see what the other can contribute; we ignore, or even worse, attack, those who think differently from us. This is the same example that as adults we

often bring with us in our speech and action to other spaces, including the school. There cannot be a better moment to research new ways of communicating with each other to foster different kinds of relationships among us and explore different ways of 'becoming'.

The study sought to explore Colombian adolescents' identity formation through a short creative reading and writing programme within their school. Therefore, the primary research questions addressed in this thesis are:

1. How does a short term participatory creative writing programme within a school context help explore adolescents' identity formation?
2. How is this creative writing programme perceived by the participants?
3. What aspects of adolescents' identity formation are portrayed through their creative writing?

The next section gives a brief explanation of the contexts in which my research was carried out.

1.2. Context of the study: Colombia

It is very difficult to perceive a problem when one has been immersed in it for far too long. This is the case for Colombia: a country founded in armed conflict and violent interactions. From the war for independence against the Spanish (1810-1819), to the 1000 Day War (1899-1902), which culminated in Panama´s independence; to the Banana massacre of the United Fruit workers in 1928; to the political violence between conservatives and liberals which led to over 14,000 deaths in the 1940s; to the creation of what was, until 2016, the biggest illegal Marxist armed group, FARC, in the 1950s; to the war against drugs and terrorism between the 1980s and the beginning of this century, we have not held back from armed conflict (Bushnell, 1994). After a four-year long negotiation for peace in Cuba between the Colombian government and FARC (2012-2016), on the 23rd June 2016, Colombia reached a milestone: an indefinite ceasefire treatise between the FARC guerrilla and the Colombian government, and in November 2016, a new peace treaty was signed and put in action (see BBC, 2017 for more information). This treaty is the first step to

ending a civil war that has lasted over half a century (El Tiempo, 2016). Since then, FARC have not returned to armed conflict; have demobilized into designated rural areas supervised by the UN; have handed in all their weapons; and will now speak of their political ideas through a structured political party rather than through violent response, torture, and kidnapping. Although other minor groups are still negotiating with the government, it is the first time in over 200 years that social and political differences are trying to be discussed and resolved without groups resorting to terrorism as a weapon.

Within this context, given Colombia's long history in poor conflict resolution, it becomes essential to acknowledge the change and challenges the country will be facing now. FARC are no longer to blame for the country's problems. As Colombians, we must also change the way we perceive ourselves and others if we are to move into a more empathetic, caring and empowered society. Learning from other countries which have faced similar challenges to the ones we will be facing will be imperative. We must be open to reinventing ourselves as a society that solves its differences in a peaceful and respectful way. This, of course, has not been easy.

A peace treaty is not a guarantee of peace itself but it is the first step. The upcoming challenges have been many, and education will need to play an important role to overcome some of them, as it has in other post-conflict societies that have faced major challenges. Countries such as Guatemala, South Sudan or Salvador experienced a rise in violence after peace agreements were put in place (McCaffery, 2005; Chaux, 2015). However, in the long run, their investment in social and emotional education has proven useful to transform violent discourse, give meaning to the violence that has been suffered, increase empathy levels, and open new job opportunities. These transformations have reflected in these countries' development and reconstruction of the social fabric (McCaffery, 2005; Garranzo and Gómez Climent, 2006; UNESCO, 2011; Martínez Restrepo, et al., 2015; Chaux, 2015).

However, this is still not the case for Colombia. Four years have passed since the Peace Treaty with FARC was signed. When you take away a conflict that has permeated for a long time how Colombia has been narrated to the world, it is possible to think that new

spaces must open for new, more positive narratives to emerge. However, those emerging are not being perceived as particularly favourable. The referendum put in place in 2016 to vote in favour of, or against, signing this treaty was a clear manifestation of the deeper divisions our society faces. Similar to the Brexit referendum, 51% of the vote was against achieving this milestone. This division has continued to manifest itself in the past presidential election in May, 2018. This situation has set up a political atmosphere of 'you are either with me or against me'. In such a divisive atmosphere, finding opportunities to create a more inclusive language where creativity can be the tool for dialogue and recognition of others' differences becomes fundamental.

The Colombian Ministries of Culture and Education have acknowledged, like other countries with previous experience with armed conflict, the importance of the role of socio-emotional education in the construction of sustainable peace. They have particularly focused on developing and strengthening literacy programs, libraries and cultural activities around them as a way to involve underage population in the construction of peace (Fino, 2015; Ministerio de Cultura, 2015; MEN, 2016). The National Reading and Writing Plan (MEN, 2016) is one of the promoted policies that now aims to raise fiction and non-fiction reading rates in school and public libraries and to promote both literacy and creative writing engagement. Although these efforts have not yet been clearly reflected in the public education language curricula, the current language Basic Learning Rights (BLR) - a group of stated competencies, knowledge and abilities that students are expected to achieve in each school year within the classroom context (MEN, 2016a) - do leave enough flexibility to bring creative reading and writing practices into the classroom.

Once ninth grade students[1] complete their academic year in Colombia, they are able to make 'adult' decisions like continuing in high school for two more years to be able to access tertiary education, pursue college education, or join the workforce. However big

[1] The Colombian education system is divided into five main parts: initial education, preschool education, basic education (including five years of primary, and four of secondary education), further education (two years, required to pursue higher education), and higher education. Children are expected to legally attend basic education years, running from 4 or 5 year-olds until the student is 16 years old. Ninth grade corresponds to students in the last year of secondary education, and can include students between 14 and 16 year olds.

these decisions are for a 15 or 16-year-old, they are still not able to participate in politics and vote for those who represent their vision for the country. I find this to be a paradox. In addition to this, the Ministry of Education reported in 2016 that 96% of students enrolled in primary education stayed in the system versus only 67% of students enrolled in secondary education (Sánchez Alvarado, 2016). Statistics have not improved much since then. Only 44 students out of every 100 that join the Colombian public education system, complete high school education, and among the different drop-out reasons (bullying, displacement, child work, and teenage pregnancy among others), lack of interest is the highest with 26% of students not finding purpose in the education system (El Tiempo, 2020). Continuing to motivate adolescents to remain in school and continue their education is a task that is not simple, but essential.

1.3. Context of the study: Language Education and Adolescents

Researchers in the social sciences and arts education have defined our experiences as storied narratives (Gergen, 2015; Harper, 2015; Speedy, 2008). We narrate facts in the way we perceive them. By sharing those narrations with others, we expect them to be validated, and just like this, we build our own life story, our own way of perceiving the world and those around us. An event can never be objective, but value is placed upon it in the way it is narrated and constructed by others. In that way, as we construct stories through language (spoken or written), we construct our own vision, becoming, in a way, authors of fiction.

National statistics show that literate Colombians do not read more than 2 books a year (Dinero, 2016; Semana, 2016), so it is not a surprise that over 50% of the school population in Bogotá (the city that has the most favourable statistics), is still below the minimum required reading language standards (SED, 2016).

Research has shown the advantages of reading creative writing, not only in fostering language development and learning, but also in aiding empathy and opening up possibilities of worlds other than one's own (Davis, 1995; Schmidt, 1996; Walker, 1997;

Mason, 2004 in Ro, 2016; Nuttall, 2005; Perkins, 2015; Kidd *et al*., 2016; Saavedra Rey, 2017); making connections to his or her own context, learning about themselves and others, and creating or acting upon new ideas they take from the text (Gruenfeld, 2010; Kidd et al., 2016; Oatley, 2016). It was Schopenhauer (1890) who said 'Every man takes the limits of his own field of vision for the limits of the world,' and it is the lack of reading that also limits the language available to interpret that which happens around us. Evidence in countries like England and the United States show that schools that include spaces for creativity and choice within the curriculum, not only achieve better academic results overall, but students also show more commitment to their academic life as well as healthier emotional development (Ofsted, 2010; Responsive Classrooms, 2018). In addition to this, Wilhelm (2016) reports that high school students differentiate between their reading done inside the classroom for academic purposes - *school reading* - from reading in their own time outside of it - *real reading*. The fact adolescents are not perceiving schools offer 'real' opportunities for reading and personal development, but only content they 'have to do', is a worrying thought that schools should be thinking more about.

Klemperer (2000), in his analysis of conflict language during the Second World War, discussed how the structure and sound of language influences thinking structures about reality and how people relate to it. Colombia is a country whose language has been permeated by violence for too long, and it seems a need for it to be transformed is important.

In the current post-conflict process Colombia is facing, it is my interest to explore whether encouraging and promoting creative reading and writing within schools could possibly aid identity formation in adolescents. It should be noted that, although the context of this study is post-conflict Colombia, the activities of this research were not intended to act as a therapeutic intervention for specific traumas. The study did not seek to specifically work with populations of young people that had been directly affected by armed conflict. These adolescents have lived in a context that has been politically divided for a long time, but this political situation is not particular to Colombia, and is shared by young people in Latin

America, America, Europe and other parts of the world. I aimed to look at adolescents' general performance of identity in one context, but it actually reflects any other adolescent in any other socially and politically divided country. I do not want to conceptualise these adolescents as 'affected by conflict' or 'vulnerable' or 'in rural settings', but as adolescents who have grown in a particular social context. They were given the space to openly make decisions and choices on how they want to interact with others and talk about themselves and their experiences with and outside the group they work in. Rather than prescribing a focus on conflict, I aimed to observe patterns and themes that emerged in the performative narratives they decided to write and share with me. This approach was reinforced by my theoretical position because I used a lens that conceptualises identity as constructed and subject to shift and change in the interaction with others through language.

1.4. Outlining the theoretical context of the study

In this section I will provide a conceptual context of my study by outlining the relevant theoretical frameworks. This dissertation stands within a socio-constructionist framework and combines theories of three main disciplines: social sciences (Dan McAdams Narrative Identity Theory and Kenneth Gergen's Relational Being stance); creative arts (arts based research), and education (project-based pedagogy). This multidisciplinary approach allowed me to feed, design, develop and analyse a sound qualitative methodology to explore adolescent identity formation in a novel way. Here I will explore these approaches, their relevance and how they were negotiated for my research process.

1.4.1. Social Constructionism

My dissertation's main theoretical framework lies within social constructionism. This approach places the social process or interaction as previous to knowledge construction (Gergen, 2009). Hence, construction of meaning becomes possible because we relate with the world through language as a fundamental relational tool. This ontological stance marks a distance with psychological cognitive theories that instead, centre the

construction of knowledge and self within the individual, and acknowledge a separation between an inner and an outer self (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008; Burr, 2015; Gergen, 1973). Different psychological approaches can be considered part of a social constructionist umbrella, like critical psychology, discursive psychology, Foucouldian discourse, and constructivism, among others, all having one element in common: language (Burr, 2015).

The way language is analysed is what sets apart two particular lines of social constructionism: macro-, which focuses on language as a tool to establish power relationships and social structures; and micro-, which focuses on the structures of language used in everyday interactions (Burr, 2015). This thesis is underpinned by a micro-social constructionist view: it is key for my research that adolescent identity is not viewed as fragmented through social labels (for example gender, class, sexual orientation, race or disability), but as a whole, open to transformation in the interaction with others.

This study utilized language as a central tool for identity exploration: spoken language in the interaction with the participants, and written language in the short stories read, and creative pieces written by the group. These interactions, together with the process of offering a different space within the school to promote a different use of language - language as an artistic tool, rather than language as an output for academic evaluation -, were key to revealing authentic identity processes of the participants.

1.4.2. The Relational Self and Narrative Identity Theory

Micro-constructionism has two approaches, discursive and narrative. This research focuses on the narrative approach to identity, which states we make sense of our identities and roles through the stories we tell (McAdams, 1985; Gergen and Gergen, 1988). Gergen (2011) is considered one of the main proponents of the narrative social-constructionist view of the self. He argues against an individualistic view of the self, and defines its construction as one that brings together all social experiences, past and present. He calls this view of the self the *relational being.* He argues against identity as something that needs to be achieved, and instead views it as something that is in constant

transformation throughout the lifespan. In this sense, Gergen, Lightfoot and Sydow (2004) do not link identity formation to a particular life stage and look at language as critical to creating alternative ways of being. Gergen and Gergen (1988) place narrative as necessary for the relational being to emerge, as it is through stories that we make ourselves intelligible to those around us.

Dan McAdams' Narrative Identity theory states we build stories about ourselves by integrating lived experiences, cultural contexts, relationships, and expectations of the future. These stories aim to give a unified sense of self. McAdams (2001) argues identity construction begins in late adolescence and continues throughout adulthood, given it is at this age (16 and above) that individuals show the cognitive ability to integrate experiences.

Both theories agree relationships, language and narrative are important for identity formation. However, McAdams continues to acknowledge a separation between inner and outer self, whilst Gergen does not. Despite this ontological difference, the studies around McAdams' theory are manifold and provide a sound theoretical framework to study narratives in adolescent populations. This dissertation focuses on identity formation as one that is achieved through the commonalities of Gergen and McAdam's theories: use of language, relationships, and storytelling. All three elements were deemed as central in the construction, implementation and analysis of the methodology designed for this research.

1.4.3. Arts-based Research

Socio-constructionist theories were fed by work in a number of disciplines, including postmodern and poststructuralist thought. Under this view, works of literature were not judged any more by ideas of 'right' or 'wrong', or 'good' or 'bad'. The value of the literary work is created by the reader or writer as they interact with it, and therefore, subjective in its nature (Burr, 2015). Identity in postmodern literary work became a central question particularly in narrative literature, where work can be categorised in terms of its different theoretical approaches to the self (Culler, 2011). This thesis defines reading and writing as artistic activities that have a value of their own, can be performed by all, and allow the exploration of self and understanding of others through creative use of language.

Research done in identity formation through the use of creative reading and writing practices have usually focused on the reactions and evaluations of the participants rather than the creative work itself. My dissertation proposes a way of integrating both to explore adolescent identity formation. Within my context, Arts-based Research is an interdisciplinary approach that aims to construct knowledge through creative arts (for example music, theatre, photography, writing) (Leavy, 2018). It is an approach that allows us to bring together both elements of my research: social (participants' perceptions) and creative (participants' creative work). Rolling (2010) defines Arts-based Research as post-paradigmatic, meaning it does not fall within one particular theory of knowledge and opens different artistic possibilities to constructing knowledge.

My thesis, in particular, used an innovative creative writing programme that concluded in the production of a short creative writing publication that became the main data for analysis. Rolling (2010) defines the practice of any art as a negotiation between the artist and the work in the search for self -expression. Therefore, Arts-based Research became central to the development of my thesis methodology.

1.4.4. Project-based Pedagogy

Project-based learning, particularly promoted by American education organisations like HighScope Educational Research Foundation and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), aims to provide students with opportunities to research topics and real world issues they deem relevant for their lives (Larmer and Mergendoller, 2010). Particular characteristics of this pedagogical model, include being student-centred, where the teacher acts as a facilitator of the students' interests; developing students' academic and social skills; giving students an active voice and constant opportunities for choice; and providing them with a space to revise, present and talk about their work. David (2008) reports that project-based learning reduces performance anxiety and generates positive attitudes towards school.

My dissertation uses project-based learning as the backbone of all workshops created for the methodology, allowing students to actively participate and develop a sense of belonging and care, not only towards their creative work, but towards each other. The

lack of 'academic judgement' from me as a facilitator, also enabled spaces for the self-reflection and authenticity which were shown consistently in their creative writing pieces, both important elements that foster a positive identity formation.

This next section will discuss my contribution to research, once all theoretical frameworks used came into place.

1.5. The Significance of the study

The original contribution of this thesis can be distilled into four specific areas of significance. Firstly, the study offers a *practical application* of socio-constructionist tools (particularly Gergen's concept of relational being), within a study of mid-adolescent identity. Secondly, the thesis provides an expansive account of a multidisciplinary and mixed qualitative methodological approach, that demonstrates the usefulness of combining creative practice, educational practice and the social sciences within studies of mid-adolescent identity. Thirdly, the research reveals the potential for co-produced fictional narratives as complementary forms of data to other more established qualitative techniques. In addition, the research evidences the usefulness of such a combination to enrich data production and analysis in both arts-based research and the social sciences. Finally, the study argues for the importance of valuing agency in mid-adolescents and the benefits of this for both research and their experiences of constructing authentic expressions of identity.

1.6. Thesis structure

In this chapter I outlined the rationale behind my desire to explore Colombian adolescents' identity formation through a short creative writing programme, and introduced the main multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks that underpin my research.

The aim of **chapter two** is to establish social constructionism as the main theoretical framework to understand identity. Within it, I present Dan McAdams' narrative identity theory and Kenneth Gergen's concept of relational being and self in narrative as central to

my study. I close this chapter by discussing adolescents' identity formation in particular, and how it can be examined under a constructionist framework.

In **chapter three**, I seek to establish the relationship between creative reading and writing and the narrative identity approach discussed in chapter two. I begin by discussing the influences of literary theory on social constructionism, followed by an exploration of creative reading and writing as literary tools to explore identity from a narrative perspective. The chapter addresses reading from the point of view of Rosenblatt's (1969) transactional reading theory, as well as showing the advantages of reading that aid identity formation, like empathy and reflexivity. Writing is explored as a collaborative activity, used to find ways of self-expression and reflection of the self. I close this chapter by analysing the research that led me into my methodological choices explained in chapter four.

In **chapter four** I outline the research and instrumentation design I developed based on the theory previously outlined, as well as the data production process. Ethical considerations are explained with a particular focus on anonymity in research. I close the chapter by presenting a framework for data selection and analysis.

In chapters five and six I present the findings of the relevant data selected to answer the study research questions. **Chapter five** documents the findings that respond to the first two research questions. I begin by evaluating constructionist elements of the methodology, particularly social and participatory, as well as the role of the researcher as a facilitator. I highlight how these elements allow for authentic self-expression of the participants, and how they promote empathy and trust among them. I also look into the role of creative reading and writing as tools to appreciate the difference and bring new understandings of the self. Then, I continue to discuss the role of the researcher and the importance of acknowledging the difficulties of 'being neutral'. I highlight the importance of creating meaningful connections and being vulnerable as a researcher for programmes like mine to work.

Chapter six documents the findings related to the third research question. Throughout this chapter I analyse the identity aspects that emerge in the participants' creative writing

as a result of the methodology. Two areas are discussed. Firstly, I consider the complementary relationship between inner and outer self of the adolescents, both built through their social interactions; the former through more negative or dark experiences, whilst the latter is a brighter or lighter reflection of their personality, passions, and what they care about. Secondly, I explore how the 'other' is portrayed in their creative pieces and conclude adolescents seek trust as the backbone of their identity formation. Four types of trust are analysed.

Finally, **chapter seven** is the conclusion where I highlight the key findings of the study, and their relevance to the research questions set out above. I explain the theoretical and methodological implications of my work, and their limitations and the relevance of this for both future research and education practice. The chapter concludes by highlighting the original contribution of this thesis.

Chapter 2. Identity: Establishing common ground

2.1. Introduction

The definitions and approaches to identity are too many to give an account of within the limited scope of a literature review. Over the past ten years, several handbooks published (Wetherell and Mohanty, 2010; Gallagher, 2011; Schwartz, Luyckx and Vignoles, 2011; Leary and Tangney, 2014; McLean and Syed, 2015; Elliot, 2020) have attempted to encompass its definition, provide explanations on how it is formed, and explore different disciplinary approaches to analysing and measuring identity. This chapter does not intend to give a complete historical overview of the concept, but rather place this study within a socio-constructionist framework, whilst providing theoretical and contextual justifications for this choice. Within this objective, this chapter is divided into two. In the first part, I argue in favour of identity as multidimensional and socially constructed, where narrative becomes a tool to access and understand it. This perspective on identity, however, is not immune to criticism, and challenges to this theory will be outlined and discussed throughout the chapter. In the second part of this chapter, I provide a short overview of the main theories and challenges surrounding adolescent identity formation and argue in favour of the advantages of looking at adolescents' identity through a socio-constructionist lens.

2.2. The road to the social construction of identity

This research focuses on exploring identity formation in Colombian adolescents through a short creative writing program. Identity has been studied in different disciplines, mainly within the social sciences such as philosophy, psychology and sociology, among others (Oyserman, Elmore and Smith, 2012; Burr, 2015). It is within the last two disciplines that identity has recently received more attention, particularly for the past 70 years (Côté, 2016). Between the 1920s and 1950s, psychologists focused on understanding human behaviour and learning processes, more than identity itself, on the premise that humans acted the way they did because of their response to external factors that could be known, accessed and controlled, making behaviour predictable and measurable (Toates, 2009;

McLeod, 2013). Behavioural psychologists like Thorndike, Skinner, Watson and Pavlov, spoke of the inability of human beings to shape who they wanted to be, but rather being the result of environmental stimuli and their response to them (Skinner, 1953 in Bandura et al., 1961; Toates, 2009; McLeod, 2013; McLeod, 2017). For Skinner, for example, reasoning was not to be trusted or measured and was considered superstitious and unreliable (Brozec, 1948; Toates, 2009). However, identity under this lens was little spoken of, and more attention was given to more science-based and controversial approaches to understanding how behaviour could be shaped; as well as to the role of learning through observation in social processes (See for example conditioned emotional reactions, Watson and Rayner, 1920; superstition and conditioning, Skinner, 1948; learning aggressive behaviours, Bandura, Ross and Ross, 1961).

Despite these deterministic approaches to behaviour and learning not focusing particularly on identity formation, their findings cannot be completely disregarded when looking at such a divisive political world we live in. Bandura's conclusions on learning aggressive behaviours by observation could provide a broad explanation of violent behaviours in society, and of why it is so difficult to move away from violent patterns, not only in relationships but politically as well. However, it would seem too dark a future if, as humans, we were unable to move away from violent behaviours and have a moral stance towards certain political situations. Colombia has clearly been immersed in conflict since the end of the fifteenth century, and the fact there has been a peace treaty put into place does not necessarily mean the country and its habitants are ready to learn new ways of relating to and accepting others. Is Colombia doomed to repeat violence as a way of continuing to build its history?

In a contrasting view to deterministic theories, cognitive and developmental psychologists and sociologists suggest we are not just a result of environmental factors or genetic predispositions, but that identity is, rather, a concept that involves both the self and the social (Erikson, 1968; Vaughan, Tajfel and Williams, 1981; Moscovici, 1984; Holland et al., 1998; Bandura, 1999; Layder, 2004; Kroger, 2007; Oyserman, Elmore and Smith, 2012; Glăveanu and Tanggaard, 2014). Therefore, it is through social relations, membership of

certain social groups, and the cultural context an individual belongs to, that they continuously construct and make sense of who they are, giving the spotlight to the individual mind and agency to act.

Developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst Erik Erikson is considered to be one of the main contributors to the development of identity as a concept (Kroger, 2007; Cobb, 2010; Oyserman, Elmore and Smith, 2012). He defined identity as a sense of consistency, coherence and continuity of the self as a whole, involving 'the emergence of a new, intrapsychic structure. This new structure is more than the sum of previous childhood identifications; rather, it is a configuration that now enables the holder to mediate rather than be mediated by these earlier identifications of childhood.' (Kroger, 2007, p. 11). From a psychoanalytical approach, he grounds his theory in Freud's research stating identity is formed and developed through crises or turning points the person must overcome in eight stages, from childhood to adulthood:

> I shall present human growth from the point of view of the conflicts, inner and outer, which he vital personality weathers, re-emerging from each crisis with an increased sense of inner unity, with an increase of good judgement, and an increase in the capacity "to do well" according to his own standards and to the standards of those who are significant to him. The use of the words "to do well" of course points up the whole question of cultural relativity. (...) (Erikson, 1968, pp. 91-92)

This sense of unity gives the individual the feeling of what one is and is not. Through the identity development process, Erikson (1968) spoke of various elements that are essential for the identity formation process to be successful such as the interaction with others, developing free will and a sense of individuality, the possibility to imagine oneself in multiple roles, and the establishment of trust in others.

Kroger (1998, as cited in Cobb, 2010; Kroger, 2007), however, found in a longitudinal study with late adolescents (18 to 22 years of age) that they did not necessarily engage in the developmental stages described by Erikson's theory in a particular order or at a particular time according to their age. Others, like Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen and Kokko (2005, as cited in Kroger, 2007; 2007) have found identity development continues to happen beyond middle

adulthood years. Gergen (1973) examined Erikson's theory as well as other cognitive psychologists who spoke of personality and identity development like Allport (1962, as cited in Gergen, 1973) and criticised these psychologists for being heavily focused on the individual and not taking into consideration cultural and historical elements in how the self is built (Gergen, 1973; Burr, 2015). Later on Gergen's observations would be considered the starting point of social constructionism (Burr, 2015). Gilligan (1982 in Kroger, 2002) criticised Erikson's theory from a feminist perspective, arguing his observations were mainly male-oriented and therefore, did not consider more central aspects to females like care and relationships. However, feminist criticisms of his theory have been rebutted by psychologists like Horst (1995) and Kroger (2002; 2007) who have pointed out Erikson always mentioned the importance of interpersonal relationships and significant connections with others in order to be able to solve stages appropriately. Despite criticisms that have been made of Erikson's developmental theory of identity formation, it continues to have empirical support, and did establish an important framework for its field, becoming the springboard for other theories on identity formation to emerge (Kroger, 2002; 2007), such as McAdams's Narrative Identity Theory, which will be discussed later in this chapter (see sections 2.4. and 2.4.1.).

Erikson was not the first or only one to acknowledge the importance of the social for identity development. Within the social psychology field, and touching on the psychoanalytical ideas of Erikson, two theories discussed the importance of the social in the identity formation process: social identity theory developed by Tajfel (1978 as cited in Vaughan, Tajfel and Williams, 1981; 1978 as cited in Rodriguez, 2016) and social representation theory developed by Moscovici (1984).

Tajfel states that identity is achieved in the motivation to establish and maintain a positive self-concept by achieving recognition from the groups and communities they feel they belong to or want to belong to, and personal traits and achievements (Vaughan, Tajfel and Williams, 1981). When a group's values and beliefs are considered valuable and positive for oneself, then belonging to them builds a positive sense of self. Tajfel (1978 in Rodriguez, 2016) discussed strategies to improve one's self-concept which rely on the

person's ability to make decisions, such as leaving a group one is not comfortable in, or changing behaviours which are perceived by a group as unfavourable.

Moscovici, proponent of social representation theory, acknowledged that we establish our sense of identity in dialogue with other social factors at an individual, group and community level, meaning we construct and give meaning to who we are in interpreting, understanding and interacting with others (Moscovici, 1984; Marková, 2003 as cited in Glăveanu and Tanggaard, 2014). Harré (1998) analysed Moscovici's theory from a discursive perspective arguing its importance for acknowledging human agency and stepping away from determinist and positivist ideas of human behaviour. He equally acknowledges the importance of language to build common meaning and understanding among societal groups. For these social psychologists, identity is built in interaction, and therefore it is embedded in it (Côté, 2016). Research that has been based on these theories, including research in discursive psychology, usually focuses on social identities (such as gender, race or social class) that are built in the interaction between the individual and the social groups surrounding him or her (Burr, 2015; Côté, 2016). It is not the purpose of my study to delve into these but to understand more general aspects of identity in adolescents. Nonetheless, these theories already acknowledge there is not just one construction of identity, but that one might have a multiplicity of them according to the social contexts one might be part of.

These three identity theories, Erikson's developmental theory and Tajfel and Moscovici's social identity theories, move away from a genetically determined and defined by external factors sense of self, to get closer to a more social and active role in identity building (through groups, interactions with and trust in others, exchange of ideas). Bandura (1999), who initially had a deterministic position (see beginning of section 2.1.), concluded we were not only influenced by the environment but that our behaviours and relationship with others could also shape it in return (Thomson, 2019; Bandura, 1999), hence proposing that environment and mind were not opposed to each other but instead complementary to create one unique and congruent sense of self. According to Bandura

(1999) relationships become an important element to define what we like, who we are, and what we would like to become.

Similarly, and within social psychology and emerging theories that challenged more deterministic approaches, constructivism added to the notion of the social and cultural as fundamental for individual development. The constructivist movement was influenced by philosophical conceptions which argue human beings have agency and therefore the capacity to think and make up their own minds, rather than being products of a particular environment (Gergen and Gergen, 2008; Burr, 2015; Gergen, 2015). Some researchers within the constructivist framework placed identity formation in the individual, who builds his sense of self through his or her experiences with the social world.

For example, Cavendish, Vess and Li-Barber's revisions of the socio-cultural approach to identity suggest that '"socio-cultural" refers to learning that occurs in interactions with others and within a cultural framework. This does not mean we are bound by cultural context, as we have the agency to stretch and reframe a lens (2016, p. 27). This socio-constructivist approach, then, highlights that we build our identity as we gain an understanding of our surroundings, our interactions with others, and the culture in which both are immersed. At the same time, this approach acknowledges identity is not bound and limited by environmental factors, as agency allows the individual to create different opinions and develop different perceptions from the same social and/or linguistic stimuli (Cavendish, Vess and Li-Barber, 2016; Holland et al., 1998). This gives identity a heterogeneous and fluid nature.

Constructivist theory, acknowledges the role of society and culture in identity development, but some authors still continue to value the mind as an individual process where each person creates and constructs their idea of self and their own individual idea of the world (Burr, 2015; Gergen, 2009; 2011; 2015; Gergen and Gergen, 2008). Nonetheless, my research does not sit within the idea of individual, separated minds, but instead, assumes we build who we are in the interactions we have. This way, we are capable of learning and experimenting with new ways of relating to others, and in that sense, the ability to continuously construct or reconstruct our sense of self. This is where

the main difference lies between social *constructivism* and *constructionism*, the theory which this chapter will now go on to discuss (see section 2.2.).

Social psychology was not the only discipline where identity and the social started to be the focus. Within sociology scholars had already been talking about the role of society in the construction of identity. Psychologist, sociologist and philosopher George Herbert Mead was already shedding light on the role of society in the construction of the self in 1934 in his work *Mind, Self, and Society* (Gergen, 2011). Mead (1934), who is considered one of the fathers of symbolic interactionism (Burr, 2015), argued self and others cannot be seen as two separate beings since one cannot exist without the other: it is language and interactions with others that allow the mind to develop, and therefore, a sense of self:

> The individual possesses a self only in relation to the selves of the other members of his social group; and the structure of his self expresses or reflects the general behavior pattern of this social group to which he belongs, just as does the structure of the self of every other individual belonging to this social group. (Mead, 1934, p. 164)

For Mead, a key element for the development of the self is language and our ability to use and interpret symbols, which at the same time, depends upon social interaction (Burr, 2015). Language becomes an important element in constructionist approaches to identity.

Sociologists Berger and Luckmann (1966) in their book *The Social Construction of Reality*, argued identity is developed and maintained in social interactions, especially with significant others who confirm or negate particular ways of being. As Berger and Luckman (1966) state:

> Identity is, of course, a key element of subjective reality, and like all subjective reality, stands in a dialectical relationship with society. Identity is formed by social process. Once crystallized, it is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations. Conversely, the identities produced by the interplay of organism, individual consciousness and social structure, react upon the given social structure, maintaining it, modifying it, or even reshaping it. Societies have histories in the course of which specific identities emerge; these histories are, however, made by men with specific identities (p. 173).

These authors argue that people both construct and respond to society, making human beings both creators and products of it (Burr, 2015). Different from Erikson and other social and cognitive psychology theories where identity is considered to be built individually, Berger and Luckmann view identity as embedded in social interaction; and different from Tajfel (Vaughan, Tajfel and Williams, 1981), they do not acknowledge a separation between the individual and the group. Berger and Luckmann's theory does not view identity as an individual process, but a collective one, created and maintained through social practices. This sociological theory had an impact on what Gergen (1973) would argue and develop within social psychology as Social Constructionism (Gergen, 1985; Burr, 2015).

Developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky also challenged the notion of the isolated mind: 'everything that is in mind is first in the social world. In this sense, individual psychological functioning is culturally derivative' (1978, as cited in Gergen, 2009, p. xviii). His work questioned the idea that the world is a reality that can be known and accessed, and suggested that it can be differently constructed by each person depending on what they define as knowledge through their interactions and experiences (Gergen, 1985; 2011; 2015; McKinley, 2015). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory was one of the models that laid the foundations for social constructionism to emerge and strengthen, where language, the social, and cultural become the main focus as elements that precede the individual mind (Wertsch, 1995; Gergen, 2011).

Post-Vygotskian academics in different fields like anthropology (Wertsch, 1995), linguistics (Moita-Lopes, 2003 – see section 2.3.), education (Rogoff, 2008), and psychology (Gergen, 2011) have based their research on Vygotsky's work. They have continued to highlight the importance of the social in the construction of self, whilst distancing from the individual mind as the focus of study. For example, Wertsch (1995) discussed the ongoing debate around the relationship between the mind and the social (what comes first?), suggesting *action* as the unit of analysis to understand the dialect between the mind and the social. Hence, he suggests the focus should not be on the mind, but on the person as an actor in particular social and cultural settings. Similarly, Rogoff (2008) proposes a sociocultural

model that joins personal, interpersonal and community planes which cannot be separated given they mutually transform each other through interaction. She draws on Luckmann and Berger's concept of *appropriation* which distances from *internalisation* as it denies the separated individual internal mind, and rather places thoughts and feelings as a result of interaction with others within a particular social and cultural context (Rogoff, 2008).

While in the foregoing section I have explored different approaches to understanding the self and how these approaches connected and gave space for socio-constructionist theories to emerge, my next section will continue to delve into the latter, since social constructionism is the main theoretical approach that guided my research.

2.3. Social Constructionism: A theoretical framework to identity formation

The theories of identity formation are many and are fed by different philosophical, sociological and psychological theories, but they share certain attributes that have been mentioned over time; for instance, the construction of meaning in the interaction with an 'other'; the dynamic nature of identity; and the importance of finding a sense of coherence and consistency from within the formation process. Two other elements are mentioned across theories: language as a tool for interaction and construction of meaning; and agency, or capacity of directing one's actions at will (Erikson, 1968; McAdams, 1985; Holland et al., 1998; Layder, 2004; Oyserman, Elmore and Smith, 2012; Cavendish, Vess and Li-Barber, 2016; Rodriguez, 2016). Erikson states, for example: 'Apart from such clinical evidence, however, the overall contribution to an eventual identity formation is the very courage to be an independent individual who can choose and guide his own future' (1969, p.114). Social constructionism is not alien to these elements, but unlike cognitive and other developmental views of the self, this approach to knowledge centres the construction of meaning *in* the interaction rather than within the individual (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008; Burr, 2015; Gergen, 1973; 1985; 2009; 2011; 2015). In this sense, individual thoughts, ideas, mind and sense of self are all a result of the social process (Flick, 1998; Gubrium and Holstein, 2008; Burr, 2015, Gergen, 2009; 2011; 2015).

Social constructionism represents a shift in how the world and human beings are understood: 'If what we call knowledge emerges from social process, then social process stands as an ontological prior to the individual' (Gergen, 2011, p. 112). Therefore, we *become* in relationship with others. In his work *The saturated self*, Gergen argues psychology and other social sciences cannot continue to view the human being through an individualistic lens, confined to his or her own thoughts and processes (Gergen, 1998: 2009, 2011). Viewing a human being as individual and isolated in his or her thoughts places a barrier between people, given we can never really get to know a person. Under this view of what Gergen calls a *'bounded self'* (1998; 2011), we can choose what to disclose to others, which can generate feelings of distrust and therefore of conflict. Basing his ideas on postmodern philosopher, linguist Mikhail Bakhtin (1982), Gergen emphasises that our selves are actually negotiated in the interaction through language: 'The person we are, in this view, depends upon rather than stands in isolation against, other people.' (Burr, 2015, p. 161). Therefore, the social-constructionist view marks a clear break from cognitive and developmental theories and moves out of the individual mind to explain the formation of the self through relationships and language, where identity stops being this fixed, stable concept, as it is constantly created, transformed and maintained in past and current relationships: 'our identity is never fixed but always in process, always open to change' (Burr, 2015, p. 143).

Constructionism, however, has different approaches within it. Burr (2015) makes a distinction between micro- and macro-constructionism, both approaches having language and relationships at the centre. The main difference lies in the focus: while micro-constructionism is centred in language structures used in daily interactions, macro-constructionism sees language both as created and as a result of social structures:

> The idea of subject positions [in discourse] is utilised by those working within both macro and micro forms of social constructionism; within macro social constructionism the emphasis is upon the constitutive force of the subject positions carried by particular discourses; within micro social constructionism it is upon the ability of the person to negotiate subject positions within interactions. (Burr, 2015, p. 145)

Macro-constructionism has a focus on social relationships around power and social inequality due to issues like gender, or ethnicity, among others, and therefore has been highly influenced by the work of Michael Foucault (Burr, 2015, p. 24-26; Gergen and Gergen, 2008). Research within this line of thought usually aims to challenge these social structures, and therefore the language created in and through them, with the objective of generating structural changes. Critical psychologists and sociologists (see for example Baxter, 2003 for use of discourse in feminism; Honneth, 1995 for the role of language in his theory of social recognition) fit within this macro-constructionist umbrella, where methodologies like critical discourse analysis (CDA) and poststructuralist discourse analysis (PDA) are commonly found (Flick, 1998; Baxter, 2008; Gergen and Gergen, 2008; Burr, 2015). Among interpretative and critical approaches, the symbolic interaction theory (Blumer, 1969) defines identity as a fluid construct mediated by culture in the relationship with others through language. Therefore, the quality of social interactions and the way others perceive you are fundamental when establishing a positive or negative sense of self, as well as central to the way we view and learn from the world around us (Blumer, 1969; Holland, et al., 1998; Cavendish, Vess and Li-Barber, 2016). Honneth's 'Theory of Recognition' (1995) proposes that identity is the result of a social struggle lived in the interaction with others: family and friends, communities one belongs to, and a social and political system that guarantees protection to establish those relationships of trust. These relationships are formed and structured in time and are particular to each individual. Under these approaches, Burr (2015) states:

> Our identity is constructed out of the discourses culturally available to us, and which we draw upon in our communications with other people. A person's identity is achieved by a subtle interweaving of many different threads. There is a thread of age, (...); that of class (...); ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and so on. All these, and many more, are woven together to produce the fabric of a person's identity. (...). We are the end product, the combination, of the particular versions of these things that are available to us.' (Burr, 2015, pp. 123-124)

A good example within this macro-constructionist perspective, is Moita-Lopes (2003) research on portraits of masculinities with Brazilian adolescents in a schooled context. Based on Labov's elements for narrative analysis (1972, as cited in Moita-Lopes, 2003), he

analyses stories told by pupils around gender and sexuality and how hegemonic masculinities are built through them. His constructionist approach to discourse and language allowed him to suggest alternatives to deconstruct such views by supporting the adolescents in recognising and being aware of their language and how it affects not only gender roles, but also ideas around 'sexuality, race, ethnicity, social class, nationality and religion.' (Moita-Lopes, 2003, p. 45). He concluded: 'If, for no other reason, this should be done for reasons of social justice (Connell, 1995). Language education can help because of its central concern with meaning construction in a variety of discursive practices of which storytelling is one.' (p. 45). Therefore, Moita-Lopes (2003) research illustrates Burr's (2015) analysis of macro-constructionist research (above) of how identity is built through language as it delineates different aspects that define it.

Instead, micro-constructionism is focused on the interaction itself between individuals in everyday discourse (Burr,2015). Therefore, by analysing and paying attention to everyday use of language, we can understand and access new ways of relating to each other, encouraging more positive ways of seeing others, and therefore, ourselves:

> Drawing on Bakhtin, (...) Gergen argues that selves are negotiated and constructed in relationships, and each new relationship we make will in turn, bear the mark of other, earlier relationships we have formed. (...). He calls for us to reflect on our own use of language, leading to more emancipatory ways of constructing things. (...) He sees a move towards 'relational being' not as a way of ending conflict and difference, but as a way of helping us manage it less damagingly by encouraging dialogue, and discouraging people from seeing themselves as individuals or groups with competing interests. (Burr, 2015, p. 161-162)

There are two approaches to analysing language and relationships within micro-constructionism. One, similar to the macro-perspective, is a discursive approach, mostly influenced by Harré's (1998) work. Harré (1998) argues the importance of analysing language in use in conversation and the role of language and interaction in understanding a moral universe. Discursive micro-constructionism looks to analyse the content of language, usually through approaches like conversation analysis (CA), which reveals the use of certain language devices to achieve goals in particular social scenarios (Flick, 1998;

Burr, 2015). A second approach is not discursive but narrative, which argues we are storytellers in essence, and therefore we make sense of ourselves and our experiences with others around us through stories (McAdams, 1985; 2001; Gergen and Gergen, 1988; see the person as a product of interaction, symbolic dialogue and use of language, my research aims to look at narrative structures to explore identity formation in adolescents rather than studying particular use of linguistic devices in their interactions. Therefore, my research will explore identity formation under a micro-constructionist perspective, particularly within the narrative approach, with a combination of Gergen's and McAdams's ideas of narrative identity at the centre.

2.4. Narrative and identity

Three social constructionism tenets provide a theoretical basis to understand identity as narratively constructed. Firstly, constructionism stands on the ontological premise that knowledge about who we are is built in the interaction with others (Côté, 2016). Secondly, if our identity depends on the social, then there is the possibility of a person having multiple identities. This means a person can have as many identities as roles they perform in the social: mother, father, sibling, worker, boss, student, and so on, making identity performative, fluctuating between roles that one might assume in particular social scenarios. Mainstream cognitive psychology has criticised this point as it negates an inner coherent sense of self where multiple identities might fragment it, generating a feeling of inner incoherence (Gergen and Gergen, 2008; Burr, 2015). Finally, a third element is language as the key to performing those identities, primarily based on poststructuralist movements (Gergen and Gergen, 2008):

> With developments in semiotic theory in general and literary deconstruction in particular (Derrida, 1976), attention was variously drawn to the ways in which linguistic convention serves as the forestructure for all claims of knowledge. Whatever reality it may be, its representation is necessarily dominated by such conventions. (Gergen and Gergen, 2008, p.172)

Therefore, language becomes the tool not only to perform but also to access the different identities. The narrative approach to studying identity came, in part, as a response to an

important critique made to the constructionist approach mentioned above: if we have multiple identities that are built in the interaction with others, then why do we feel a sense of coherence of the 'self' through time? A question that certainly raised a valid point in favour of the cognitive view of an 'inner' and 'outer' self (Gergen and Gergen, 1988; Gergen, 2011; Burr, 2015; Heavy, 2017). In response to this, Sarbin (1990) concludes narrative structure is what human beings fall back on to explain and interpret occurrences in their lives: '[N]arratives give form to unformed experience (...)' (p. 50). He proposes the *narratory principle*: '(...) studies point up the phenomenon of employment, sense-making through assigning observations to a narrative structure. (...) We take discrete bits and pieces of fact and fancy and fit them into one or more narrative frameworks.' (Sarbin, 1990, p. 51). This means that as human beings, we turn to narrative to make sense of our experiences and in such a way we find them coherent and unified. Heavy (2017) also draws on Riessman's work to argue the same point:

> Narrative analysts tend to view identity as something emergent in, and constructed by narrative, moving away from "static conceptions of identity and … essentializing theories that assume the unity of an 'inner' self" (Riessman, 2001, p. 701). Put simply, narrative is not a reflection of identities but a site for their production. (Heavey, 2017, p. 139)

In this context, from a constructionist view, the narrative approach to understanding identity steps away from the duality between 'inner' and 'outer' selves and therefore, from the duality between identity and self (Gergen and Gergen, 2008; Gergen, 2011): 'When attitudes and reason are viewed as discursive actions, psychology is removed from the head and placed within the relational sphere' (Gergen and Gergen, 2008, p. 177). As Layder (2004) and Schechtman (2013) state, our sense of self is built in narrative form, and therefore, there is no final resolution to the self as developmental psychologist Erikson proposed, but instead, the self is in constant construction and is capable of changing throughout a person's lifespan. We build coherence through the stories we tell, the events we choose to share, and the way we decide to share them. Memory has a role in creating a sense of self (Burr, 2015). This means that all past and present experiences that one chooses to share as part of a life narrative are a collection of main events, plans, dreams and decisions that one acknowledges as valuable for explaining one's identity, and that

one organises coherently into narratives or stories to make sense of one's self. Layder (2004) states in this regard, that the self is a reflexive project in constant revision through narrative (p. 129). To avoid further confusions, for this research, I will refer to *identity* and *self* as two words for the same thing, and may use the term *identities* to refer to particular roles assumed that build a broader sense of the self.

Within narrative approaches to identity, I will discuss two perspectives that are relevant for my research: Dan McAdams's concept of narrative identity (McAdams, 1985; 1993; 2001; 2011), which was initially based on Erikson's approach to identity development; and Kenneth and Mary Gergen's approach to the self in narrative (Gergen and Gergen, 1988; Gergen and Gergen, 2006; Gergen, 2009; 2011; 2015). Although these authors agree on the importance of relationships, language and narrative for identity formation, the main difference between them lies in their ontological approach: while McAdams is more within socio-constructivism and recognises an inner self, Gergen and Gergen stand within a socio-constructionist stance which negates this duality. However, in my own work I have attempted to integrate these two views since constructionist views of adolescence identity are limited, whereas constructivist ones are more precise and informative when looking at the population my research works with.

2.4.1. Narrative Identity Theory

McAdams (1985) developed the narrative identity theory, taking into consideration Erikson's view of staged identity development. He devised his theory considering Erikson's notion of identity as organised and achieved in time in chronological order, and therefore, narrative becomes the perfect vehicle to organise such a timeline (McAdams, 1985; 2011). McAdams (2011) defines *narrative identity* as:

> (...) an internalized and evolving story of the self that provides a person's life with some semblance of unity, purpose and meaning. Complete with settings, scenes, characters, plots, and themes, narrative identity combines a person's reconstruction of his or her personal past with an imagined future in order to provide a subjective historical account of one's own development, an instrumental explanation of a person's most important commitments in the

> realms of work and love, and a moral justification of who a person was, is, and will be. (p. 100)

He suggests identity is constructed through language and argues that the way we use it to talk about ourselves justifies and gives meaning to our actions and thoughts, whilst establishing a relationship with societal demands (McAdams, 1985; Layder, 2004; McAdams, 1988 in Kroger, 2007). McAdams (2019) states '[n]arrative identity's value to psychological science does not lie so much in its ability to improve discrete behavioral prediction. Its value instead comes from its ability to capture how people make meaning out of their lives' (p. 79).

Different elements come together in narrative to build a person's sense of identity. As in any story, characters, plot, setting and outcomes are important to build one's own story (McAdams, 1985; 2011, Breen and McLean, 2017). In social life these elements would translate into the integration of past and present experiences with others one relates to, the reasons for those interactions, the places or cultural contexts where the interactions take place, and one's expectations and vision of the future. McAdams (1985; 2011) defines three areas which build into identity formation:

> [N]arrative identity combines a person's reconstruction of his or her past with an imagined future in order to provide a *subjective* historical account of one's own development, an instrumental explanation of a person's most important commitments in the *realms of work and love, and moral justification* of who a person was, is and will be. (McAdams, 2011, p. 100; italicized for emphasis)

McAdams (1988 as cited in Kroger, 2007; 1993 as cited in Breen and McLean, 2017; McAdams, 2001; 2011) states narrative identity construction begins in late adolescence and continues into adulthood. However, different from Erikson's view of identity as something that is *reached* (Erikson, 1968; McAdams, 2011), McAdams states people continue to make sense of their identity throughout the lifespan, as well as the identity of others around them. This view remains within a more developmental framework, which assumes that it is not until late adolescence that people have the cognitive ability to form a sense of self by giving past experiences autobiographical continuity (Breen and McLean, 2017, p. 199). This matches Erikson's (1968) identity versus identity confusion

developmental stage when adolescents start integrating and solving past childhood experiences with their new social and sexual maturity, as well as the initial stage of exploring possible occupations (See section 2.5.1. for more about Erikson's (1968) developmental stages).

This developmental lens brings a particular way of analysing narrative identities. McAdams's (2011) research was based on McClelland's work on coding stories coming from the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) pictures (1985 as cited in McAdams, 2011). McAdams concluded narratives can be analysed not only in their complexity and coherence, but also in terms of motivational themes linked to personal agency (linked to more critical psychology topics, like power or recognition), and closeness in the relationships described (for example, love, loss, hate, or dependency, among others) (p. 101). Narrative identity research with late adolescence and adults that look into McAdams views on narrative identity usually use verbal narratives as the data (interviews), as well as a range of mixed qualitative and quantitative methods to analyse, classify and explain narrative structures.

Cowan *et al.* (2019), for example, studied the influence of stressful, challenging events in adults' narrative identity by coding and applying exploratory factor analysis to interviews held with 157 adults in their mid-fifties. The construct *agency/emotion* was negatively correlated to expressions of depression and neuroticism in oral narratives around challenging events, meaning that participants who 'reconstruct[ed] the life story as the continued efforts of a potent, motivated, optimistic protagonist' (Cowan *et al.*, 2019, p. 10), and referenced positive emotions as a result of the challenging situation, consistently scored lower on depression scores and better overall psychological functioning. Although this study was focused on adults, rather than adolescents, under the constructionist notion that identity is continuously forming, it provides important elements to look at in terms of positive identity formation when studying the effects of past stressful events: positive view of the future, resilience, and a sense of agency. Cowan *et al.'s* (2019) research findings align with McAdams's concept of *redemptive narratives* (McAdams, 2006; 2011; Breen and McLean, 2017), or the ability for adults to derive positive meaning

from negative experiences. McAdams (2006; 2011) concludes that these resilient adults usually score high in *generativity* measures ('an adult's concern for and commitment to promoting the development and well-being of future generations' (McAdams, 2006, p. 81)); and show a number of elements in their narratives (from beginning to end) that point to a positive identity formation: (1) they feel 'blessed' from early on in their lives. This means their stories begin with an event that sets them apart from the rest in a positive way (for example, having a special advantage from others less fortunate). (2) Adults who score high on generativity measures, are four times more sensitive or empathic to others suffering from social injustice. As they continue with their stories, situations arise where they have felt troubled after witnessing injustice, discrimination or prejudice, and begin feeling that 'life is not fair' (McAdams, 2006, p.92). Therefore, they need to use their blessings for the good of others; (3) They report a strong value system that remains steady since adolescence. These adults do not question the values that guide his or her actions, and report consistent moral clarity. (4) Nonetheless, although they do not question their morals, they do question their motives:

> Highly generative adults tell life stories that mix shades of both narcissism and altruism—stories about strong protagonists who push hard their own agendas but who also want to love and be loved by others, to care and be cared for. In many life stories told by highly generative adults, the tension between power and love drives the plot forward and provides the narrative with the kind of energy and suspense that audiences and listeners expect in good stories. (McAdams, 2006, p. 93)

Finally, (5) they aim to benefit society in the future (McAdams, 2006; McAdams, 2011, p. 109). Breen and McLean (2017) researched redemptive narratives with mid-adolescents (aged from 15 to 19 years) living in challenging contexts, a population not frequently studied under narrative identity theory. Despite McAdams (2006) concluding in his study that adults telling their own redemptive narratives positively correlates with high well-being, previous research has shown that adolescents might not benefit from telling them, correlating it with tendencies to criminal behaviours and poor adjustment skills (McLean *et al.*, 2010 in Breen and McLean, 2017; McLean, Wood and Bree, 2013, in Breen and McLean, 2017). Breen and Mclean (2017) conclude redemptive narratives of adolescents

in vulnerable contexts (pregnancy, drugs, criminal behaviours) are not enough to predict a positive identity development in the future. Their study brings a word of caution for adolescent redemptive narratives: although they show hope in their narratives for a better future, support from those surrounding them and resources available are also fundamental.

During the last fifteen years, research around adolescents' narrative identities has not only focused on the role of redemptive narratives. McLean and colleagues have researched multiple other aspects such as meaning-making of past memorable events in written and spoken narratives; the function of narratives in identity construction; how adolescents build a continuous life story through them; narrative content; commitment to personal values; and gender and age differences among others. McLean (2005) found redemptive narratives were not the only way to construct or represent identity for late adolescents (16 to 27 years): narratives that show deep personal reflections upon events (not necessarily negative in nature) and narratives of playful and joyous moments, both bring meaning-filled experiences that contribute to self-definition. In her study, McLean classifies the narratives into two groups: self-explanation and entertainment. Within the former, participants shared more relational narratives relating to loss (like death or divorce) or gains (related to love or closeness), whilst for entertainment, mishaps (like accidents or adventures) were more common (McLean, 2005, p. 687). All life events considered self-defining, do not need to be challenging, in order to be significant to construct one's identity. McLean concludes '[t]he results of this study suggest that relationship memories are not only an important part of one's internal self-representation but are also crucial to telling the self to others.' (McLean, 2005, p. 688), whilst memories for entertainment seem to be meaningful when there is an audience that validates it.

In later studies, McLean and colleagues researched gender differences in narrative identity construction (McLean and Breen, 2009; McLean and Mansfield, 2011). In McLean and Breen (2009) research with 171 mid-adolescents (14 to 18 years) on narrative identity development processes and content found no significant differences between men and women in the degree of *meaning-making*. They defined this concept as 'the degree to

which one learns something about oneself from reflecting on past events' (McLean and Bree, 2009, p. 702). The authors also did not find any significant gender differences in sharing of relational narratives (that is narratives to increase intimacy with/ get close to others), despite women sharing more relational narratives than men. Similarly, McLean and Mansfield (2011), who studied narrative identity construction through past event conversations between adolescents (63, 11 to 18 years) and their mothers, found no significant differences for meaning-making between men and women. McLean and Jennings (2012) published an article on the same study, where they explored differences between narratives of past events shared with mothers and those shared with friends. While they found no differences between conversations with mothers or friends in meaning-making of past events, McLean and Jennings (2012) concluded mothers provided more scaffolding strategies than friends. However, friends provided a type of scaffolding different from the adolescents' mothers, where they validated the adolescent's self-presentation aspects of his or her narratives and provided a safe arena for exploration of past events. The authors concluded that adolescents have what Pasupathi (2011, as cited in McLean and Jennings, 2012) defines as *narrative flexibility*, or the ability of an adolescent to adapt a narrative depending on the audience.

Pasupathi and Weeks (2010) state identity continuity is challenging during adolescence. They propose that a way to achieve that continuity relies on the ability to tell stories about their lives that link one's sense of self to a particular past event. McLean, Breen and Fournier (2010) found in their study with 146 early, middle and late adolescent boys, that identity construction in adolescence not only involves integrating the self with past experiences, but also more specifically, by integrating the self and relationships through those past experiences (p. 178). Pasupathi and Weeks (2010) concluded that identity narrative tradition has usually focused on the way people establish these links between their self and experience, as well as how they express continuity in themes and emotions, all of which show how 'the present is shaped by the past and can potentially shape the future' (Pasupathi and Weeks, 2010, p. 33). These studies place narrative identity as a process that requires an 'other' for meaning construction, either for sharing (with mothers or friends), or for the presence/absence of an 'other' in the self-defining memory. Hence,

although McAdams work is strongly linked to theories of personality development and mentions a clear separation of an inner and outer self (McAdams, 1985; 2001; 2011), Narrative identity theory still continues to validate and highlight the 'other': (1) an 'other' we interact with in the past or present to build a notion of continuity and meaning; and (2) an 'other' we share our stories with who can help us to scaffold meaning and validate our ideas of self.

Although McAdams continues to give the social an important role in narrative identity, his ontological stance that favours this duality between inner and outer self clashes with the ontological stance of my research, which negates it. Most research done around narrative identity has been focused on empirical methods that can bring a 'mathematical' validation to the model. Although these methodologies allow identifying clear categories of analysis for narrative identity formation, as well as patterns and differences by age and gender, the focus is still maintained in how continuity and commitment to one's identity are achieved. My research stands on the premise that identity is not something that is achieved but instead, it is in constant transformation. Cognitivism theories point out that a multiplicity of identities would mainly consider the human being a black box, "waiting to be filled" in the interaction with others. This, in turn, would make us void of agency (Burr,2015). However, narrative identity could not step further from this: the fact we choose what and how to share our own stories to make a sense of who we are (Pasupathi, 2011 as cited in McLean and Jennings, 2012), and how we see others in our own timeline (McLean, Breen and Fournier, 2010), cannot be void of agency. Schechtman (2013) says '[t]o be agents we must be intelligible to ourselves and to others; our actions must be meaningful and significant in a way that cannot be captured by pure naturalistic terms, but this requires that we interpret behaviours in the context of a narrative.' (p. 395).

This section has provided an overview of Adam McAdams's concept of narrative identity and research done with adolescents under this scope. This next section will examine a social constructionist view of the self in narrative, particularly focusing on Kenneth and Mary Gergen's work.

2.4.2. The Self in Narrative: a constructionist approach to narrative identity

As it was previously explained, Gergen (1998; 2006; 2009; 2011; 2015; Burr, 2015) argues conflict, distrust, lack of intimacy and the focus on self-gratification are all a result of an individualistic view of the self, and therefore calls for a different view on the self that is built in the relationship and in the interaction with others. This view marks an important shift from mainstream, cognitive psychology, and defines a construction of the self as 'a complex product of all our past and present relations' (Burr, 2015, p. 161). He calls this new view of the self, the *relational being*. He concludes the self is not static, it is not something that is achieved in time, or that needs to be solved, as stated by Erikson (1968), but it rather is in constant construction and can adapt, change and evolve in the relationships established: 'What we take to be knowledge of the world grows from relationship. In effect, constructionist dialogues celebrate relationship as opposed to the individual, connection over isolation, and communion over antagonism.' (Gergen, 2015, p. 98).

Gergen (2009) states that the internal, or inner mental states, are no more but the result of interactions that have already happened in the social world. He gives four main propositions supporting the nature of the relational being (Gergen, 2009, p. 70-75): (1) Mental discourse comes from relationships, and (2) functions in its service. These two propositions mean we gain vocabulary from relationships, and we use it to engage in them. (3) When we use mental discourse in the service of relationships, it becomes action within those relationships:

> The spoken language is but one component of a full social performance. Our words are notes within orchestrated patterns of action. Without the full coordination of words and action, relational life turns strange. (...) We may speak of these full coordinations as *relational performances,* that is, actions with or for others. The performances in this case include the discourse of the mind. In calling them performances, attention is directed to their socially crafted character. (Gergen, 2009, p. 73)

Finally, (4) our discursive action gains meaning in the relationship. This means that meaning does not just depend on individual utterances and functions one wishes to fulfil

with it, but on how it is received by the other one is in interaction with. For example, saying 'I am sad' and looking sad, and thinking that 'I am looking for comfort' in an interaction, mental discourse changes when the other does not offer comfort but dismissal. The self, built in that particular relationship, builds new meanings and ways of interacting with others when it comes to talk about and perform sadness. These four premises negate the duality of the self as a separation of distinct inner (mind) and outer (action) selves. Breaking this premise opens possibilities for change, growth and new understandings of the self, one in constant construction through the social.

Therefore, in the same way as McAdams, Gergen (1988; 2009; 2011; 2015) places language at the centre of the construction of self. Particularly Gergen, Lightfoot and Sydow (2004) analysed the importance of social construction for child and adolescent clinical psychology. They concluded that the constructionist stance of making language central is important in three ways: (1) it allows us to be appreciative of other ways of seeing the world, and opens space for alternative ways of constructing knowledge; (2) Opens a door to reflexivity, where the objective is not anymore the search for 'truth', but reflecting on the advantages and limitations of understanding things in a certain way; and (3) 'the emphasis on language brings us to the realization that together we can create new realities' (Gergen, Lightfoot and Sydow, 2004, p. 391). From this point of view, the authors analyse the negative language constructions that have been done around adolescence, which constantly problematizes it:

> The research community also contributes to the negative construction of youth. Funds are made available by government agencies and private foundations to support research that addresses the problems of youth, whereas little support can be found for examining positive and indeed more typical aspects of adolescent behavior and development. (...) (Gergen, Lightfoot and Sydow, 2004, p. 393)

In this regard, the authors conclude that rather than being a 'crisis' of youth, there is a crisis from a particular point of view on reality and behaviour. Social constructionism comes in as an alternative way of looking at adolescence and understanding the cultural understandings of youth to then be able to explore new ways of narrating it. Bringing

social constructionism as an ontological framework to understand social concepts and issues, the search for new narratives and ways of understanding them is always a possibility to foster positive change and growth for those involved.

Within this definition of the *relational being* as emergent from social interaction, where language is considered fundamental for the relational being to emerge, Gergen and Gergen (1988) placed narrative as a fundamental tool for interaction: 'stories (...) serve as a critical means by which we make ourselves intelligible within the social world (...). (...) [W]e use the story form to identify ourselves to others and to ourselves.' (Gergen and Gergen, 1988, p. 17). Through narrative, we not only show ourselves but also the ways in which we relate to others and how we live those relationships. While McAdams's definition of narrative identity establishes that the way we construct the narrative allows us to justify and give meaning to our present actions and thoughts (McAdams, 1985; Layder, 2004; McAdams, 1988 in Kroger, 2007), from a constructionist point of view, the narrative is a process where we actively give meaning to the events we are putting together, as we are putting them together (Gergen and Gergen, 1988): 'The individual in this case does not consult an internal narrative for information. Rather, the self-narrative is a linguistic implement constructed by people in relationships and employed in relationships to sustain, enhance, or impede various actions.' (Gergen and Gergen, 1988, p. 20). This is important in terms of this study, as the methodology was created and constructed under the assumption that we actively give meaning to what we tell about ourselves and our relationships, giving participants the ability to strengthen, change or create new ways of seeing themselves and others throughout the process.

Gergen and Gergen (1988) established five characteristics they consider important to define a well-constructed narrative: (1) There must be a point to the story (for example, how I lost my first tooth); (2) the events selected must be relevant to make that point; (3) there must be a logical ordering of events, and although this usually makes reference to a linear timeline, they can also be organised by other logical criteria, like value or relevance to the story; (4) The events must be logically linked, which usually refers to causality links between events; and (5) they usually have demarcation signs which mark beginning and

ending of a story (Gergen and Gergen, 1988). These five elements provide structure, coherence and directionality to the narratives of the self.

Because narratives of the self are also born in the relational, they also must complete a function about the self within those relationships. Therefore, Gergen and Gergen (1988) suggest three basic types of narrative linearity: A *stable narrative* where the self is shown as unchanged (for better or for worse) after a series of events; a *progressive narrative* where the self is seen in a more positive light after a series of events; and a *regressive narrative*, where the self is seen in a more negative light. These three narratives, when combined in different ways, can lead to types of 'master narratives' like, comedy, romance or tragedy (Gergen and Gergen, 1988; Gergen, 2009; Gergen, 2015). In a study conducted by Gergen and Gergen (1987b, as cited in Gergen and Gergen, 1988) with 29 late adolescents (19 to 21 years), they asked the participants to chart their life stories by grading their level of well-being in time from the earliest memories until the present. Later on, the participants were asked to describe the events around periods in the timeline they had evaluated as the most positive or most negative periods. The authors found adolescents expressed their life stories using a romantic narrative line, meaning they see their lives as mostly happy in their early years, regress into difficult moments as they enter adolescence, and progress into feeling hopeful about the future and things starting to look well for them (Gergen and Gergen, 1987b, as cited in Gergen and Gergen, 1988).

In terms of what they described as positive and negative events, narratives were very diverse, relating positive events to experiences with friends, school, or hobbies, among others; while moving away, failing subjects at school, family problems or loss as negative ones. The authors concluded 'In effect, the crisis in the adolescent period does not appear to reflect any single objective factor in this period. Rather, participants seem to use this given narrative form and employ whatever "facts" they can to justify their selection' (Gergen and Gergen, 1988, p. 30). This conclusion could have probably been different if the participants had not been prompted from the beginning to give a negative or positive value to their own timeline. Although this might look into measurements of wellbeing, providing adolescents with more open instructions could have shown how they are also

capable of building meaning as they tell their own personal stories. It is this way of approaching narrative that I am more interested in, rather than one where value is already defined for them from the start.

Gergen and Gergen (2006) suggest narratives, which they also refer to as 'stories', can change relationships, either personal or professional (for example therapist-patient, mediator-people in conflict), for they can be transformed. Therefore, the people involved in telling and listening can be transformed as well. Within this context, the authors offer five reasons to explain narrative efficacy: '(...) there is something particularly effective about listening to others' narratives that crosses boundaries of meaning and brings people into a state of mutuality.' (Gergen and Gergen, 2006, p. 117): (1) Stories allow *receptivity* from the listener, they grant a base for sociability. (2) Stories are part of all cultures, we grow listening to them and get a sense of *familiarity* on their structures and properties. Therefore, they are easy to follow and understand. (3) Together with a familiar structure, stories allow *trust* and credibility to be built, especially if the storyteller positions him or herself as a witness or active participant in the story. Gergen and Gergen (2006) define this as *Witness trust.* (4) The audience becomes a witness to the story told as they make their own representations of what the narrator must have felt and experienced. The authors define this as *empathic witnessing* which not only aids empathic listening, but also intimacy between the narrator and its audience. Finally, (5) Gergen and Gergen (2006) suggest narratives allow *recreation of the self*. As we become empathetic listeners of others' stories, we reflect on the protagonist's actions and feelings, we remind ourselves of moments where we have gone through similar situations, and in doing so, we recreate the storyteller and ourselves in a different way: '(...) most importantly, the emerging self may resemble the person who is otherwise an antagonist. "I now recall when I have felt like he did…"' (Gergen and Gergen, 2006, p. 118).

These elements that define the efficacy of a narrative are linked to emotion, trust and empathy. Burkitt (1997), based on earlier works from Gergen, particularly focused on *emotions* as complexes that are performed and constructed in the social, rather than being inner states of a person. Burkitt (1997) argued emotions only arise within

relationships, and together with a particular way of being performed and the socio-cultural context in which they are embedded, emotions have a communicative purpose within those relationships (p. 37). He states emotions are complex, built in cultural discourse as well as in performance, and yet, still linked to biological responses, and cannot be reduced to just one of them. Burkitt (1997) concludes emotion is learnt from early on in life within particular cultural contexts, that allow people to communicate emotions within their own cultural groups as they grow up. So, emotion in relationships becomes part of the relational self as it follows Gergen's propositions (2009): emotions are also built in relationships, serve a relational function, are performed within certain cultural contexts, and build ways of relating to others depending on other's response to one's performed emotions.

Flanagan (2003) has spoken of *trust* as relationally constructed. As Erikson (1968) observed, trust starts from early years in the relationship with carers, and establishes the grounds for developing a sense of security. The author defines trust as '(...) the belief that others are fair, that they will not take advantage of us, although they could' (Flanagan, 2003, p. 165-166), and this belief is built in the relationship with other people or institutions. He continues to say '(...) trust is premised on freedom. Because the behavior of others is not under our control, trust is an act of faith, never fully certain.' (p. 166). As part of a wider research about beliefs on social justice, Flanagan, Gill and Gallay (2005) surveyed 1031 adolescents (12 to 18 years) about their participation in community or school-based organisations and the relationship with adolescent's views of others in their communities. Through one-way ANOVA they found that adolescents that are usually involved in these activities are more likely to perceive benevolence in others and are more willing to welcome newcomers and help to solve community problems (Flanagan, Gill and Gallay, 2005). Flanagan (2003) reflects these youth groups are more democratic, different from other spaces like schools that tend to be more rigid and vertical in power relationships, therefore in equal relationships, trust can be easily built and maintaining the group and its goals become more important than individual interests. Reflecting on Gergen and Gergen's (2006) element on narrative efficacy, and taking into account Flanagan, Gill and Gallay (2005) results, it can be concluded adolescents belonging to

community groups allows transformation of the self, makes them receptive to others' needs and stories, and of course, help build trust in the relationship with others.

Related to trust, Erikson (1968) defines eight psychoanalytical stages for identity development starting from childhood and continuing into adulthood, all of which must be solved in time to establish a coherent sense of self. The first stage in early infancy is establishing trust with his or her carers and the child's surroundings. This trust is usually built not in the mother's providing of food or love demonstrations, but in the quality of the relationship they establish (Erikson, 1968). Identity at this early stage 'arises out of the encounter of maternal person and small infant, an encounter which is one of mutual trustworthiness and mutual recognition.' (Erikson, 1968, p. 105). In this sense, Flanagan (2003) concludes from his research that although trust in friendships and peers are important for self-development, is the trust developed with the carers that define a way in which we relate to the world and others.

Erikson's concepts of trust and mistrust, also aligned with Bowlby's concept of secure and insecure attachment in the early years (Pittman *et al*., 2011; Kerpelman and Pittmain, 2018). Bowlby's attachment theory developed parallel to Erikson's work focusing on early childhood and on the primary role of the caregiver (mainly the mother) in being able to provide a secure base for the child to explore relationships within and outside his or her immediate family circle (Holmes, 1993; Pittman *et al.*, 2011). Kerpelman and Pittman (2018) argued Erikson's developmental theory aligned and was complemented by Bowlby's. These authors pointed that together, they provided a stronger understanding of identity formation: "Blending Erikson's model with attachment can enrich the scholarly understanding of the processes of identity formation in adolescence and beyond, as well as the ways in which relational dynamics may influence identity change" (Kerpelman and Pittman, 2018, p. 307).

Bowlby's theory, together with Ainsworth's *et al.* (1978/2015) longitudinal study on mother-child attachment (See Ainsworth *et al.* (1978/2015) *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation*), have been key to explain secure and

insecure attachment in the early years. However, the narrow focus and emphasis on the mother as the main caregiver (maternal care), has been criticised in the literature. Schaffer and Emerson (1964), for example, led a longitudinal study in Glasgow with 60 toddlers until the age of 18 months to establish when these babies started to show signs of separation anxiety. Their study led to conclude the mother was not necessarily the carer the toddler would be the more attached to, but actually to the carer that better responded to their needs. Shaffer and Emerson (1964) also concluded that by the age of 10 months, the babies already show attachment to several other figures different from the mother, such as siblings, father and extended family, which brought into question the concept of maternal care and maternal deprivation discussed in Ainsworth's studies (1978/2015).

Later on, Rutter (1972; 1979) examined Bowlby's maternal deprivation arguments. Although the evidence in Rutter's study supported deprivation as an important factor that affects children's psychological development, he found it is not necessarily linked to the mother but to a combination of different psychological mechanisms that may or may not include the figure of the mother. Rutter (1979) reported not all children are damaged by deprivation. Moreover, he suggested the importance of looking beyond the early years and consider other key experiences throughout the lifespan. More recently, Neckoway, Brownlee and Castellan (2007) questioned the relevance of Bowlby's theory to aboriginal parents who may have different social and cultural backgrounds when it comes to parenting, including shared responsibility of the toddler, which does not necessarily rely solely on the dyad mother-child. Hence, although attachment in the early years is important for healthy adolescent and adult development: (1) the mother may not be the main figure of attachment, nor is she solely responsible for positive or negative identity development; (2) attachment figures and positive identity development might look different across cultures; and (3) there continues to be a difference between Erikson and Bowlby: while Bowlby focuses on a general evolutionary theory in relation to secure attachment (trust), Erikson places trust as culturally and historically situated (Pittman *et al.*, 2011), which better aligns with my research.

Finally, Broome (2009) has explored what he defined as *relational empathy* in his research on peace-building in post-conflict Cyprus. Stepping away from more traditional definitions of empathy, Broome (2009) states empathy is relational and in its creation, it allows co-creation of meaning in a situation. He used a methodology named interactive design process where, like participatory action research, the participants are the ones in charge of developing an understanding of an issue they face, establish ideals about the future in relation to the issue, and produce a plan of action (Broome, 2009). With fifteen Turkish Cypriots and fifteen Greek Cypriots, Broome (2009) did a series of workshops over a period of nine months where the two groups worked first individually and then collectively to put in place programmes and ideas that could recreate their joint vision. He concludes there are five main principles that allow the construction of empathy: (1) the role of the mediator/facilitator in helping the group focus in the learning process rather than the achievement of one truth. (2) Bridging differences by negotiating or mediating points of difference, rather than only focusing on similarities between groups. (3) Providing space to talk about negative emotions without making it the primary focus of the encounters. (4) Focus on building an environment for joint action to take place rather than only individual work. And finally (5) promoting the construction of alternatives that fulfil both sides rather than alternatives that require one or both sides to 'give in' (Broome, 2009) make the joint vision that took each of these groups through each of the stages of the interactive design process. This requires participants to be able not only to build narratives about their story but also to be open to listening to a different side to their story, and therefore find ways of recreating their relationship, the fifth element of narrative efficacy proposed by Gergen and Gergen (2006).

Research that uses narratives from a constructionist perspective is very varied in disciplines, methodologies and participants. Some disciplines where narratives have been commonly used are psychotherapy, education, medicine, organizational transformation, and conflict resolution, just to name a few (Gergen and Gergen, 2006; Gergen, 2009; 2015). Methodologies range from purely theoretical exploration of concepts, quantitative approaches, and purely qualitative research mainly through coding of narratives in interviews. Just in Latin America, particularly Colombia, a social constructionist view on

self and narrative has been used to explore identity with different populations and in different disciplines. For example, Estrada, Ibarra and Sarmiento (2003) developed ethnographic research involving 47 women in four Colombian municipalities that had been highly affected by armed conflict. Through a grounded theory approach they coded women's testimonies to generate theory to better understand Colombian cultural patterns that facilitate or reproduce violent actions and interactions in everyday contexts where armed conflict has been an everyday factor (Estrada, Ibarra and Sarmiento, 2003, p.149). Verona Madrid (2007) uses Gergen's relational being theory and self in narrative theory to justify the implementation of Cooperrider's (2003, as cited in Verona Madrid, 2007) appreciative inquiry in organisational contexts as a way to help organisations discover, create and implement new narratives in favour of changing environments. Alvez Rizzo *et al.* (2013) develop a theoretical paper on loss, based on Gergen's notion of the relational self. The authors state loss is an important element of identity re-configuration and propose two options for individuals to reconfigure their identity as a result of a personal loss: (1) *Regressive Identity Orientation*, where the person bases his or her identity in the loss and emptiness and cannot find ways to restructure his or her relational world, usually turning relational narratives into tragedy (*regressive narratives* in Gergen and Gergen, 1988). (2) *Progressive Identity Orientation*, where individuals assume a resilient attitude, reconfiguring themselves in the light of what happened and building new positive meanings in the narratives they construct with others (*progressive narratives* in Gergen and Gergen, 1988) (Alvez Rizzo *et al.*, 2013).

The variety in themes, disciplines and methods exposes a pitfall of Gergen and Gergen's (1988; 2006) approach to self and narrative, as well as to Gergen's (2009) relational being theory: '(...)while rich implications for action, the discursive orientation is weak in terms of specific recommendations. One may appreciate that narratives play a significant function within relations, but this appreciation carries no specifiable marching orders for action.' (Gergen and Gergen, 2006, p. 119). Therefore, my study complements this theoretical approach through a more practical view on narratives and self, as the one proposed by McAdams (1985) explained above.

However, although Gergen's (2015) *relational being* theory does not provide particular information on adolescent's identity formation (as we are potentials that result from each potential relationship we participate in), he does provide three dimensions that are continuously in play: the self in construction, the other in the relationship, and the interaction that falls between them. Because my research is particularly focused on adolescent identity, I will now provide a short overview of what is known about adolescent's development that can give light to the adolescent self in construction in the relationships that surround him.

2.5. Adolescents' Identity Formation

Adolescents are the material evidence identity is neither static nor simple. Gergen (2009) does not offer tangible connections between the relational self and adolescence in particular. Therefore, to be able to speak about adolescent identity formation, it is necessary to draw back on Erikson's (1968) work and that of other developmental and cognitive psychologists who have made adolescence their field of study. In order to do this, I will focus on the two main dimensions that are necessary for the relational self to emerge in interaction according to Gergen (2009): the self (adolescent), and the other (social spheres around him or her). In section 2.5.1. I will do a short overview of the concept of adolescence, and will explore dimensions of the self that adolescents solve in interaction with others. In section 2.5.2. I will explore who those 'others' are and the social role they play in identity formation. Finally, in section 2.5.3. I will argue how previous research on narrative identity and adolescence have opened the door to look at ways of exploring adolescence from a relational point of view while fostering positive identity formation.

2.5.1. Adolescence

Adolescence today is usually defined as a developmental stage between childhood and adulthood, but this definition can be simplistic (Erikson, 1968; Cobb, 2010). Adolescence is already a culturally and socially constructed concept, which means it has changed over time in the narratives that have been constructed around it, particularly since the last

century (Kroger, 2007; Nichols, 2009). At the beginning of the twentieth century, young people were expected to get married and/or enter the workforce before they were 16 years old (Nichols, 2009). Changes in the economy, wars and social movements in the protection of children and youth, demanded a younger population to leave the workforce and stay in school with same-aged peers, prolonging the entrance into adulthood (Nichols, 2009; McAdams, 2011). This trend has remained since then and now, adolescence encompasses young people between 10 and 18 years of age, with some psychologists even prolonging it into the mid-twenties (Kroger, 2007; Nichols, 2009). Kroger (2007), for example, defines three different stages within adolescence: early (11-14 years), mid (15 to 17 years) and late adolescence (18 to 22 years), each with particular characteristics and challenges in their identity formation. For this study, I am particularly interested in mid-adolescents' identity formation.

The study of adolescence is multidisciplinary, where disciplines like biology, cognitive and educational psychology, and sociology, among others, have contributed to its understanding (Nichols, 2009). Within Psychology, psychoanalyst and developmental psychologist Erik Erikson (1968) defined eight stages for identity development: (1) Trust versus Mistrust, (2) Autonomy versus Shame, (3) Initiative versus Guilt, (4) Industry versus Inferiority, (5) Identity versus Identity Confusion, (6) Intimacy versus Isolation, (7) Generativity versus Stagnation, and (8) Integrity versus Despair (p. 94). It is the fifth stage, Identity versus Identity Confusion, that belongs particularly to the adolescent years. For Erikson (1968), adolescence is the stage between childhood and adulthood, a transition which requires young people to integrate a plethora of changes, both physical and social. It is also a critical moment for adolescents to finish solving and integrating all previous four stages and start thinking about the kind of person they want to be in the future (Erikson, 1968; McLean, 2010). Therefore, by 'connecting past events to the current understanding of oneself' (McLean and Mansfield, 2010, p. 437), and thinking of the future, adolescents gain a sense of continuity of the self and hence, the ability to start constructing their narrative identity (Erikson, 1968; McLean, 2010; McLean and Mansfield, 2010; McAdams, 2011).

Kroger (2007) refers to mid-adolescence as the period between 15 and 17 years of age. She points out that this is a stage when the person has become more comfortable with the biological changes of puberty and cognitively moves towards more complex and critical thinking skills. Socially, negotiating relationships and rules within the family become important, and there is a more serious focus on friendship-love relationships outside of the family group (Cobb, 2010). Mid-adolescents begin to consider future possible roles and vocations and start showing more interest in becoming part of a broader community (Kroger, 2007).

Erikson's (1968) theory provides a general overview of these multiple challenges while integrating previous stages to their sense of self, and negotiations the adolescent is faced with. (1) Regarding the first stage of trust building in oneself and in others, adolescents now start looking for ideals and adult figures they can believe in, rely on, and therefore prove themselves trustworthy to (Erikson, 1968, p. 129). (2) From the second stage, Autonomy versus Shame, adolescents begin exploring freedom of choice and get involved in activities or groups that spark their individual interests while avoiding activities or spaces that can make them feel exposed, ridiculed, or negate opportunities for choice (Erikson, 1968). (3) In relation to the third stage, Initiative versus Guilt, adolescents are now challenged by earlier views during the play age about what and who they could become, and face limitations placed upon them by elders. Adolescents therefore look for approval in their peers, who support those future visions of who they want to become, and distance themselves from elders who place limitations (Erikson, 1968). Finally, regarding (4) the stage of Industry versus Inferiority, adolescents are faced with the challenge of pursuing occupations that make them feel fulfilled, rather than occupations that can only bring them success or status but with no real sense of satisfaction (Erikson, 1968). The challenges of identity formation are many. Solving them positively, leads them into a positive sense of identity, while the opposite can result in negative identity formation, evidenced in challenging, dangerous and sometimes antisocial behaviours (Kroger, 2007). This period of exploration of the self is defined by Erikson (1968) as *moratorium*: 'Psychosocial moratorium to Erikson meant a delay of adult commitments by youth as well as a period of permissiveness by a society to allow young people the

exploration time necessary to make deeper and more meaningful psychosocial commitments.' (Kroger, 2007, p. 12).

Cobb (2010) states that a positive sense of identity is linked to self-awareness:

> Adolescents find themselves looking inward and outward all at once, one eye on the inner self and another on those around them. They are well aware others may be judging them in terms of cultural images they share, but also in terms of how well the others have achieved precisely what they themselves are attempting to do. (Cobb, 2010, p. 141)

This means that despite the moratorium they are in, while trying to understand who they are and what they want to commit to, positive identity formation requires a constant awareness of those explorations to define the present self. It is also equally important that they have spaces to express and, in a way, perform who they are and who they want to become. However, depending on limitations placed by the social environments they belong to, feelings of mistrust, self-doubt, and shame can emerge and turn into negative expressions of identity as they move into risky behaviours (Cobb, 2010). In the previous sections, research on positive identity formation has been reported. Factors like optimism about the future, resilience, agency, empathy, and a good support system, are important to validate and give meaning to the present self, and open opportunities for future possibilities of the self (McLean, 2005; McAdams, 2006; McAdams, 2011; Breen and McLean, 2013; McLean, 2017; Cowan *et al.*, 2019). They provide adolescents the opportunity to create meaning from past experiences, and express coherent narratives alongside that meaning.

2.5.2. The adolescent, the others and their role in identity formation

The previous challenges outlined that the adolescent faces during this identity formation stage, are in close relationship to the social relations they establish. Kroger (2007) describes four main primary social contexts: family, friends, school and community. Family, particularly relationships with parents or primary carers, are particularly important from the first stages of identity development during childhood (Kroger, 2007). Even though adolescents start valuing friendships more than before, parents that foster

autonomous exploration of interests, and show genuine interest to connect and listen, continue to be more important to identity formation than peers (Kroger, 2007). In this respect, Cobb (2010) based on previous research of parental relationships and autonomy, says:

> The growth of autonomy, like attachment, reflects a healthy balance between growing independence and continued closeness with parents. To the extent this balance is maintained, adolescents are able to assume increasing responsibility for their own individuality without fearing that doing so will distance them from their parents. (Cobb, 2010, p .145)

While family relationships foster or hinder autonomy for them to explore future possibilities of being, friendships and peer relationships become a social space to experiment different possibilities of being (Kroger, 2007). Usually, closer friends share similar values and interests, and therefore is a social space that provides validation for narratives of self around past or present events, as well as future possibilities of being (McLean, 2005; McLean and Jennings, 2012; McAdams, 1985; 2001; 2011).

School is the place where adolescents spend most of their time during the week. This means, school becomes one of the main social laboratories where adolescents can explore their own identity (Kroger, 2007). Here, they not only explore new ideas and relationships, but also explore vocational pathways they can move to in the future (Kroger, 2007). Kroger (2007) made a call for more research on the impact of schools in socioemotional development, which during the Twentieth Century was mostly focused on intellectual and academic outcomes (p. 80). Dryer (1994 as cited in Kroger, 2007) suggested schools can better facilitate identity formation through promoting opportunities for responsible choice, social interaction across age groups, and creating environments for positive feedback, as well as spaces for role-playing. Flanagan (2003) raises concerns around vertical and rigid school structures, which instead of promoting trust, exploration and social interests, they rather hinder them, and therefore the importance of schools offering clubs, community groups and extracurricular opportunities.

Being adolescence a socially constructed term, Gergen, Lightfoot and Sydow (2004) provide a word of caution regarding research that focuses on looking at adolescence as problematic. Zeldin and Price (1995) had already noticed at the end of last century, the focus of social policy aimed at preventing and fixing certain behaviours in adolescence. However, as much as policy had focused on defining what behaviours adolescents should avoid, not much had been said in terms of what they were expected to achieve (Zeldin and Price, 1995; Kroger, 2007). Therefore, criteria now associated with positive identity formation can bring light into programmes and interventions that could be carried out to foster it, rather than programmes only focused on preventing negative behaviours.

2.5.3. Narrative identity and adolescence in research

Research on adolescence that I have reported throughout this chapter have explored different identity formation aspects through a mix of quantitative (surveys, questionnaires, and use of statistical analyses) and qualitative research (interviews, conversations and testimonies, and use of grounded theory or coded thematic analyses). Among these aspects are features of adolescents' narratives about the self (McLean, 2015), identity formation through redemptive narratives (McAdams, 2011), gender differences regarding the content of those narratives (McLean and Breen, 2009; McLean, Breen and Fournier, 2010), how through autobiographical narratives adolescents construct meaning and continuity of the self and commit to certain ideals (Pasupathi and Weeks, 2010; McLean, Breen and Fournier, 2010), the role of listeners (mothers and friends) for positive identity formation (McLean and Mansfield, 2011; McLean and Jennings, 2012), and the links between narrative identity (through turning point narratives), personality traits and adolescent well-being (Reese *et al.*, 2017), among others. This research has been important to establish characteristics of narratives, themes in adolescence identity formation, role of others who the narratives are shared with, and in general, a broad idea on how continuity of self is achieved.

The concept of relational being (Gergen, 2009) and adolescent identity has been less explored in research, although the concept has become an ontological stance in social

sciences research, including disciplines like therapy and conflict resolution. The theoretical foundations of the relational being have provided identifiable aspects that, if put in practice, and together with previous research findings on narrative and adolescent positive identity formation, can bring light into what *relational being'* stands for particularly in adolescents. The methodology I designed, which will be explained and analysed in detail in chapter four, aims to provide an alternative way that not only aims to foster characteristics of positive identity formation, but also brings light into what are the dimensions of identity formation that emerge in adolescence from a relational ontological approach.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter has focused on establishing a theoretical framework on identity for my research. Different ontological approaches to identity have been discussed and I have argued in favour of a multidimensional and socially constructed view of identity. Within this view, I situated myself within a narrative, rather than discursive, approach to understanding identity, particularly focusing on two complementary approaches: McAdams's (1985) Narrative Identity Theory and Gergen and Gergen's (1988) Self through Narrative. I provided a short overview of adolescent identity formation. Finally, I concluded how research in the subject has provided elements to create a new approach to explore general adolescent identity formation from a relational perspective, whilst also fostering a positive outlook on this process. The next chapter argues in favour of using creative reading and writing practices as an alternative to research adolescent identity formation from a narrative perspective.

Chapter 3: Creative Writing Practices for Identity Exploration

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I provided a general background to the study of identity, focusing particularly on a social constructionist approach to studying it with adolescents, within a narrative approach to understanding identity. Research on identity in psychology has usually focused on aspects such as how a continuity of the self is achieved, the relationship between wellbeing and identity, gender and age differences, and how adolescents create or make meaning from past experiences (usually linked to continuity in identity formation). Quantitative methods like surveys and structured instruments to measure wellbeing have been commonly used, as well as qualitative methods like interviews and testimonies with participants in order to understand narrative content and meaning making.

Within this approach, my research aims to explore general identity formation processes with adolescents, rather than exploring specific themes like continuity, wellbeing or differences by age, gender or other particular identities (race, social class, or sexual orientation, among others). This chapter will focus on showing the relationship between creative practices like reading and writing and a narrative identity approach. In order to do this, I will first briefly explain the relationship between social constructionism and philosophical movements closely linked to literary theory, particularly, poststructuralism and postmodernism. Second, I will explain the links between creative writing and reading as literary tools to explore identity. Finally, I conclude how my study methodology (see Chapter 4) will seek to link constructionist views on narrative identity with creative reading and writing practices in an original way within the field.

3.2. Constructionism and the influence of postmodern and poststructuralist thought

Social constructionism arose from a mixture of disciplines, such as social psychology and sociology (see section 2.2.). There are two philosophical movements that also influenced social constructionist theory: poststructuralism and postmodernism (Burr, 2015; Culler,

2011). These two theories overlap and are hard to separate from each other (Agger, 1991; Burr, 2015). Agger (1991) makes a distinction between them, referring to poststructuralism as a theory of knowledge and language, and to postmodernism, as a 'theory of society, culture, and history' (p. 112). Poststructuralism is usually said to have emerged from the social sciences as a philosophical response to structuralist ideas that meaning is produced within the individual thanks to certain structures that operate unconsciously, such as language, societal structures and individual psyche (Culler, 2011). Instead, poststructuralist theory defies the notion that there is objective knowledge, arguing that these underlying structures, like language or society, are constantly changing and transforming (Culler, 2011; Burr, 2015). Jacques Derrida is usually linked to poststructuralist thought, particularly through *deconstruction*, a methodology he proposed for reading texts (Agger, 1991). Derrida challenges positivist assumptions about a 'real' world that is already defined, a world that has already established notions of what is good or bad; instead, he proposes, through deconstruction, to look at texts in the context that might give it its significance and value (Agger, 1991).

Postmodernism is a philosophical theory that has been usually linked to art, architecture, literature and cultural studies, rather than the social sciences (Burr, 2015, p. 12). It comes as a response to Enlightenment thought about the world being objectively observable and measurable through scientific evidence; the idea that the world has rules and structures that should be respected (Agger 1991; Burr, 2015). Within art and architecture, this meant that designs and paintings had to follow certain rules to be appreciated as 'good' or 'right' (Burr, 2015). Postmodernism, instead, rejects this sense of 'ultimate truths' and like poststructuralism, rejects underlying structures, making works of art, design and literature the same in status as other work done in the past (Burr, 2015).

> Postmodernism emphasises the co-existence of a multiplicity and variety of situation-dependent ways of life. (...). Postmodernism thus rejects the notion that social change is a matter of discovering and changing underlying structures of social life through the application of a grand theory or metanarrative. In fact, the word 'discover' presupposes an existing, stable reality that can be revealed by

> observation and analysis, an idea quite opposed to social constructionism. (Burr, 2015, p. 14).

These two philosophical approaches stand on the idea that 'reality' is subjective, dependent on the particular groups and contexts we are associated with. Truth is not what needs to be achieved, but is subjectively linked to our own circumstances. Poststructuralism and postmodernism, like social constructionism, both place language at the centre of knowledge and construction of the self, challenging the notion of an individual, objective, independent self (Burr, 2015). Language is seen as subject to question, temporary, contestable, and therefore with the possibility to be transformed, which has important implications for the way the self is understood: a being capable of social change and reconstruction (Agger, 1991; Culler, 2011; Burr, 2015)[2].

These two philosophical movements did not only influence social constructionism as a theory of knowledge, but were also central to the development of theories to study and understand literature (Culler, 2011). Identity has been studied and looked at within literary studies through different theoretical lenses depending on definitions of the self (either given or created), and whether the self should be conceived as individual or social (Culler, 2011). Similarly to how social constructionism emerged in response to modern views about the self, so did literary theory: 'Literature has always been concerned with questions about identity, and literary works sketch answers, implicitly or explicitly to these questions' (Culler, 2011, p. 111). Literary work, particularly narrative literature, has provided different answers to how the self is formed: do we make our own fate, or are we predestined? Are we who we are because of where and when we were born, or are we formed in our life experiences and who we interact with along the way? Culler (2011) suggests literary work can be divided among the different theoretical positions of the self:

> (...) opting for the given and the individual, treats the self, the 'I', as something inner and unique, something that is prior to the acts it performs, (...). The second, combining the given and the social, emphasizes that the self is determined by its origins and social attributes: you are male or female, white or black, (...). The third, combining the individual and the made, emphasizes the changing nature of

[2] Please refer to section 2.4.2. for the role of language in narrative identity and social constructionism.

> a self, which becomes what it is through its particular acts. Finally, the combination of the social and the made, stresses that I become what I am through the various subject positions I occupy, (...). (Culler, 2011, p. 109).

Micro-social constructionism aligns with the latter vision of a self that is created in the social, with language and interactions at the core of one's identity formation. Particularly focusing on McAdams's (1985) narrative identity, and Gergen and Gergen's (1988) self in narrative, these approaches align with literary studies, particularly ideas on narrative that became central during the 1960s (Culler, 2011):

> Literary and cultural theory have increasingly claimed cultural centrality for narrative. Stories, the argument goes, are the main way we make sense of things, whether in thinking of our lives as a progression leading somewhere or in telling ourselves what is happening in the world. (...) It follows not a scientific logic of cause and effect but the logic of a story, where to understand is to conceive of how one thing leads to another, how something might have come about. (Culler, 2011, p. 83)

McAdams (1985) and Gergen and Gergen (1988) also place narrative at the centre of identity formation, where the person makes active decisions on the events they will choose to narrate, as well as how to connect them to provide meaning to the events and for themselves as they tell it. Both theories step away from deterministic views and consider the use of language fundamental as the tool to build meaning to what is being narrated. In this context, written narratives, fictional or not, actively create meaning about the self through language. Identity formation through narrative can be seen as an active creative process, a creative expression where language, agency and meaning making are fundamental for identity formation.

In this context, Glăveanu and Tanggaard (2014) argue that identity is an act of creativity. We build ourselves in communication with others. A person cannot separate identity from creative processes:

> From this perspective, being a 'creator' involves identity work and identity itself is fundamentally a social category. The creative person therefore, far from existing as an isolated unit, is a *social actor* able to co-construct his or her own sense of creative value in communication with others (...). In the end, there is creativity in

> identity construction just as there is identity construction in the most mundane form of creative expression. Most importantly, identities conducive for creative performance are not just 'given' but built over time in interactions that are often marked by struggles and acts of resistance. (Glăveanu and Tanggaard, 2014, p. 13)

Identity formation, then, is an act of creativity in itself, and as such, several studies have used creative practices (reading, writing and photography among others) as tools to access and understand identity formation processes in different fields such as medicine (Dhurandhar, 2009), therapy (McNichol, 2016), arts (Kushner, 2009), and education (Woods, 2001; Lockney, 2012; Ryan, 2014; Cavendish, Vess and Li-Barber, 2016). Leach (2001) argues that creative outcomes are not possible if the culture and communities one is involved with are not understood or taken into consideration; as Mercer (2000 in Leach, 2001) states:

> Creativity exists not simply in the forging and exchange of new knowledge or innovative products such as poetry, oratorios, optic glasses or novels. It also exists in the collaborative process of blending and reconfiguring existing ideas, hypothesizing, working with others on common problems, from different standpoints, and communicating such 'inter-thinking'… in a way that eloquently speaks to others. (p. 179)

Hence creative practice in this study is assumed to be a social process, in no way attributed to 'genius' individuals, and accessible to all. The creative individual is fostered and nurtured in the interaction with the groups and communities that surround them; and therefore, they are 'able to co-construct his or her own sense of creative value in communication with others…' (Glăveanu and Tanggaard, 2014: p. 13). Within this context, creativity is closely linked to identity formation in a constructionist framework, where interaction and language are necessary to nurture self-development (Gergen, 2009; 2015). These next sections will explore reading and writing as creative practices for narrative construction –central to identity formation (McAdams, 1985) – and how they are relevant tools to explore identity formation in Colombian adolescents.

3.3. Narrative: Reading for pleasure and identity formation

McLean and Mansfield (2011) and McLean and Jennings (2012) focused on studying narrative identity in the interaction between adolescents and mothers and adolescents and friends. They focus on how the relational patterns work between them, focusing on scaffolding strategies used by listeners, and how the meaning-making of events changes depending on the audiences (see section 2.4.1.). The authors found that listeners have different strategies depending on the relationship they have with the adolescent. For example, mothers tend to be more scaffolding, while friends tend to be more reassuring of emotions and positive presentation aspects of the adolescent's narratives (McLean and Jennings, 2012). Gergen (2009) places us as 'listeners' when we read: we enter into a relationship with the narrative text and actively make meaning of it: it becomes less about getting exactly right what the writer had in mind, and more about finding meaning that makes sense to us to be able to share it in the contexts that we are part of (Gergen, 2009). Along these lines, Rosenblatt (1969) proposed a transactional theory of reading. She defined the relationship between the reader and the text as an active one, where both the text and the reader are transformed and re-interpreted in the experience:

> The transactional view of the reading process not only frees us from notions of the impact of distinct and fixed entities, but also underlies the essential importance of both elements, reader and text, in the dynamic reading transaction. A person becomes a *reader* by virtue of his activity in relationship to a text, which he organises as a set of verbal symbols. A physical text, a set of marks on a page, becomes the text of a poem or of a scientific formula by virtue of its relationship with the reader who thus interprets it. The transaction is perhaps similar to the electric circuit set up between a negative and positive pole, each of which is inert without the other. (Rosenblatt, 1969, p. 44)

Rosenblatt (1988) states meaning is created by the reader in the act of reading, and even before the actual reading begins: we already approach a text with ideas, predictions and previous experiences that help us shape, construct and revise meaning as we read. She defines two types of reading: 'efferent' and 'aesthetic'. Efferent reading is when the reader focuses on what they can take away from the text after they have read the text; and aesthetic reading happens when the reader focuses on the experience, 'what is being

lived through *during* the reading event' (Rosenblatt, 1988, p. 5). Rosenblatt (1988) does not present them as dichotomous, but rather as two extremes of a continuum of the reading experience. The different ways a reader connects with the text, both efferent and aesthetic, brings the reader into an active meaning making process. Burr (2015) states:

> In literary criticism, it also led to the idea that there could be no 'true' reading of a poem or novel, that each person's interpretation was as good as the next, and the meaning that the original author might have intended were therefore irrelevant. (Burr, 2015, p. 14)

For example, a novel read inside a classroom for a book report might have a different interpretation from the reader than if the novel is just being read for pleasure. Gergen (2009) states 'Reading is altogether social action' (p. 167): we engage actively with the text, rather than being passive receivers of information. Agger (1991) refers particularly to Derrida's deconstruction methodology which clearly defines the active role of the reader:

> For Derrida, deconstructive reading prises open inevitable, unavoidable gaps of meaning that readers fill with their own interpolative sense. In this way, reading is a strong activity, not merely passive reflection of an objective text with singular meaning. Readers help give writing its sense by filling in these gaps and conflicts of meaning, even becoming writers and hence challenging the hierarchy of writing over reading, cultural production over cultural reception. (Agger, 1991, p.113)

Along the same lines, Culler (2011) states literature has not only made identity a subject of study, but also has played an important role in constructing readers' identity: 'The value of literature has long been linked to the vicarious experiences it gives readers, enabling them to know how it feels to be in particular situations and thus to acquire dispositions to act and feel in certain ways.' (Culler, 2011, p. 113). Reading literature as social action, then, opens space for empathy by exposing the reader to situations and experiences from different points of view. This is similar to one of Broome's (2009) (see section 2.4.2.) principles for relational empathy to occur: the interaction between text and reader is not about the search or achievement of one truth, but instead, it mediates a learning process of the self. Therefore, reading literary fiction opens up possibilities of different worlds to

one's own (Walker, 1997; Nuttall, 2005; Perkins, 2015; Kidd, Ongis and Castano, 2016; Phelan, 2017). Moreover, it allows the reader to make connections to his or her own context and emotions, to learn about themselves and others, and to create or act upon new ideas they take from the text (Barry, 2009; Gruenfeld, 2010; Kidd, Ongis and Castano, 2016; Oatley, 2016). This means reading is, in fact, a tool for self-development and identity formation.

Gruenfeld (2010) compares literature comprehension to the creation of art, as it entails the ability of the reader to be able to see patterns, evaluate ideas, and therefore, to transform and construct new ones. On this matter, Oatley (2016) states that reading literary fiction provides the reader with information that allows him or her to acknowledge others' plans, beliefs or desires, as well as to compare them with their own; in addition, literary fiction encourages emotional investment in characters and events which are constantly compared with one's own life. In this context, fiction is considered dialogic, as it helps create a constant conversation between the reader and the text content, as noted by Freitas (2003):

> the freedom of fiction to enter into dialogue with the given context in such a way as to underscore the play of interpretation (that movement to-and-fro between the self and the other) is at once necessary and extremely dangerous. Fiction is never innocent. The imagination is never disembodied (p. 8).

Freitas (2003) acknowledges that reading marks a struggle between the reader and the text, and a struggle within the reader itself, which, as Glăveanu and Tanggaard (2014) state, is conducive to creativity as well as to identity formation as the reader solves the conflicts the text presents, imagines the possibilities and learns from him or herself in the process of doing so. Leavy (2012) explains fiction can be used as a tool for social research as it conveys an important array of emotions. When writers use social, cultural, and historical elements that are known to the reader, fiction also promotes reflexivity and personal reflection through resonance, identification and empathy (Iser, 1997 in Leavy 2012). Finally, fiction draws on master plots and characters across genres that reflect human behaviour, and therefore, promotes the 'emergence of critical consciousness' (Leavy, 2012, p. 254).

Research linking literature reading practices to narrative identity, has usually focused on how reading allows positive emotional development, empathy, Theory of Mind (or 'the ability to understand others' mental states' (Kidd, Ongis and Castano, 2016, p. 43)[3]), and the possibility of acknowledging a multiplicity of perspectives (Kushner, 2009; Goldie, 2012; Kidd, Ongis and Castano, 2016; Carroll, 2018; McAdams, 2019; Mathies, 2019), Kidd, Ongis and Castano (2016), in their quantitative study with 317 adults (18 to 82 years), found that reading literary fiction (as opposed to genre fiction)[4] enhances the reader's ability to recognize theirs and others' emotions and state of minds. Literary fiction was found to linguistically present more markers of reflective function - that is, literary fiction uses more language that refers to the feelings, desires and state of mind of characters - than genre fiction. As Mead claims, reflective function, or reflexivity, is considered crucial for identity formation, because the concept of self relies on the outcomes of social interaction and our ability to reflect upon them (Mead, 1934; Burr, 2015). Hence reading literary fiction should aid identity formation processes.

Similarly, Kushner (2009) suggests, based on his research on evaluating performing arts projects, that adolescents are already continuously reflecting on their lives and complex life experiences they face, and that their identity emerges from these reflective transformational processes. Although (Kushner (2009) focuses mainly on music as performance, he concludes his observations apply to all art forms:

> I was told by more than one senior musician (...) that music students are 'inarticulate' - that I wouldn't get much out of them. (...) This was lazy thinking (...). The reality is that music students and their tutors have perennial difficulties in establishing good communicative relationships. But how strange, for in fact, these students had an extraordinary capacity to reflect on self and life—something that came to underpin evaluation reports whose strength relied on the quality of student expression and analysis far more than on the expertise of the evaluator. This is a capacity that I have only been able to explain with the idea that their art required them so frequently to question self that they were well-

[3] Also see Premack and Woodruff (1978) for Theory of Mind in chimpanzees.

[4] Kidd, Ongis and Castano (2016) define literary fiction as fiction that has won literary prizes for presenting complex characters in diverse narratives, versus genre fiction which focuses on grand narratives (romance, crime, science fiction, etc.) with stereotypical characters.

> rehearsed and ready to relieve themselves of the burden of their internal soul-searching. All art, I would contend, is self-knowledge. (Kushner, 2009, p. 15)

Kushner's (2009) and Kidd, Ongis and Castano's (2016) findings, relate to Rosenblatt's (1988) concept of aesthetic reading, where the reader's previous experiences allow him or her to focus on particular features of the text and evoke a particular experience and meaning from it. She states '[T]his meaning evoked during the aesthetic transaction constitutes the "literary work", the poem, story or play. This evocation, and not the text, is the object of the reader's "response" and "interpretation" both during and after reading the event.' (Rosenblatt, 1988, p. 5). Hence, the aesthetic reading experience requires constant reflection.

Other research within cognitive and developmental psychology has also pointed out the relationship between reading fiction (literary or genre fiction) and Theory of Mind. Black and Barnes (2015) for example, found in their research with 60 undergraduates (M = 19.8 years), that those who read more fiction and have more past reading experience are better predictors of social cognitive abilities, and therefore perform better in the 'Reading the Mind in the Eyes' (REM) test. This test asks participants to recognise emotion in people's faces; two types of texts were used, fiction and non-fiction, but performance was better when fiction texts were read before the non-fiction one. Similarly, Tamir *et al.* (2016), found through MRI scans with young adults (19 to 26 years) that social cognition performance - or the ability to comprehend, process and apply information about others in social situations - and empathy, are stronger in those who read fiction, particularly vivid scenes involving and stimulating social content. In addition to this, their results proved to be consistent with previous findings that it is fiction reading that affects Theory of Mind and not the other way around (Tamir *et al*., 2016). Empathy has been linked to narrative identity formation as it opens different points of view (Burkitt, 1997; Broom, 2009; Gergen, 2009; Mathies, 2020).

Mathies (2020) developed a model to explore the relationship between fiction reading and narrative identity, once empathy with the text is already given. In her study, she argues there is a close relationship between fiction reading, the emotions it generates and

the person's experiential memories that influences the reader's narrative identity. This is similar to what Rosenblatt (1969) proposes in her transactional view of reading. Mathies (2020) looks at four aspects regarding the self when reading: the self (the reader), the other (a fictional character), the self-in-other (the reader empathising with the character), and the other-in-self (the character influencing the way the reader sees him or herself (p. 331). Given a continuous sense of self is achieved and maintained through narratives of our experiences with the world, Mathies (2020) explains that when conflicts arise in those experiences, those self-narratives are re-evaluated. She argues:

> [T]he necessary condition for refiguration of our self-narrative is that we encounter a conflict in our relations to the external world.
>
> I argue that a similar process occurs in a self-in-other-narrative. Here, the conflict does not arise from the real world, but from a fictional one. We (as the reader) adopt the fictional other's conflict as our own. In order to simulate the fictional other's feelings as richly as possible, we fill the gaps of the story with our own experiential memories. (Mathies, 2020, p. 334)

This only happens when an empathic relationship has been established with the fictional character, different from appreciation or sympathy, where the reader does not engage fully with what the character is going through (Mathies, 2020).

Bolivar and Gordo (2016) researched and designed pedagogical strategies to motivate literary reading inside the tenth grade classroom[5] in a Colombian public school. Their research was qualitative and included different stages: they first did a survey around reading habits in and outside the classroom, learning difficulties and reading comprehension. Through open and axial coding, the authors found a strong relationship between a lack of reading, learning difficulties and poor comprehension.

Second, Bolivar and Gordo (2016) developed a theoretical framework to design and support their reading intervention. They based their work on Rosenblatt's (1969) work, including transactional reading theory; the importance of shared reading experiences as

[5] Tenth grade corresponds to one of the two years of further education in Colombia. Tenth and eleventh grades are required to pursue a degree in higher education. Students in this particular year are usually between 15 and 17 years old.

the backbone of educating and forming school readers; and the role of the classroom teacher as a facilitator (to dream, create, discover through the text), as a mediator who helps the student find personal value in what they read, and as a '*provoker'* by facilitating creativity, argumentation, interpretation and production of texts (Bolivar and Gordo, 2016; Rosenblatt, 1969).

Third, they introduced children's and young adult literary texts to the classroom that had easy to follow plot structures and stories that were close to the students' lives. They read stories out loud and developed different didactic activities around the books. The authors also gave the students the chance to freely pick their own books, which they read and presented to one another through different playful options, including a reading festival done within the school which included 36 different stands created by the students to promote their favourite reads. Book choices by the students, invited authors, and student publications were also included during this third stage (Bolivar and Gordo, 2016).

Bolivar and Gordo (2016) found the project strengthened reading habits in the students involved, and increased reading for pleasure habits in the students. Policy within the school changed to continue to promote reading for pleasure across all years. In addition to this, their research proved effective not only to promote reading for pleasure inside the school, but also students engaged and improved reading habits outside the classroom. Lastly, Bolivar and Gordo (2016) found their proposal also enabled students to '*live through* literature' (p. 207), meaning that the transactional relationship with reading allowed the participants to evoke through the text memories, past experiences, likes, and losses. Reading for pleasure gave them tools to express themselves more freely and genuinely. Their findings supported Rosenblatt's theory (1969) of reading literature as being transformative of the reader: 'Literature is a way for the young reader to understand himself and learn about other people' (Bolivar and Gordo, 2016, p. 208).

In summary, reading fiction brings many advantages for the reader - improving Theory of Mind, promoting empathy, aiding creativity, promoting meaning-making, and self-transformation, among others - which in turn impact identity formation. Studies on the advantages of reading fiction and reading for pleasure, like those presented in this

section, have focused on three main areas: theory around fiction reading and its relationship to narrative identity (Rosenblatt, 1969; 1988; Gergen, 2009; Goldie, 2012; Phelan, 2017; Carroll, 2018; Mathies, 2020); secondly, language development and literacy (Walker, 1997; Nuttall, 2005; Perkins, 2015); thirdly, development of empathy, social and non-social skills through quantitative approaches in social psychology and neuropsychology (Black and Barnes, 2015; Kidd, Ongis and Castano, 2016; Oatley, 2016; Tamir *et al.*, 2016). The relationship between reading fiction and identity formation is not new in research. Even in studies in second language acquisition, reading for pleasure has been found to promote empathy, positive ways of relating to others, and reflexivity (Walker, 1997; Nuttall, 2005), all elements of positive identity formation. However, there still continues to be a gap in researching with mid-adolescents, and a strong focus either on theory or quantitative research.

Bolivar and Gordo's (2016) Colombia-based study sets a precedent for qualitative approaches that aim to bring theory of reading and identity into practice, and is, in some ways, similar to my own. However, my research aims to design and use qualitative approaches to study the role of creative writing as well as reading to explore identity formation in Colombian adolescence. My next section will explore the unique connections my own study makes between creative writing and identity formation.

3.4. Narrative: Creative Writing and identity formation

In the previous section, it was concluded that reading literary fiction allows connections to self, the text and the world, helps develop empathy, and fosters Theory of Mind and reflexivity in readers, all important elements of positive identity formation. But what about writing it? Gergen (2015) states '[i]f language is generated in relationships, then so is everything we can write. Or one might say that writing is an exercise in borrowing from, integrating, and playing with past conversations' (Gergen, 2015, p. 154). In this sense, writing is a way of portraying relationships as well as a way of creating multiple ones (for example writer-reader, writer-characters). In Gergen's (2015) socio-constructionist view of self and language, he argues in favour of writing practices that are less standardised and

more collaborative, particularly taking into consideration different talents and interests that allow spaces to learn about each other as well:

> As many scholars realize, what is considered excellence in academic writing doesn't reach anyone but other academics. (...) Further, it is argued, the standard style prepares one for a subservient role in society, that is, to report clearly, economically and instrumentally to one's superiors. This is not the style of an inspiring leader or the agent of social change, but a writer of reports.
>
> In the light of such issues, many teachers and scholars explore new practices of writing. For example, younger students may be encouraged to write about themselves in the ways they know best. These autobiographical offerings help students to recognize that the forms of expression in their own traditions are also useful, and need not be obliterated by academically "proper" writing. (Gergen, 2015, p. 155)

Writing can therefore encourage new ways of relating and new ways of seeing oneself and others. De Beaugrande (1987 in Sorókina, 2015), however, makes a claim in favour of both standardised and more creative texts. He argues that writing of any text influences and improves thought, since its process provides opportunities for reflection, planning, rethinking, shaping and experimenting with ideas. De Beaugrande (1987) defines creativity not as a sudden strike of inspiration, but a gradual process of registering, evaluating and revising one's own thoughts (p. 29), all related to reflexivity. Hence writing, academic or literary, becomes an act of self-knowledge.

Whitney (2017) highlights the importance of bringing *authentic* writing to the classroom. She defines authenticity as '(...) not only doing things that are real, and not only seeing what is real in another person or situation, but also *revealing* what's real about yourself and what you are doing.' (Whitney, 2017, pp. 16-17). Therefore, in order to achieve authenticity in the writing classroom, she makes a call for committing to authentic genre, process, audience, and authentic teachers and students. (1) In terms of authentic genre, Whitney (2017) says writing tasks need to be real as well. She mentions book reports, summaries and short essays, among others, as set texts that are not commonly used in everyday life by students, and therefore not relevant for the writing classroom. Her position stands between Gergen's (2015) and Beaugrande (1987), as she suggests that at

least some texts should be taught, as long as they are relevant for the learners and their everyday life. (2) Regarding authentic process, Whitney (2017) outlines different strategies where the teacher can model his or her own way of approaching writing, provide examples of scribbling or sharing one's written work with them to show them writing is subject to change and hard to get perfect on the first try. (3) By authentic audiences, it means providing the students the real possibility of being heard, rather than just staging a 'pretend audience' for a book review that ultimately, will only be the teacher. Lastly Whitney (2017) refers to (4) authentic teachers and students by saying it is important for the writing teacher to show him or herself to the students in the same ways as we are expecting our students to show themselves through their work. Sharing our writing, being vulnerable and open with them, or taking risks. She finishes her article by saying:

> (...) but more importantly it means letting them know what you are like when you write. Excited. Nervous. Scared. Self-critical. Daydreamy. And when you encounter a student in struggle, you respond with a "me too." (...)
>
> I want the life in my classroom to be lived. I want us to be a group of real people doing real work. I pray that nothing we do in my classroom is "as good as it's going to get." Instead I want what we do with students to be just a beginning. To be provocation toward full engagement with themselves and their world. (Whitney, 2017, p. 20-21)

Saavedra Rey (2017) argues creative writing promotes *bildung* - a German pedagogical concept that refers to the personal journey to 'become what one is' and understand the world through self-observation and reflection. He states the creative writing exercise allows the writer to configure different ways of being through fiction. Saavedra Rey (2017) argues that the teaching of creative writing has been neglected in the Colombian context, an alarming fact given creative writing teaching educates not only the mind, but also the whole person. Creative writing allows us to look at myriad possibilities of becoming through language (Saavedra Rey, 2017). Similar to Gergen, he rejects the writing classroom as a space to mould students into being good essayists or literary critics, as it truncates the creative mind, and therefore the chance of exploring the self. Saavedra Rey (2017) concludes there are four reasons to include creative writing in any curriculum:

> Firstly, [creative writing] challenges the traditional education system through a non-conventional use of language and formal, textual and stylistic innovations that configure a possible divergent world, and explore the existence of human beings. (...) Secondly, (...) it allows us to take responsibility for our own existence, like a work of art in the making that transcends the present reality of a person. Without a doubt, this relates to the development of «fiction» since it assumes the creation of the unknown, of possible worlds. (...) The third aspect is related to the formative aspect of fiction (...). [Fiction], «(...) as crazy as it might seem, has its roots in human experience. It is nurtured by it and nurtures it back» (Vargas Llosa, 2002), p.21) (...). Fourth, (...) language constitutes human reality. (Saavedra Rey, 2017, pp. 205-206)

Lockney (2012) compares the act of writing creatively to the performance and creation of other forms of art, like music, or painting, and therefore, provides a role for the imagination and the creation of new ways to see others and ourselves: 'it engenders a positive feeling, it has a tangible output (whether or not it finds an audience), it allows us to express ourselves in ways we are not always able to do in many other walks of daily life, and sometimes to understand things in a way we could not do in more everyday contexts' (p. 43). Hence, writing provides the opportunities to explore, appreciate and provide new perspectives on what is already known, including the self (Ray, 2001 in Cavendish et al., 2016; Lockney, 2012).

Some approaches to creative writing have been used to study identity, such as imaginative (Dhurandhar, 2009), therapeutic (McNichol, 2016) and reflexive writing (Kushner, 2009; Ryan, 2014). However, each of these approaches poses questions in terms of what my research intends. The first approach looks into using different points of view in the narratives to allow the person to place themselves in different roles which would be hard to understand if not written from that perspective. Although doing this does allow the writer to consider another's emotions and point of view, it is important to point out that the writer might not realize their own beliefs and emotions are still permeating what they write and so a genuine connection with the 'other' might not be achieved. (Dhurandhar, 2009) Therapeutic writing is personal, usually done in isolation, written in the first person (McNichol, 2016), and values the exploration of emotions and thoughts as an instrument for personal understanding and development. Reflexive writing, differently, aims for the

writer to evaluate possible courses of action, evaluate the contexts for and in which the text will be written (political, social, historical, etc.) and its purpose, and make decisions to move forward (Ryan, 2014). Nonetheless, although this approach to writing and arts involves life and identity issues, it is still based on non-fiction writing. Taking all the previous research into consideration, there is the need for exploring more writing techniques that include creative elements and are distant from therapeutic writing approaches that are not really of concern to this study.

Dhurandhar (2009) explored empathy through writing to impact medical school student identities as medical practitioners through a five-week course of two-hour seminar sessions. He found medical students who had done the seminars reported more awareness in their role towards the patient's needs, as well as strengthening the relationship with patients. Lassig (2013), who states that creativity in adolescents has been neglected in research, studied through a grounded theory how adolescents structure their creative thinking and what strategies they use. However, he did not use creative writing practices as a way to understand these processes. Ritchie et al (2013) focused on reading disabilities in adolescents, and conducted quantitative research to establish if deficiencies in reading skills were compensated for by more creativity in other areas, but neither writing nor the identities of these adolescents with reading disabilities was explored.

However, studies like Cavendish, Vess and Li-Barber (2016), do use creative writing to explore children's identity. They discussed creative writing as being strongly linked to the development of academic, social and psychological domains. The authors developed an after school programme for children (3rd, 4th and 5th graders[6]) combining photography and creative writing as a way to explore the children's identities as writers. They used a mixed methodology of quantitative and qualitative approaches by using a scale to assess beliefs on writing abilities before and after the program, and including four open-ended questions about the children's perceptions about their published pieces.

[6] This study corresponds to US education system. Pupils in these grades, third, fourth and fifth, are usually between 8 and 11 years old.

Cavendish, Vess and Li-Barber (2016) developed a writing program of four sessions focused on poetry that included talks from authors, introduction to bio-poems and photography, poetry and other readings as models for writing, photography taking and a process approach to writing to develop a piece for publication. Their findings did not point to any differences regarding writing skills of the children after the intervention, however, the qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions unveiled three main themes: (1) The writing program built and celebrated children's identities as the program enabled them to bring personal experiences about their lives outside school. Children chose pieces that showed their own worlds and passions and felt free to explore their own interests. (2) Incorporating other media, in this case photography, allowed the children to gain confidence and own their work. Children spoke confidently about their emotions and objects they photographed which they considered to be extraordinary. (3) The authors found children did not refer too much to the writing strategies learnt as much as they did to the social support they found in their peers and facilitators throughout the sessions. Elements like placing relationships at the centre of a writing experience, and the freedom to bring their lives into the writing classroom through performative arts (like writing and photography), open new pathways to understanding narrative identity formation by using different means to interviews.

Chandler (1999) developed a rationale for a writing program *Writing for Resilience to Increase Self-Esteem* (WRITE), to increase self-esteem and self-efficacy in adolescents. She worked with 11 low-income, at-risk adolescents in 11th grade[7] for two weeks during their English class time. Chandler developed creative writing exercises developed by Sneider (1993 cited in Chandler, 1999) to prompt free writing from the participants (such as "If I woke up tomorrow and I was the opposite sex…", responding to a collection of objects, or responding to poem lines like "My soul is like a well of deep water..." (p. 74)). The program aimed to explore creative writing from a positive point of view, rather than writing about problems, and students were encouraged to share their pieces with each other and positively comment on likes and memorable fragments. At the end, they were

[7] This study corresponds to US education system. Students in eleventh grade are usually between 16 and 17 years old.

asked to write freely for one minute on the question What is this experience like for you? Chandler (1999) classified the written work in three main categories: memories (pieces that recall happy simpler times of the past), affect (writings that portrayed feelings, both negative and positive), and creative ideas (poems and short stories). Their evaluations are coded into self-efficacy and self-esteem categories, which suggested this kind of interventions can improve both.

Studies like Cavendish, Vess and Li-Barber (2016) and Chandler's (1999) show the positive impact creative writing can have in adolescent development. Chandler's (1999) research focused on cognitive developmental aspects of adolescents while analysing both content and responses to the program she created. Cavendish, Vess and Li-Barber (2016) worked with children, rather than adolescents, and did not analyse the creative written pieces of the students, but attempted a qualitative analysis of the participant's perceptions on these kinds of interventions. Neither study combined reading practices with creative writing.

It is important to develop more qualitative studies that focus not only on interviews and personal narrative experiences, but also on studies that include creative reading and writing practices together. There is a need to explore the participants' creative writing as data and the information it can provide for identity formation. Creative reading and writing theory is strongly connected to socio-constructionist ideas, both macro- (creative writing to explore particular set of identities like gender, health or low income) and micro- (creative reading and writing as transactional). Yet, creative writing programmes that last more than a month, that are built in socio-constructionist theory, rather than cognitive theory, and combine creative reading and writing practices, still need to be developed.

In order to answer the research questions my study is set to answer, I aimed to create a methodology, informed by research, that:

- focused on qualitative approaches to research adolescent's identity formation.
- combined creative reading and writing practices.
- explored creative writing as data that could enable deeper understanding of identity formation processes in adolescents.

- provided participants with control over the production process.

3.5. Conclusion

This chapter has focused on arguing in favour of narrative creative practices such as reading and narrative, to explore adolescents' identity formation. The connections between philosophical movement, literary theory and social constructionism were explored. Reading was defined as a transactional, relational process that allows the reader to explore different possibilities of self. Reading literary fiction in particular fosters positive identity development through empathy, reflection, Theory of Mind and meaning making. Then, creative writing was linked to Gergen's (2009) socio-constructionist theory of relational being. A series of studies were presented to show what has been done in the field of creative reading and writing as ways to foster positive identity formation. Finally, I identified a gap in research which I have been able to fill by exploring how the creative reading and writing program output can provide insights on adolescents' identity formation. The next chapter will present the methodological process of designing such intervention and how it was carried out.

Chapter 4. Methods and Methodology

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter argued in favour of creative reading and writing as narrative tools to explore adolescents' identity formation and identified a gap where few have focused on creative writing outputs to explore identity. My research aims to answer the following three research questions:

1. How does a short term creative writing programme within a school context help explore adolescents' identity formation?
2. How is this creative writing programme perceived by the participants?
3. What aspects of adolescents' identity formation are portrayed through their creative writing?

In order to do this, I created a methodology based on my constructionist theoretical framework. This chapter aims to give a detailed account of such methodology and research design, the methods for data production, and the data analysis approaches which I used in this study used to address the above questions. With this in mind, the chapter will be divided into three sections. The first section provides an explanation of the research design, where a case is made in favour of a mixed qualitative methods approach to achieve the necessary depth in the data production process. The second section delivers a description of the data production process and field work experience, providing an explanation of how the design was put in place. It begins by explaining how the research design translated into instruments for data production, and continues to outline the setting, participants and ethical considerations that were put in place for a successful field work experience. The section ends by providing a detailed account of the data production process. The third and final section explains the approach used for data analysis clarifying how the data for analysis was chosen. I then continue to highlight the analysis approaches used for this study, which are consistent with the epistemological and ontological views in which this study is immersed.

4.2. Research design: establishing a case for a mixed qualitative methodology

This study aims to explore schooled adolescents' identity formation through a short creative reading and writing intervention. My decision to use creative writing as data required me to look into a research design that allowed me to mix methodologies across disciplines: social psychology, literature and creative writing, and education practice. In order to do this, I explored how research methodologies in the social sciences could be mixed with, and complemented by, methodologies coming from arts-based research and research through creative practices. Previous qualitative research in narrative identity formation has focused on analysing interviews and written responses to life experiences, and adolescents' perceptions of their experiences of participating in the research (Gergen and Gergen, 1988; McLean, 2005; McLean and Jennings, 2012; Bolivar and Gordo, 2016). However, few have integrated narrative creative practices like reading and writing to explore it (Bolivar and Gordo, 2016; Cavendish, Vess and Li-Barber, 2016). Even those who have included creative writing as part of their research, it has not been looked at in terms of content and what it can bring into the understanding of identity formation in adolescents. In addition to this, although social constructionism, particularly Gergen's (2009) theory of the relational self, has been used widely used as an ontological stance for education and social research, there is still a need for a more practical view of the theory (Gergen and Gergen, 2006).

Hence, it was not my interest to just interview adolescents on their creative reading and writing practices, or perform focus groups to gather age group dynamics around them. I aimed to establish a methodological approach that would provide insights into adolescent identity formation and how they perceived others around them through creative writing. However, just developing and participating in creative reading and writing practices around their identity development, would carry a risk of the researcher over or under-interpreting the participants' work. Therefore, personal insights of the participants into their own creative work was important, hence interviews and focus groups had to be considered. I was searching for an answer to Whitelaw's question: "(…) '[H]ow do I develop a research practice which is generating knowledge and… in which creative

practice plays a really vital role?'" (Whitelaw, 2012, in Webb, 2015, p. 107). Given my aim is to explore adolescents' relational identity through creative practice, it was necessary to find a middle ground between the participants exploring their identities through creative practice, and analysing creative practice as data.

Arts-based research is a methodological approach that allows us to bring together creative practice and social science educational research. Leavy (2018) defines Arts-based research as an approach that aims to construct knowledge across disciplines, using creative arts tools in research contexts. She explains its methodologies have been used in different ways by researchers; for example, by engaging in their own artistic practice to express their findings in a different light from academic writing; or by using artistic devices (written, performative or visual, among others) at some point during the research process to better understand the phenomena under study (problem inquiry, data gathering, data analysis or data representation, for example) (Leavy, 2018; Leavy, 2015; Kara, 2015). My own study falls in the latter group, where I aim to use an artistic representation, in this case creative writing, as a means to explore adolescents' identity formation.

Rolling (2010) considers Arts-based research methodologies acknowledge the complexity of human experience in terms of the learning process and construction of knowledge. He suggests construction of knowledge occurs in the spectrum between the scientific and the interpretative, therefore making it difficult to position ABR within one ontological paradigm (being that empirical, interpretative or critical). Hence, Rolling (2010) considers Arts-based research methodologies as post-paradigmatic, meaning these methodologies do not necessarily fit in one leading paradigm and actually allow new ways of constructing knowledge, including within the field of education: '(…)even within the swirling undertows of incommensurability caused by the confluence of opposing paradigms, the interaction of those paradigms with varying cultural constructs and social geographies often create localized eddies of common sense.' (Rolling, 2010, p. 109). In this context, he makes a case in favour of Arts-based research as lending itself to explore the connections between beliefs, experience and relationships. The practice of any art, whether creative writing or photography, is therefore a negotiation of self-expression between the artist and their

work, as well as the artist and their community of practice, therefore calling for constant self-reflection. This definition of Arts-based research aligns with Rosenblatt's (1969) and Gergen's (2009) transactional and relational view of reading and writing, where the self is constantly negotiated through practice. In addition to this, Mead (1934) stated the importance of reflecting on the outcomes of our social interaction for identity formation (see section 2.2.). Arts-based research, therefore, becomes relevant for my own study, given my research required the participants to work within a group environment whilst developing their own creative practice.

Although their creative work could provide valuable information into the research questions, it was also important to provide the participants with a space to speak about their work, their lives and their own creative writing process, rather than taking the risk, as a researcher, of under or over-interpreting their creative outputs. I wanted an approach that would value the voice of the adolescent over the researcher's. Mannay (2016) acknowledges the dangers of interpreting creative practice (visual in her case) from the researcher's common understanding of the context. She also mentions the importance of being aware of participants' assumptions of what we, as practitioners and researchers, should already know or assume about them and their experiences which might or not reflect on their creative practice. Both, affect the interpretation of the data produced (Mannay, 2016). In order to avoid this, social research methods like interviews and focus groups, were equally important to provide a more accurate authentic approach to analysing the creative data. Therefore, a transdisciplinary methodological design was necessary. However, little has been written about mixing qualitative methods that come from such different disciplines. Kara (2015) discusses this methodological concern and explains how recent this discussion actually is. Some researchers perceive ABR as a paradigm on its own which cannot be fully encompassed within traditional qualitative research methodologies (Barone and Eisner, 2012; Kara, 2015; Leavy, 2018; McNiff, 2018).

Only very recently, different authors have started to discuss the implications of mixing qualitative methodologies, which would otherwise never fit under one epistemological stance, in order to provide further understanding into social questions being researched

(Cronin *et al*., 2008; Morse, 2010; Frost *et al*., 2010; Lal, Suto and Ungar, 2012). Although mostly focused in mixing qualitative analysis methodologies that come from different epistemological stances, these authors make a case for research designs that challenge the traditional notion of mixed methods research (mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches) to propose one that mixes two different qualitative approaches or methods to research. Cronin *et al*. (2008) referred to this as integration of qualitative data sets for analytic integration, making a case for qualitative data not being homogenous: 'We have argued that since all qualitative data are not alike attention must be paid to the processes by which research generating multiple qualitative datasets will achieve integration, where that is the purpose of having a multiple methods research design.' (Cronin *et al*., 2008, p. 584). Frost *et al*. (2010) refer to this as plural qualitative research; Morse (2010) and Lal, Suto and Ungar (2012) use the term mixed qualitative methods and Multiple Methods respectively.

In my own study, I have chosen a mixed qualitative design, where I have mixed ABR with social and educational research qualitative methodologies (see Figure 1). Figure 1 shows the approach taken in this study, exploring the common areas among qualitative methods between creative arts, social and educational research. This model makes an attempt to acknowledge a middle common ground between qualitative methodologies that come from different disciplines. Cronin *et al*. (2008) well states '(…) this approach offers the opportunity for synergies between datasets in order to achieve one of the goals of multiple methods research: the generation of an overall analysis which is greater than the sum of the (methodological) parts.' (p. 584).

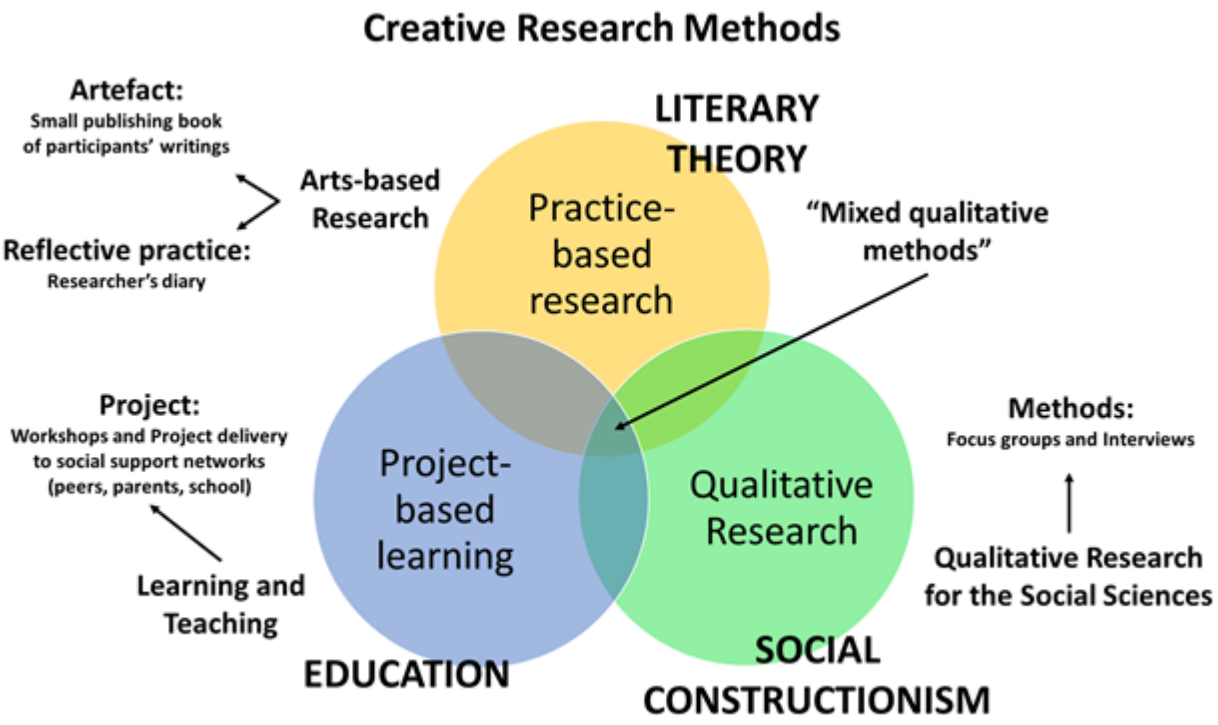

Figure 1. Methodological model proposed

Figure 1 shows how within practice-based research, an ABR approach allowed me to explore identity through creative practice, particularly through creative reading and writing workshops designed by me within a project-based educational methodology, and performed by the participants (see section 4.3. for instrumentation, and Appendices F-K for workshop guides). My researcher's diary was also fundamental to keep track of the field work experiences, my emotions and beliefs, which usually permeate qualitative fieldwork practices. These tools also recognise important tenets, mainly within narrative theory, where stories are thought of as necessary to make sense of situations, as cited by Culler (2000): "Stories, the argument goes, are the main way we make sense of things, whether in thinking of our lives as a progression leading somewhere or in telling ourselves what is happening in the world." (p. 83). If I wanted to make sense of the participants' creative work, I needed to be monitoring my own stories and experiences as I carried out my field work (see section 4.3.2. for the Researcher's diary explanation).

Interviews and focus groups allowed me to bring further understanding to the developed creative practice. Interviews allow a dialogic interaction with the participant, where a discussion about themselves, their writing and their perspectives are exposed and re-constructed in the conversation with the researcher, whereas focus groups allow participants to interact with each other and share opinions on a subject. A group interaction like this one, usually allows participants to build upon other's answers or show a difference of opinion when listening, enriching and building upon a group conversation[8]. Watson (2011) states "crossing disciplinary boundaries gives us access to another set of tools which enable exploration of some issues of social and educational interest in – slightly – different ways." (p. 406).

This design was also built upon pillars of critical research approaches like Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) (Cammarota and Fine, 2008; Cammarota, 2017). These authors state YPAR's objective is to provide young people with the opportunities to question social, political or economic issues that affect them and research possible solutions and actions they might take. Youth Participatory Research is a methodological approach commonly used within a macro-constructionist framework, where social structures and relationships of power are analysed (Burr, 2015). Therefore, its use looks for participants to take action on social issues that are oppressing them or their communities (Cammarota and Fine, 2008; Cammarota, 2017). Although this research is not aiming for the participants to find solutions or act upon social or political issues in their communities, it does aim to provide a safe space to empower them into developing their own creative project around their own identity construction. Consequently, YPAR offers a solid structure to empower participants into taking action within the project (Cammarota and Fine, 2008; Mallan and Greenway, 2011; Noble-Carr et al., 2014). Thus building my methodology upon YPAR pillars, allowed me to respond to questions about power differences between the researcher and the participants, which the BERA Ethical

[8] For further explanation of interviews and focus groups as instruments for data collection, please refer to section 4.3.4.

Guidelines for Educational Research (2018) warns us to bear in mind (see section 4.6. for Ethical Considerations).

In summary, along the lines of YPAR practice, my own research aimed to create a mixed design that allowed me to *empower* youth into reflecting and acting on social relations and their place in them; *respect* the voice of the participant; *raise awareness* of the participants' abilities, ideas, feelings and experiences; and *value* the voice of the participant, versus the authoritative voice of the researcher (Mallan and Greenway, 2011). This was possible through the design of the reading and writing workshops as tools for participants to explore connections to others and to their own self within a project-based learning environment, which empowers the student into taking charge of his or her learning/exploration through guidance and interaction with peers.

This section aimed to describe the research design proposed for this study, make a case in favour of a mixed qualitative methods design and discuss how they fit my philosophical stance. The next section will give a detailed account of the methods and instruments I used and created to work with the participants and collect the data for analysis.

4.3. Instrumentation

This section explains how the methods used were developed and integrated into the mixed qualitative methods research design explained in the previous section. Referring to qualitative research, Creswell and Creswell (2018) state the importance in qualitative research of participants being able to express themselves free from questionnaire constraints and laboratory conditions. This approach is usually supported by the researcher's ability to gather data in multiple ways. My study does have a multiple approach to data production, joining Arts-based research through creative writing workshops and a reflective researcher's diary, qualitative social research methods through focus groups and interviews, education under a project-based approach. This section presents the design and rationale behind each of the methods used.

4.3.1. Arts-based Research methods - Designing a Creative Reading and Writing Programme

One way of doing Arts-based research is by using artistic devices during the research process to provide a better understanding of the topic under study (Leavy, 2018). These artistic devices could be used as a way to explore a social issue, to gather data, to analyse it, or to artistically present the results of research, among other possibilities (Leavy, 2013; 2015; 2018; Kara, 2015). This study highlights the creative performance, particularly reading and creative writing, as the vehicle to explore identity formation with the participants. Taking into consideration my epistemological stance within socio-constructionism, I developed six creative writing workshops that would highlight language, relationships and reflective moments as vehicles for identity construction. This is in line with what Ryan (2014) states: "writing can be conceptualised as a performance whereby writers shape and represent their identities as they mediate social structures and personal considerations." (p. 130).

A writing workshop, also referred to in the literature as a writing laboratory (Kroll, 2013), is an approach traditionally used by writers and students of creative writing to move their practice forward and experiment with it in an environment where they can both write and reflect upon feedback given by peers (Kroll, 2013; Harper, 2017; Harper, 2019). A writing workshop usually provides the participants with a writing space and allows them to connect to the writing mood. It often provides a model that can be discussed, contested and/or used for inspiration, as well as a moment for feedback which allows participants to then revise and improve the original piece (Ziegler, 2008). It is never done in isolation, and peer support becomes relevant to move the writing forward with a shared objective (such as writing nature poetry; creating a character; describing conflict, among many others) (Kroll, 2013). However, there are other approaches and objectives to writing workshops.

Harper (2019), for example, creative writing workshops in the academic environment are mostly used within creative writing programmes. Here, the main objective of the workshop is to improve the writer's work through a series of exercises and feedback from peers and teacher. Workshops in academia may be focused on particular genres or styles,

for example poetry, fiction writing, nature writing, or biographical writing among others. It is common for the students to bring pieces which are already written to be discussed in the group. Other published literary examples may be offered for inspiration, and the participants' pieces are revised and reedited based on the feedback, exercises and discussions done around them. A better version of what was initially written is expected, and therefore, feedback and editing play a major role. However, Harper (2019) makes a call for understanding the creative writing process as 'foundation-generation-response', rather than a common 'pre-writing-writing-editing' model. He argues creative writing does not fit the commonly known writing process. Creative writing, instead of being planned, needs *foundation,* which can include the writer's observations, emotional contexts and experiences, personal interests, notes, and even reading: 'Foundation can also refer to your reading practices as a creative writer, some consciously engaging with the evolving project, and some unconsciously influencing the project' (Harper, 2019, p. 71); all which can be previous to the project, or evolve during its creation. *Generation* of writing is underpinned by foundation. Rather than being a linear process, creative writing is thought of as something that is constantly created and recreated and cannot be divided into simpler processes like revising, editing or rewriting, which all imply 'corrective measures' (Harper, 2019). 'Generation (...) refers to the engine of creation, the entwined and vibrant activities of the intellect and the imagination that occurs in your creative writing. (...) recognizes the fluidity of your creatively writerly actions, their forms and functions, and the results they offer.' (Harper, 2019, p. 75). Finally, *response* refers to a moment of reflection of what has been written. It can be connected with generative processes: when new connections are discovered, it is a moment to refine what one has written, and think about future steps, like publishing, sharing or re-evaluating it (Harper, 2019).

Harper (2017; 2019) has argued against other traditional concepts and processes in creative writing, and has even established a different approach to creative writing workshops he defines as *'The Unworkshop'*. Through this concept he makes a claim that workshops can be responsive to the individual writer's needs, moving away from a single definition of what quality creative writing should look like. His view contrasts with that of Kroll (2013), who compares the creative writing lab to the scientific one, arguing for it to

be a space for testing hypotheses in writing, innovation, obtaining tangible results, and of course, making sure there is production of knowledge. Kroll (2013) discusses the creative writing lab from a research methods perspective, where spaces such as this can be a valuable tool for creative based research.

A programme that complements Harper's (2017) notion of the unworkshop is the ARVON Foundation, located in the UK. Their programmes offered are creative writing workshops in schools, libraries, community centres, as well as writing retreats, with the aim to foster creativity and inspiration in a nurturing environment (ARVON, 2020). Their values are all focused on the writer's process rather than the final written product: inclusive of everyone who wants to write, regardless of their experience; inspiring by offering places outside the routine and in landscapes that foster contemplation; supportive of all who attend where experts are guides, supporters and encouragers; and transformative: 'Immersing yourself in creative writing nourishes the imagination, can deepen connection to self and to the world, and can lead to dramatic change and progress' (ARVON, 2020).

Given that my study aims to explore creative writing as a tool for exploring identity, rather than using fiction as evidence of the research done, the workshops designed for my particular framework were strongly based within Harper's definition (2017). I chose this approach when designing the material for two reasons. Firstly, the workshops were for adolescent volunteer participants. Therefore, their own writing and reading skills might not all have been at the same level when deciding to join the study. Similarly, their engagement with the project could come from different motivations, either intrinsic, like a liking for reading and writing; or extrinsic, like wanting to skip or avoid being in a certain class[9]. Designing a workshop tailored to those individual motivations and literacy skills was fundamental for successful data gathering. Secondly, grades were immediately taken out of the equation, making sure that quality was not the issue to be looked at. In this sense, the workshops did not aim to reach a particular, better or more desirable model for writing, but instead provided materials for the students to explore their own styles and

[9] There were no detriments to students participating in this research. For more information on participation, please see section 4.5.

content. The creative exercises needed therefore, to respond to the individual interests, ideas and experiences of participants and allow them to feel free enough to discover and create their own material, whilst giving them a general structure to help them get started rather than just a blank page [as J. K. Rowling (2018) wrote on Twitter: "The wonderful thing about writing is that there is always a blank page waiting. The terrifying thing about writing is that there is always a blank page waiting"].

My writing activities were adapted and taken from different sources that would lead the students into writing practices that would reflect the topics of interest for my research. A main influence in creating them was the book The Grammar of Fantasy: An Introduction to the Art of Inventing Stories, written by Gianni Rodari (1973/2006), an Italian children's author and activist who is in favour of using imagination as an instrument for a more compassionate education.

Therefore, for this particular research project, six creative writing workshops were created, all respecting a general structure that could be adapted according to the daily circumstances that could arise during the field work. At the same time, the workshops were designed to allow participants enough space to explore their own writing experience, while still providing them with a structure as a starting point. This structure included the following: (1) Ice breaker; (2) short story reading; (3) individual and group reflections on what was read; (4) writing exercise; (5) sharing about the experience. In addition to this, although all workshops were connected around identity, each of them had different objectives, namely:

1. ***Feeling comfortable in their abilities to write creatively***: The first workshop was not looking at delving into identity formation aspects, but fostering important elements for identity formation, particularly, establishing trust bonds with the participants and within the participant group.
2. ***The collective: writing a story collectively in groups of 3 or 4 students***: This workshop focused on the social interaction among participants to create a collective story. If social interaction is prior to identity formation (Gergen, 2009), then a workshop that guarantees those interactions must come first before looking

at the individual self. Group activities, based on my teaching experience, tend to be less threatening as students feel less exposed as individuals.

3. ***The other: writing about the experiences of a peer***: This workshop focused on a second element in the interaction: the other. By reading, listening and writing about experiences that have happened to others, elements like empathy should be fostered in the group (Broome, 2009).
4. ***The self: writing about themselves***: Here, the workshop focused on the third element of the relational being (Gergen, 2009): the self. Life stories, metaphors and using different points of view to talk about the self came into play.
5. ***The difference: writing about people who act differently from them***: This workshop aimed to put together the three previous elements, where we looked at what happens when we find ourselves being too different from someone else.
6. ***Conflict as transformation: using conflict as transformative for characters in stories***: This was a more general workshop on creative writing, which focused on reviewing narrative form, storytelling, and narrative elements. Students had the chance to create their own short stories bringing together elements from previous workshops.

We usually started with an 'ice breaker' to help students disconnect from their daily routines, connect to each other and to the context they were about to work in, and at times, provide an introduction to the theme or topic that would be developed through the workshop. We could start by writing emotions on a post-it that would reflect how we were feeling at the time, or have a discussion about an event happening at school and how they felt about it. A short story was usually read out loud by me, at the request of the participants. The story and author were introduced together following a reading protocol commonly used in language teaching: giving the participants questions to think and reflect on as the reading went along (Harmer, 2015; Scrivener, 2011), helping them to focus their attention on their own thoughts, feelings and reactions to the plot and characters. These questions were intended to generate individual and group reflections that would lead into the writing exercise according to the topic of the workshop. Every workshop was designed around at least one main writing event. However, some of the workshops had shorter

writing exercises leading up to the main one. Because of time restrictions, sharing and editing were usually not part of the workshop. As the researcher, I considered the most important elements of these workshops were firstly, to generate discussion around topics of interest, and secondly allow participants enough time to develop the writing exercises without my intervention as a 'teacher', 'editor' or 'expert'.

All workshops were written and developed in English and translated into Spanish to work with the students. Table 1 below, summarises the workshops designed.

Table 1. Creative Practice Workshops [10]

Workshop's name	Aims	Short Story	Writing/Creative exercises
1. Writing is in all of us	Encourage students in the art of creative writing through short writing exercises and stories.	Dupeyron, O. (2001) *Not the End: Life Isn't Over Until is Over:* ***Chapter 1.***	**"What if…?"** (Based on Langston-George, 2016: p. 6) - Daily routine gone weird. - Recreating the short story (fairy tale).
2. Writing together	Explore writing as a collaborative act through writing a short story in groups based on chosen images.	García Márquez, G. (1968) '**The Handsomest Drowned Man in The World**', in *The Incredible Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother*.	*Before, during and after* (Taken from Carter, 2002)
3. Writing the other	Write the anecdote of a peer using the first person point of view, after observing, portraying, and interviewing each other.	Cortázar, J. (1956) '**Axolotl'**, in *End of the Game*.	**"Portraying the other"**, based on Artsy for Education (2018). Students observe and interview each other and do an artistic portrait. **"Writing the other"** based on Shawl and Ward (2005). Write a short anecdote of a peer's experience using the first person point of view. Their drawings go along with their creative piece.
4. Writing about yourself	Explore the self through reflection, life-story, metaphors and writing the self, using a third person point of view.	Cortázar, J. (1951) '**House Taken Over**', in *Bestiario*.	- "**Our lives"**, adapted from *Winter Counts* by Ziegler (2008). - "**Metaphors"**, adapted from *Creative Writing Prompt: Write a Description of Yourself Using Only Metaphors*, by Thomas (2017). - **"A tale"**, from *Write About Yourself [writing prompt]* by Bunting (2015)
5. Challenging our views	Develop and write a character with characteristics the author might find difficult to cope with.	Bradbury, R. (1950) '**Night Meeting**', in *Martian Chronicles*.	**"A character different from me"**, developed from ideas in *Telling Tales: Writing Captivating Short Stories* by Langston-George, R. (2016)
6. Literature and Conflict	Explore conflict in literature as a transformative for characters in a story.	García Márquez, G. (1962) '**One of These Days**', in *Big Mama's Funeral*.	- **"Head, Body and Legs",** adapted from Gee (2018).
7. Reflective Narratives	Rather than a workshop, this was an additional space we had where the students developed a writing piece to individually reflect on their overall experience, their writing, and their thoughts about themselves and others (the group).	N/A	- **"Reflective Narratives (*Narrativas*)"**, format developed by the researcher.

[10] For detailed information about each workshop, please see Appendices F-K.

All creative workshops shown in Table 1 where created for this particular fieldwork supporting what Gergen (2015) describes as *relational writing practices in the classroom*. Gergen (2009; 2015) asserts that quality in education can be seen in the quality of relationships built among students and between teacher and students, and in how the former enhances participation. He moves away from more traditional cognitive views of education that prioritise the individual mind and thoughts, and believes an educated mind is more in tune with what John Dewey stresses as 'the social mind'. This means thought cannot be built in isolation but in the social questioning and shared language conventions (Gergen, 2009). Gergen also stresses the importance of encouraging students to write about themselves whilst not being intimidated by 'proper forms of academic writing'; as well as recognising others' strengths to improve their own work (Gergen, 2015; Gergen 2009). Within this context, the workshops aimed to promote interactions and discussions among students, focusing on ideas, personal reflections, emotions and reactions to the stories and exercises, rather than on comprehension tasks. In order to encourage participation, the voluntary nature of participation in the whole study and the freedom to decide to participate, or not, in each of the individual workshops were important elements to consider[11].

All workshops followed a similar structure, which aimed to echo the constructionist view of education this study focuses on. These workshops, based on my lived experience as a language teacher, were developed in a particular order that would take the students through a learning process as follows:

1. Feeling comfortable with being creative, with a focus on creative writing
2. Creating trust relationships among participants and with the researcher.
3. Being able to explore and write stories about themselves.
4. Creating their own short stories.
5. Being able to reflect back on the whole process.

[11] For this and other ethical considerations on students' participation, please refer to section 4.6. and Appendix T.

As mentioned previously, all workshops were linked to a pre-existing short story I chose which related to the topic being worked on. The stories chosen to accompany each of the workshops responded to two different criteria: practical/logistical, and pedagogical. Logistically, the stories needed to be a certain length given time constraints when planning and delivering the workshops; therefore, the stories chosen were between 500 to 2800 words (2300 words on average). The stories also needed to be available electronically and with open access, as a short booklet with the short stories needed to be printed and given out to the students for the purpose of this research. These criteria already limited the stories that were accessible for use.

In relation to the pedagogical criteria, the objectives of the workshop and my research questions, short stories were chosen because of their universality and language. Latin America has a rich literary culture that was worth looking into first, not only because of language (stories that would be easy to find in Spanish, as it was their original language), but also because of their relevance to three aspects: to the Colombian current social and political atmosphere, to their own personal development, and to the objectives of each of the workshops. Authors like Gabriel García Márquez, Mario Vargas Llosa, or Julio Cortázar, among others, have represented Latin-American culture and social reality in stories that are still current today, therefore considered literary fiction. These stories have been internationally translated in several languages, proof of their universality. I particularly looked into literary fiction short stories, as research has shown it promotes empathy, Theory of Mind and reflexivity in readers (Kidd, Ongis and Castano, 2016)[12].

These short stories were chosen and curated with the help of literature teachers in Colombia, and cover both Latin American and international writers. Four out of the six stories selected, were authored by Julio Cortázar and Gabriel García Márquez. One of the other two short stories was written by contemporary Mexican writer Odin Dupeyron, and the other one was by the Pulitzer-winning American writer Ray Bradbury from his book *Martian Chronicles*. Because the field work was wholly developed in Spanish, an officially

[12] To see how each of the short stories linked to the workshops' objectives, the rationale behind their choosing, for a short account of each story used, please see Table 2.

published Spanish translation of Ray Bradbury's Martian Chronicles was used (translated by Francisco Abelanda, 1955) (see Appendix N for short stories used and complete referencing to online open access).

Table 2. Short stories curated for the workshops

Workshop	Short Story	Summary	Rationale
1. Writing is in all of us	Dupeyron, O. (2001) *Not the End: Life Isn't Over Until is Over:* ***Chapter 1*****.**	The main character of a traditional fairy tale story (the Princess), challenges the author to change the course of her destiny of being trapped in a tower guarded by a dragon.	This chapter challenges fairy tale traditional narrative and character stereotypes and narrative, and allows students to explore their writing by experimenting with narratives that are familiar, yet can be easily challenged or transformed.
2. Writing together	García Márquez, G. (1968) '**The Handsomest Drowned Man in The World**', in *The Incredible Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother*.	A drowned man shows up on the shore of a small, forgotten, fishing village. While the men try to find out who the dead man belongs to with nearby communities, women prepare him for his funeral. The beauty and size of the man makes the women day dream about what his life could have been like. The town ends by adopting him and recreating their town in his memory.	The story shows a town creating a collective narrative for a dead man with very limited information. It is also linked to the way we build information around us about people we do not know. It becomes a short story that opens the possibilities for students to collectively create stories around images with limited context.
3. Writing the other	Cortázar, J. (1956) '**Axolotl'**, in *End of the Game.*	This short story is told in the first person point of view. Walking around Paris's zoo, the author becomes obsessed with the Axolotl (a type of salamander found mainly in Mexico) in the aquarium, finally becoming one, who observes a man looking into the tank.	The detailed description of the writer that illustrates the obsession of the character with the Axolotl and finally becoming one of them, opens the discussion around observing others and learning who they are without judgement.
4. Writing about yourself	Cortázar, J. (1951) '**House Taken Over**', in *Bestiario*.	A house inhabited by two siblings is slowly taken over, making them close parts of the house until they are forced to leave it. The relationship among the siblings is hinted as incestuous. There is no indication as to what takes over the house.	The story is open to be interpreted in terms of what takes the house (people, objects, fears, secrets?). We used the story to explore own hopes, fears and motivations.
5. Challenging our views	Bradbury, R. (1950) '**Night Meeting**', in *Martian Chronicles*.	Martian Chronicles narrate through a series of short stories, life of humans in recently colonised Mars. *Night Meeting* narrates a midnight encounter between a human and a Martian, where both desperately try to make the other see what is actually real (Martians have been extinct/humans have never colonised Mars). They finally decide this is not possible and decide to part ways.	The story allows a discussion around listening to others when our realities seem so distant from each other. Do we eliminate the one who thinks differently? Or do we make an effort to understand? Can we move on, understanding each other's differences?
6. Literature and Conflict	García Márquez, G. (1962) '**One of These Days**', in *Big Mama's Funeral*.	This short story explores relationships of power in a small town permeated by political violence. The town's dentist is visited by the mayor, who has an abscess. After the mayor threatens the dentist to fix it, the dentist decides to fix his tooth with no anaesthesia to 'make him pay for the dead'.	The story's plot is analysed in terms of how a conflict is built through the narrative, as well as the role of it in the development of the characters, emotions, and change. The story was used to speak of conflict as a transformative element which moves it forward, walking away from the negative connotations of the word. Students then brainstormed for characters, settings and situations to create their own story.

I was particularly interested in curating stories that not only represented topics of interest vis-à-vis identity, but also encompassed parts of the Latin American culture the participants and the researcher grew up in. García Márquez (Colombian) and Cortázar (Argentinian) are both authors from the Latin American Literature Boom in the sixties and seventies, a time in which they published their major works, today considered classics, like One Hundred Years of Solitude in 1967 and Hopscotch in 1963. This generation of authors, which also includes renowned writers like Mario Vargas Llosa (Peruvian), Carlos Fuentes (Mexican) and José Donoso (Chilean), was influenced by two major historical moments. They started to write during the post-war decade in the fifties, a moment marked by uncertainty and scepticism (Díaz-Granados, 2019).

Secondly, both Marquez and Cortázar were marked by the Cuban Revolution which broke out on 1st January 1959. Latin America at the time was facing a unique political phenomenon that García Márquez in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech defined, distinguishing it from Europe: the mythic dictator figure (García Márquez, 1982[13]). Different Latin American countries have had military dictators throughout the 20th Century, particularly between but not limited to 1960 and 1980: Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, El Salvador, Dominican Republic and Cuba, among others (Gaona, 2018). Military dictators in Latin America were attributed characteristics of supremacy and terror, associated to disappearances, torture and murder of civilians and politicians against the regimes. The Cuban Revolution was the first successful movement against this form of government, and it united important writers, poets and thinkers of the time (Díaz-Granados, 2019). García Márquez (1982) suggested it was in dictatorship and all its consequences that great Latin American literature found its way into the world: by creating a caricature, through magical realism, of this omnipotent figure. Some of his novels and short stories deal with this kind of character, like the mayor in One of These Days, used in this study.

Cortázar, although less political than other writers of his generation, like García Márquez, Donoso or Vargas Llosa, was also influenced by the Cuban Revolution ideals, and later on

[13] An English version of his speech can be found in the Nobel Prize website, here: https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1982/marquez/lecture/

by the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, where he constantly travelled before his death in 1984 (Delgado Aburto, 2015; Díaz-Granados, 2019). His writings are permeated with intense characters like travellers, political tourists and intellectuals, all of whom challenge the fine line between reality and fantasy (Delgado Aburto, 2015) and who can be seen in his narratives alongside characters who question and challenge their own identity, like those presented in Table 2. Although Ray Bradbury was American, and not part of this particular generation of writers, Martian Chronicles depicts interesting questions about our identity as a human race that made it worth including. To sum up, the stories were chosen for three reasons: Language and length, universality, and their portrayal of Latin American identities[14].

This next section will explain the importance of the researcher's diary, as the second method for data gathering within an Arts-based research approach.

4.3.2. Arts-based Research methods - The Researcher's Diary

Four characteristics of qualitative research exposed by Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain the importance of having a researcher's diary:

First, the researcher is key for data collection. Unlike quantitative research where information is gathered through self-administered instruments, in qualitative research researchers usually collect the data themselves interacting directly with the participant. Interviews, focus groups, or observations, among others, are designed, developed and carried out by the researcher. Second, the importance of the participants' perspectives entails the researcher carefully focusing on the meaning the participant brings to the issues being studied, rather than on the interpretations given by experts, or by the researcher himself. Third, the emergent design, meaning that qualitative research rarely happens in a straightforward manner, being subject to last minute changes and adaptations that follow either from the fieldwork itself or the question at hand. And fourth, the reflexive process in research. This one encompasses the first three, because it

[14] For a detailed account of each workshop and the references used to develop each of them, please refer to Appendices F-K. The list can be also found at the end of the participants' creative output *Of Life as a Book: its ending, its climax, and its introduction*, which accompanies this dissertation (see Appendix P).

is important for the researcher to reflect on his or her own beliefs, values, and background insofar as these affect the data collection and interpretation of the data itself, hence the direction and impact of the study (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

Within creative writing research, Webb (2015) makes an important distinction between reflexive and reflective writing, despite both being equally valuable when doing writing as research. Webb (2015), on the one hand, defines reflective writing as that one which is done at the end of the research process, reflecting on what happened throughout the research process, as in making a recount of events. On the other hand, she defines reflexive writing as more of a personal process, where the researcher is thinking about one's feelings, beliefs and positioning towards the research. Reflexive writing, therefore, is usually done as the research develops, and not necessarily at a specific point in time (Webb, 2015; Bolton and Delderfield, 2018).

In addition to the latter, Creswell and Creswell (2018) mention important aspects that must be taken into consideration when reflecting on the research process. Past experiences might influence the current one, particularly 1) focusing on demographics and circumstances that might affect the relationship between participants and the researcher; and 2) experiences that might shape the way we look at data, making us lean towards actively looking for information that supports our hypotheses. Furthermore, researcher diaries are not only used in more traditional qualitative studies, but are also widely used within Arts-based research. Batty et al. (2015) who reference the learning and teaching of creative writing, state "craft is absolutely research and knowledge. By reflecting on one's own work and understanding how it has been created, what we are actually doing is deepening our understanding of craft." (p. 92).

In my own case using a researcher diary alongside my data production from the creative workshops allowed me to continuously monitor my own emotions, involvement and responses to the fieldwork, especially given the fieldwork took up 19 weeks of intense work both in and outside the school, and involvement with the participants over the same period (which is close to half of an academic year with them). Mannay (2010) discusses the inadequacies of the insider/outsider binary narrative, which places the researcher

either as objective (outsider), or subjective (insider) depending on how much involvement there is with the participants and their social and cultural context. In qualitative research, the researcher is constantly moving between these two realms. However, she rescues the usefulness of the binary concept to make the researcher accountable for the knowledge produced in the field work (Mannay, 2010). To monitor my own involvement in the fieldwork with the students, the data and myself, throughout this period I kept a research field diary with personal reflections parallel to the workshops. This diary is an account of thoughts, feelings, memories, and chronological accounts of what was happening within that space, focusing mainly on how I might be affecting the data production process and the participants' perspectives towards the work being done (see Appendix Q for a sample of my researcher's diary).

4.3.3. Educational research and practice: project-based pedagogy

My interest in project-based pedagogy derives from the period before I came to the UK. For four years until 2015, I worked as an English language teacher at a private school in Bogotá, Colombia. In addition to my subject, I was also a class tutor and as such, part of my responsibilities were to develop a project together with the students, which usually came from the students' interests and was guided by the school's priorities for the academic year (for example social justice, urban development, sustainability or Colombian culture, among many others). The school's Head Teacher has always valued up to the minute research in education, for example that of the HighScope Educational Research Foundation[15], and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)[16] in North America, which has arguably allowed the school to be different and more innovative in its pedagogical offering from other similar private schools. Part of this approach has involved introducing and keeping up a project-based pedagogy.

David (2008) claimed project-based learning research was difficult to define given the difficulty to establish criteria to define what a good or bad project actually was. Criteria were established more clearly later on by Larmer and Mergendoller (2010) (discussed

[15] https://highscope.org/who-we-are/our-history/
[16] http://www.ascd.org/about-ascd.aspx

below). However, these authors seem to have a consensus on what it entails. Project-based learning aims for students to approach real world issues that interest them through critically engaging questions which they can then research in an attempt to create solutions and present to a bigger public audience their process, findings and conclusions (David, 2008; Larmer and Mergendoller, 2010). Not only do students develop research skills, but also personal ones like group work and collaboration, public speaking and critical thinking among others (David, 2008). The teacher acts as a facilitator in the process, and makes sure there are tools in place for the students to reflect on their learning process and outcomes.

Project-based pedagogy has been worked in different educational contexts with positive effects. For example, HighScope (2019) over the past couple of decades, have focused their work on early years through a student centred approach, where learning by doing is at the very core of curriculum development, an approach that today is used internationally at different care centres, nurseries and primary schools. David (2008) also mentions research done on project-based learning in different academic contexts: from primary to university years; however contradictory the academic effects measured were among the studies presented, David (2008) reports the similarities among them, which are more focused on personal development:

> Beyond academic outcomes, the Boaler and Vanderbilt studies both found that experience with projects reduced student math anxiety and resulted in more positive attitudes toward math. Boaler also found positive effects on equity: The link between performance and student economic level disappeared in the project-based school and increased in the traditional school. (David, 2008, online).

It is the positive student experience and attitudes here described that were fundamental for my study if I wanted it to work properly. Among the elements Larmer and Mergendoller (2010) established as necessary for Project-based learning to be successful, the following were taken into consideration when planning the field work:

- ***Have a driving question***: A simplified research question was shared with the students previous to asking for volunteers: Can reading and writing creatively be a

tool to explore who we are? It was important to have students who would be naturally curious about the topic and knew what it entailed to be a part of it.

- ***Students having an active voice and choice***: Participants created their own set of rules which they all considered fundamental to be able to work together. Although there were formally structured workshops, they had a choice regarding the content of their writing as well as what to share and how to participate in group discussions (see Appendix S for group rules). They had a choice of what of their work could be published and made public. Finally, they designed and delivered the final workshop where they presented their work to parents, students, and teachers.
- ***Development of 21st Century skills***: Skills like collaboration and communication were constantly brought to the table through the workshops' design, which they all reflected in their final reflective narratives.
- ***Feedback and revision***: Given students had to choose the work they wanted to publish, they were offered time for revision and feedback so they could be happy with the result. There were occasions when students would ask for permission to take the work home to perfect it and add more to it, which was also a testament to students being engaged.
- ***A product presented to the public***: As stated above, students designed and carried out this presentation on their own. They created the activities, speeches, and book design to be presented, which empowered them into owning their work, feeling proud and wanting others to understand what they did (See Appendix S for project presentation pictures).

As the main researcher, I needed to create a relationship with the participants where I could be a facilitator and supporter of their own process. Students were considered co-researchers from the beginning, making decisions on ground rules, topics they wanted to write about, and how they wanted to take the project forward. Although equity is not what this project was looking for or measuring, a project-based learning approach does respect different learning rhythms and circumstances, allowing me to offer a safe

environment for exploring participants' personal interests in their writing without being judged.

In addition to the previous, as part of a project-based model, a reflective narrative is always written by those who participated in the process. As the facilitator, I made sure to put in place reflective questions and practices that allowed me to keep track of their personal perceptions and their opinion and value of the project. Finally, this was a project that students designed and presented to a broader community, including parents, teachers, and peers. This enabled the participants to continue to be in charge of their own process and to present what they considered had been their most important experiences during the field work.

4.3.4. Social sciences research methods: Interviews and Focus groups

Interviews and focus groups, the latter considered a type of interview, are widely used in qualitative research in the social sciences (Creswell, 2014). The author states both are ideal to provide the participant a space to voice their own views, feelings, and experiences about the research topic through open-ended questions. My study carried out one-to-one interviews with each of the participants, and two focus groups, one at the beginning and one the end of the fieldwork process. The interviews were semi-structured and were based on Dan McAdams's (1993; 1995; 1998) life story interview. McAdams recommends starting the interview with general questions about the participant's life, and asking him or her to discuss the major events in their lives as chapters of an unfinished book. The interview continues into understanding high and low points of their lives and significant people in their lives like family, school and broader community. Finally, after exploring their past and present, I asked them about their future. After this, the interview delved into: the participant's work throughout the fieldwork; their experiences with reading and writing; and their motivations to participate in the study (see Appendix L for interview guide). The interviews were carried out after four of the workshops had been done, and lasted between 45 to 90 minutes. As outlined previously Mannay (2016) highlights it is common for the creative production process to be followed by interviews, so the material created can be discussed and reflected upon.

Focus groups aim to collect shared understandings on a topic whilst understanding individual differences among the participants (Creswell, 2014). They are also widely used in social research to enrich information in interaction, and accessing large amounts of information in a short period of time (Freitas *et al*., 1998; Litosseliti, 2003). Although it is ideal to hold them with groups of four to eight people, my focus groups had to include all of the participants at the same time (15 students) due to time and schedule constraints. Two focus groups were carried out, one at the beginning and one at the end of the fieldwork process. Similar to the interviews, the focus groups were semi-structured. Both included similar questions about their writing and reading habits and expectations of the project. The first focus group focused on asking the participants to establish rules and common understandings for the work ahead. The second focus group focused on their evaluations of the outcomes of those agreements and the overall experience, as well as establishing next steps. The focus groups lasted about 90 minutes.

4.3.5. Documenting the data

Due to my fieldwork being carried out outside of the UK, I knew I had to put in place strategies to diminish data loss, as re-accessing the fieldwork if anything went wrong, was not a possibility. With this in mind, I decided to record all data on audio and video to minimise data loss. Bailey (2008) states good recordings are the first step to written transcriptions, which are later analysed in more detail. In my particular case, videos complemented audios that were not clear enough (lip reading) given the rooms we worked in and the sound conditions they had.

At that particular stage of my research, before travelling to Colombia, I made the decision of recording not only interviews and focus groups, but our encounters as a group (workshops, project presentations) as all encounters were important steps that contributed to the final creative book. Yin (2019) suggests that in order to approach qualitative reliability, qualitative researchers should aim, when possible, to record and document all field work procedures carried out, and therefore, this is exactly what I did. In addition to audio and video data documentation, I also took photographs of materials, spaces, and workshops, and made field notes on my researcher diary. For three of the

interviews, we had issues with the audio recorders, reason why in particular cases, the video was used to guarantee validity of the transcription process and recover lost audio.

Students could decide not to be on any visual or audio registers on a workshop by workshop basis, and this was reminded to them at the beginning of every session. In addition to this, and given the participatory nature of my study, my participants also made the decision of which photographs could be used in the research, either as appendices or as part of the published creative book.

This section explained how the methods from three different approaches, like Arts-based research, education and social sciences, were thought of and developed within a mixed qualitative research design. These next sections stage the data production process as follows:

1. Firstly, I discuss the setting where my field work took place, including the selection, access and working spaces of the school.
2. Secondly, I provide an overview of the participants that voluntarily joined the research process.
3. Thirdly, I explain the ethical considerations of my study, focusing in particular on the anonymity of the participants and relationships of power between the participants and researcher.
4. Finally, I outline the chronological account of the different stages of the data collection and production, and explained how the data was documented.

4.4. Setting Explained

In this section I describe the aspects related to the place where the field work for my research took place. The aspects explained here are intended to provide a clear picture of the educational context and dynamics found, as it related to changes and adaptations which had to be made along the fieldwork phase. First I will explain how I accessed the school; second, I will discuss the characteristics of the school I worked with; and third, I will discuss the physical locations and rooms where the field work took place.

4.4.1. Access

Given the research fieldwork took place in Colombia, it was necessary to explore and define beforehand which school or schools I would be able to access. Colombia had always been the country where I intended to develop my fieldwork, and Bogotá was chosen as the main city to work in, given both time and budget limitations that had to be taken into consideration. In order to access the school in which the fieldwork took place, a gatekeeper was necessary, defined as the person who enables or mediates access to the research setting (Harvey, 2018). In my case, I contacted a work colleague who, I knew, kept close connections to public schools near Bogota.

In January 2018 we sent a letter to the Head Teacher of one of these schools presenting the project and asking for their interest in participating, after which a meeting was programmed for February on my arrival. The three of us were present at that meeting where the Head Teacher expressed his interest in having students participate. Given the nature of the research (reading and writing), the Head teacher offered to speak with the Spanish teachers so I would be able to work with the students during two out of four hours of Spanish held during the week. After the initial meeting, a second one was held a week later with the Head of the Spanish Department and the Spanish ninth grade[17] teacher, who were interested not only in the workshops, but the main epistemological and ontological views of my research. It was agreed with the school that to avoid any detriment to the students' academic development, the final piece of one of the workshops (workshop 2 – Writing Collaboratively, see section 4.3.1.), would be marked, and they would have to hand in their Spanish class portfolio with a particular set of academic work that would be assigned from the beginning[18]. Together with the Head Teacher and Language teachers, we agreed the project would be presented to one of the three grade sections. This way, it would be easier to have all students from one Spanish class, rather

[17] Ninth grade corresponds to the last year of basic education in Colombia before going into further education (10th and 11th grades). Students in this particular year are usually between 14 and 16 years old. See footnote on p. 2 for more information.

[18] The portfolio included class work (from the two hours they would have with them), grammar sheets and one written essay reflecting on the experience of the workshops. I was not involved in the assignment of this work. I understand, by talking to the Spanish teacher, that all of them handed in what they needed.

than taking a number of students from each section at different times, and it would be easier to track their academic work.

The school, situated in the outskirts of Bogota, was and is easily accessible by car or public transportation, which allowed me to complete the field work in the allotted time with minimum disruption in transportation. The fieldwork was done within the school's premises with the exception of one workshop, which was held at the House of Culture. This place hosts youth cultural activities and groups in the region, and is located within the town at a walkable distance from the school premises.

4.4.2. School

The school I worked with is part of the Colombian public education system. If a Colombian student wants to pursue a college degree, they are required to at least complete Ninth grade successfully[19]. Students who want to pursue a university degree must continue to Tenth and Eleventh grades (further education) and pass the State Examinations to do so. These two years are referred to as Secondary Education. Therefore, it is common to find schools within the public system which only offer primary and basic education years, after which the student can decide to transfer to a school that offers secondary education, or else begin college education or pursue work.

Two aspects that characterised this particular school became important to me. First, it is a public school right outside Bogota, which brings together rural and urban areas of the sector and offers both basic and secondary education. Public schools in the surroundings are mostly rural, offering only primary education, with a few others offering up to basic. Therefore, students who want to pursue secondary education in the region usually transfer to this institution, bringing together a diverse range of rural and urban backgrounds. Even though my study is qualitative and hard to generalise to all Colombian public schools, it was important to me to access a school with a diverse representation of students. Second, looking at the possibility of presenting results of my research to the same community, it was important for me to access a school where a large proportion of

[19] See footnote 1 on section 1.1. for further information on the Colombian education system.

participants would remain as part of the school in the year after the research had taken place.

Some additional facts are: In general, the students come from medium-low socioeconomic status. Students usually get to school by taking public transportation or by walking if they are more central to the town. Recently, since 2016, a few publicly funded school buses have been placed to allow easier access to students in distant rural zones and those who live closer to Bogota.

4.4.3. Working spaces and materials

The school gave me access to the audiovisual room, which was separated from the main classroom building and had enough space to develop the workshops. This was clearly an advantage when developing the fieldwork as we were rarely interrupted. However, it was close to the playground, which affected the audio recordings of some of the workshops. When the room was not available, I was allowed to access an unused classroom space, which was mainly used for the interviews. This room did not have electric sockets, which made it difficult to videotape some of the sessions. The presentation of the project was carried out in the multipurpose room inside the main classroom building, which had enough space to have parents, students and teachers on the day, as well as enough wall space to display the work done by students.

Given some time complications due to different events happening at the school, the last workshop was planned as a one-day event. It required the group to meet on a Sunday and work at the House of Culture within the town. Because this workshop happened on a Sunday, the House of Culture was empty and we had the place to ourselves. We were assigned a big room on the second floor, parted in two smaller ones joined by a door. This worked well, as we had a room to leave materials and snacks in, and another one with tables and chairs for students to do their creative work. The House of Culture also has a big backyard playground with an outdoor theatre which we used to read our stories and have our breaks.

I provided all the necessary materials for the students to develop the workshops successfully. Although some workshops required more materials than others, the basic ones were recording devices, A4 lined blocks (one per student), and varied writing tools (coloured pens, pencils), rubbers and sharpeners, flipchart paper and markers (See Figure 2).

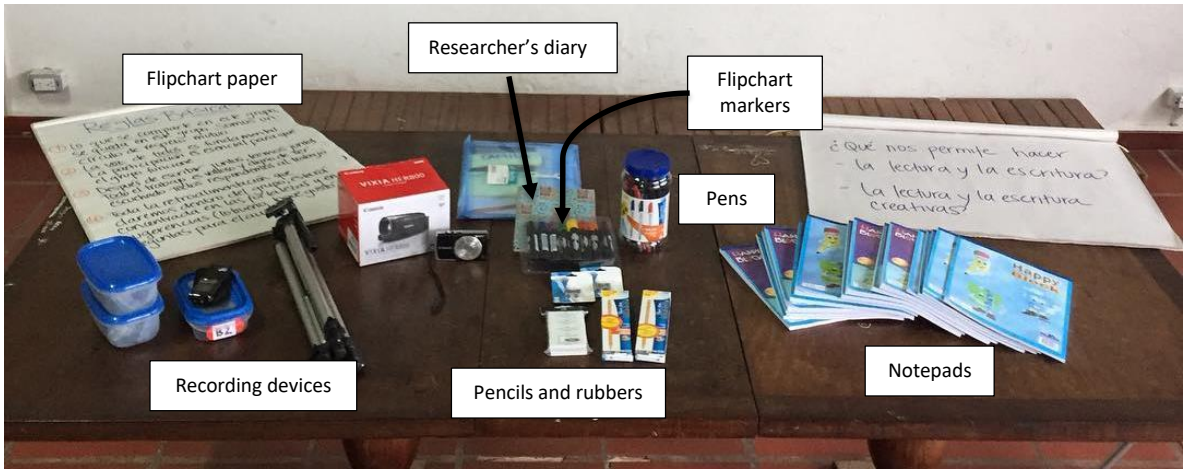

Figure 2. Materials for all workshops

Other workshops like Workshop 3 (Writing the Other) and Workshop 6 (Writing Literature and Conflict), required some additional materials such as paints (tempera), paintbrushes of different sizes, sticky notes, white card, newspaper to protect areas, small cups for water, coloured pencils, glue, markers and crayons (See Figure 3).[20]

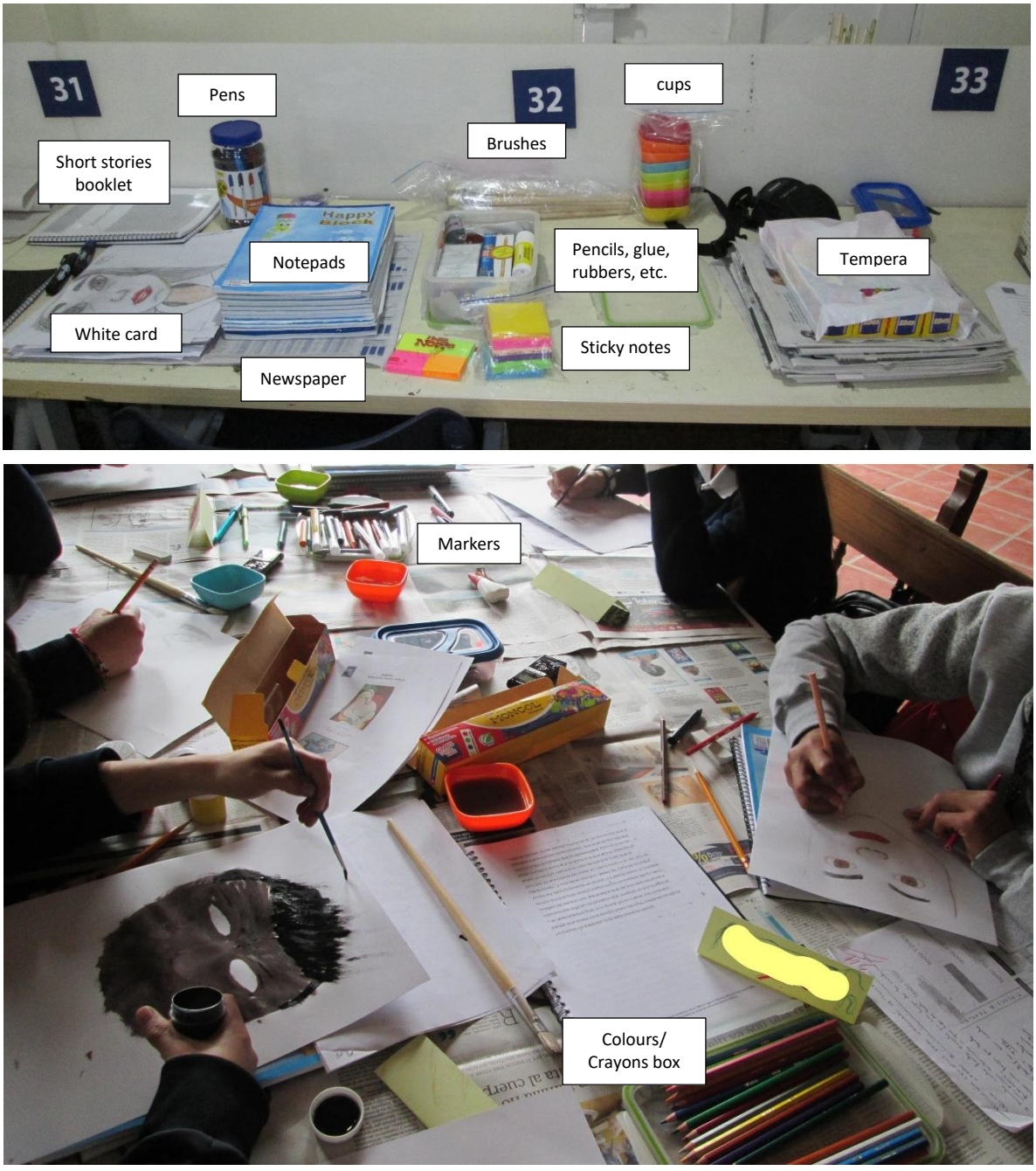

Figure 3. Additional materials

[20] For more visuals of our materials and working places, please refer to Appendix S. You can also look at Appendices F-K for more details on materials used for each workshop.

4.5. Participants

For this project, 15 Colombian Ninth grade teenagers voluntarily enrolled in the study. Of the students who participated, 11 were women and 4 were men, all between the ages of 14 and 16 (M=14.7), a three-year age range including 14, 15 and 16 year olds.

Since this was qualitative research, and in order to be able to address the research question, this study used a priori, non-sequential purposive sampling. This means that the characteristics of participants were set before beginning the fieldwork, and the group was not expected to change or increase in number as the research developed (Bryman, 2015). Because my research aims to focus on adolescents in school, some minimal criteria were established beforehand, such as age (between 14-16 years of age), grade (ninth graders), and the ability to read and write. In addition to the previous, the fact all participants were part of the same educational institution set common ground for all participants.

Within this sampling approach, we had already decided to work with only one class of students, group which had 37 students in total. After I explained the project and nature of the work it would involve to them, students were asked to volunteer for the study. My expectation was that I could enlist a group of between 8 and 12 students, and surprisingly, I had 16 volunteers to continue with the process. Out of those 16, 15 received authorization from their parents to be part of the project. Thinking some of them could probably leave the field work at some point, I did not select or cut down participants for the study. Interestingly, despite some students not being able to come to some of the workshops for other school commitments, the study had 100% retention of participants.

Ninth grade was chosen for participant sampling for different reasons. Firstly, most creative writing interventions in education have been aimed at children or late adolescents/adults. Secondly, Colombian ninth graders can make a decision to leave school and pursue work or a college degree, rather than continuing for two extra years in high school to be able to access university education. This means, they are the generation closest to ‘going out into the world’, into a Colombia that is undergoing a very fragile political moment. Thirdly, ninth graders are living their adolescent stage, where the sense of belonging is important, as well as establishing a sense of individuality and identity.

Hence, their thinking process is particularly active when thinking about their surroundings and their place in it. Finally, most, if not all of them, cannot vote yet. Therefore, they are having to live with/will have to live with the decisions other adults make on their behalf. This particular population will be immediately affected by what happens in the national voting arena in the coming years (referendum, city mayor, Senate and Congress, Presidency elections, among others).

Table 3 below, presents a summary of the participants and their engagement in the different workshops. Please note that all names used here are pseudonyms chosen by the participants to be referred to through the written research. However, see section 4.6.4. for Ethical Considerations on Anonymity.

Table 3. Participants

Name	Age	Sex	Workshops attended (1-6) [21]
Tusitala	16	Female	1, 2, 3, 4, 6
Ariadna	14	Female	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Alejandra	15	Female	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Dany	14	Female	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Maggie	14	Female	1, 3, 4, 5, 6
Andrea	15	Female	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Marian	14	Female	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Fernanda	15	Female	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Isabel	15	Female	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Naomy	14	Female	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Irene	15	Female	1, 3, 4, 5, 6
Andrés	15	Male	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Rick	16	Male	1, 2, 3
Yuniok	14	Male	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Mark	15	Male	1, 2, 3

4.6. Ethical Considerations

Because this study took place in Colombia, it had to be guaranteed that all ethical considerations valid for the UK were equally applied in this international setting, and in

[21] Everyone was present for both focus groups, for the sessions to prepare the book for publication, and for the presentation of the project. Absence to a workshop was either disciplinary related or commitments with other academic and extra-curricular obligations.

addition we had to guarantee the safety not only of the participants, but also, of the researcher. My next section gives an account of all ethical aspects and potential risks with research methods which were taken into consideration and underwent Ethical Committee approval, and also outlines how each ethical issue would and will be dealt with, with a view to covering all concerns outlined in the BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2011).

4.6.1. Risk of exposing myself to harm

The research took place in a public school in the department of Cundinamarca, Colombia, a region considered safe to travel to according to the Foreign and Commonwealth UK Office (2017). It was also important to clarify what the concept 'post-conflict' meant for Colombia at that moment. Since signing the peace treaty with FARC in October 2016, Colombia is now considered to be at the start of a post-conflict era. This means 'post-conflict Colombia' is more a current state given the political circumstances, rather than a particular situation affecting the participants or the development of the research.

4.6.2. Risk of exposing participants to harm

The region the school is located in has a 0% report of victims related to armed conflict since the year 2015 (Unidad para las Víctimas, 2018) Therefore it is important to clarify that my participants are not chosen because they are victims of armed conflict, but because they offer a general representation of students in public schools across the country.

Given the participatory nature of this research, the first focused group aimed to establish a Participant Reference Group (see section 4.6.3.), which enabled the adolescents to become active participants in the research process from the beginning. From the start they established rules regarding the information they wanted to share and discussed confidentiality, group work dynamics, and their expectations from the project once they had finalized their creative products.

It is important to mention that at no time were the participants asked to share sensitive information and no question posed by me would directly or indirectly pursue this purpose.

Research aims were clearly explained, both verbally, and through the consent forms and information sheets handed in to both students and parents (see Appendices A and B). Finally, most of the fieldwork took place inside the school to guarantee their support systems were in place for participants for the duration of the study and beyond the life of the study. Only one session had to happen outside school premises at La Casa de la Cultura (House of Culture), where a large proportion of the students attended for extracurricular activities. Therefore, despite being outside the school, it continued to happen in a place known and familiar to the group.

All participants were made aware of the voluntary nature of the research, and of their freedom to decide not to take part in it at any point during the fieldwork, including their right to withdraw their participation even after completion.

4.6.3. Imbalance in power between researcher and young participants

To mitigate this risk, elements of Participatory Action Research (YPAR) approach were adopted. A YPAR approach encourages genuine engagement, helps elicit the voices of vulnerable young people, and minimises power differences between researcher and participants, as the participants actively make decisions on what and how they want to research with the researcher (Mallan and Greenway, 2011: Noble-Carr et al., 2014). Central to this approach is the establishment of a Participant Reference Group. Formed by all research participants, general ground rules and the process of research and outcomes are agreed among everyone as a starting point for the data collection process. This is commonly used when working with oppressed or vulnerable communities (Cammarota and Fine, 2008; Mallan and Greenway, 2011: Noble-Carr *et al*., 2014; Mannay, 2016), and is based on the following principles:

1. Adolescents are not subjects of research but participants in the research process, as they have a say and an insider view of the questions and areas to be covered.
2. Knowledge gained from the research process should aim to generate positive impact for the participants and their community. Therefore, the participants become beneficiaries of the research (Pittaway et al., 2010; Betancourt et al., 2016).

3. It empowers the participants and the community involved to continue or put in action strategies for further development. Research remains active through empowerment of the community.
4. 'YPAR fosters the kind of institutional changes needed for more equitable social relations.' (Cammarota and Fine, 2008: 9).

4.6.4. Anonymity and confidentiality

This study is qualitative research that combines creative practice research with more traditional social science methodologies. The use of the latter is intended to enable participants to make decisions on the information they want to share and how they want to share it.

Because of the nature of the project, participating students were identifiable to each other, so anonymity was not possible within the group. In addition to this, the students decided they wanted to share their creative product with the school community and each other. In making this decision, anonymity became a choice as well, as clearly explained in the information and consent forms given (see Appendix A) Each of them chose whether or not to remain anonymous by using a pseudonym or to have their work attributed to them. It was interesting to find most students felt reticent about having to change their names when signing the work they had created, even if the work had deep personal meaning or related to events in their own life. Kara (2015) mentions this is a situation that is not uncommon in colonized societies, like Colombia, where people do not want others to be telling their stories. Having their names on their writings gives a sense of ownership and authenticity that a made-up pseudonym does not. Kara (2015) explains the importance of being sensitive to cultural contexts that might affect or challenge traditional ethical approaches to research, usually led by developed Western countries. Ten participants decided they wanted to use their own name for publication. None of the students decided to remain completely anonymous, and the remaining five chose pseudonyms they considered reflected their personalities.

Nevertheless, as the researcher, I had guaranteed the Ethics Committee I would preserve anonymity when reporting on the research. Hence, for this written dissertation, all

students were asked to create a pseudonym. Therefore, anonymity is preserved here where possible by using their chosen pseudonyms in the interview transcripts, findings and creative work. The name of the school is not mentioned either. Together with the participants, since our first meeting, we also established an agreement on mutual respect and confidentiality within the group.

Participants were all given the opportunity to change their mind on whether to preserve their anonymity at any point during the research. As of finishing this dissertation, no participant has contacted me to change his or her mind.

4.6.5. Disclosure

I made sure I knew and understood the school's policies on supporting students they identified or could potentially be identified as vulnerable or at risk. Participants were made aware prior to the data production phase and prior to completing their interview, that if any information they disclosed might be putting them or others at risk, such information would be shared by me with the school counsellor to provide appropriate support. However, only one participant disclosed information on a family situation which had to be referred to the relevant department for follow-up.

4.6.6. Consent and information forms

Because I would be working with minors, consent forms were handed in to institutions, parents and students. All documents went before the University's Ethical Committee. The consent form explained in detail the purpose and procedures of the research, as well as information on the possible associated risks, and how the data would be handled to ensure confidentiality. The consent form also stated the voluntary nature of participation and the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any point. Finally, all those involved were given a copy of their signed consent form with my contact details and those of my supervisors.

4.6.7. Data Protection

All digital data (see section 4.3.5.) has been stored securely in encrypted archives. This includes video and audio recordings, and photos. Access has been given to photos agreed by the

participants and the published book, both appendices to this dissertation. All physical material used and produced in workshops, such as notepads, drawings published in the book, and handwritten narratives, are safely stored in boxes I only have access to. Data has been backed up securely in an external drive with password access.

Digital data will be stored for up to a year after the final dissertation has been approved, to then be destroyed, as per the approved Ethics form (see Appendix T) and the consent forms given to participants and parents (see Appendices A and B). The consent forms also included an explanation about the possibility of disseminating the findings of this research in journal articles and conference papers, to which all 15 families agreed to. Therefore, data gathered and this research work be used for further analysis and future publications.

Their creative work (see Appendix P) which they chose to publish, was protected under a Creative Commons Licence (see more information in section 4.7.3.).

4.6.8. Deception

No deception was involved in this study. This means that the participants knew the purpose and nature of my research from the beginning.

4.7. Data Production

Mannay (2016) highlights the different levels of participation within participatory research, which usually depend on time constraints, deadlines and funding. Although it would be ideal for participants to be able to actively be involved in the design, implementation and dissemination of the research, this is not always possible, and participation is usually reduced to the data production stage –particularly 'in relation to visual and creative methods'– (Mannay, 2016, p. 22). She makes a clear distinction between data production and data collection, where the latter is more passive and researcher oriented (data is collected from the participants, like with the use of questionnaires or by observation), whilst the former is active and participant oriented (data is produced by the participants in the participants' terms). Although Mannay (2016) focuses mainly on visual research methods, the terminology stands for my research. I gave my participants the control to participate or not; to set up their own rules for

collaborative work; to create their written pieces in their own terms; to choose what they wanted to publish and all decisions regarding in how to present the project they did to peers, teachers and family. Therefore, this section outlines how the data production process was carried out.

The research was conducted in four stages which will be explained below:

1. Planning and staging
2. Developing and exploring
3. Delivering and presenting
4. Debriefing and closure.

4.7.1. Planning and staging

The main objective of this first stage was to establish a solid platform that would allow the fieldwork to develop as smoothly as possible. During this stage, I contacted and accessed the school I worked at, spoke to the Head Teacher and teachers, and observed the school's dynamics. The latter, in particular, was an ongoing process and allowed me, throughout the fieldwork, to better sort out unexpected changes to schedules and access to rooms. It also involved accessing the students to search for volunteers and introducing them to the study, its objectives and information and consent forms. In addition to accessing the field work, an initial focus group was done to establish the participant-researcher group. This was done by having the participants set the rules under which the project would develop, express their expectations, and share initial perceptions on their relation to reading and writing.

4.7.2. Developing and exploring

The aim of this second stage was to produce and collect the necessary data to analyse and answer my research questions. Throughout it, developing trust with the participants became the main focus. In order to do this, three elements where needed: 1) contact time with the participants, 2) the quality of that contact, and 3) a logical running order of the workshops, focus groups and interviews. Both contact time and quality were important to establish a safe environment for learning and developing the workshops. I intended to

establish a relationship with the students where they would feel empowered to make their own decisions about writing and discussing. I wrote in my researcher's diary after I first met my participants: 'Lovely students. Need to find the way to break the "teacher Camila" relationship to "Camila and a group of students" relationship!'; and after the first session: 'There is one girl/woman who doesn't seem quite engaged. I'll see how her work looks like next week. It's fine, though. I need to remind myself I work at a school but in this case, I'm not "schooling"'. From the beginning, I was continuously monitoring my reactions and attitude towards them, and moving quickly away from a position of power and directiveness.

I also considered the running order of the fieldwork as an element to developing trust. When I designed the workshops, I considered an order that would possibly offer a logical sequence for students to ease into the project, feel comfortable around each other and with me. Although the students came from the same class, they were not necessarily close friends. Hence, I began the fieldwork with general creative writing exercises, and only after 10 weeks of work together, did I do the individual interviews. The interviews aimed to explore their individual life story, their perceptions about the workshops we had done so far, and talk about their own creative work up to that point. Therefore, I could not have done them at the beginning of the process, nor did I feel comfortable asking them about personal stories without them feeling comfortable with me as well. The interviews also became a stepping stone into the next stage as they helped me create more meaningful connections with the participants. After the interviews I also observed more engagement in the last two workshops and with the delivery and presentation of their project.

Alongside trust, this stage was mostly focused on delivering the workshops. Each workshop was executed over two sessions of two hours each. Table 1 (see section 4.3.1.) summarises the workshops. The participants' discussions during the workshops may be assumed to derive from a genuine interest in what was happening since there was no obligation to attend. Indeed, no kind of evaluation or judgement was given for any part of the process, it was not mandatory to attend, and participation was completely voluntary. I do not intend to imply that students in general only work because of these pressures.

However, I do believe that taking those pressures away might have helped the way students got involved and engaged with my study.

In order for the participants to complete the workshops, I provided all the required material: notebooks, pencils, pens, colours, markers, crayons, paint, post-its, flipchart paper, and white card among others, depending on the workshop (for more information on materials, see section 4.4.3.). In addition, I always provided a mid-morning snack and drink. All workshops included different creative exercises that would aid the participants in developing a creative writing piece. For example, poetry from the metaphors in workshop 4, or drawings (portraits) in workshop 3, were used as devices to facilitate the creative writing process rather than being used as data collection instruments[22]. These devices/exercises were important enough that the participants found them relevant enough to discuss in their writings and interviews, and to include them in the final publication, as it will be seen in Chapters 5 and 6[23].

I arrived at the school at least 30 minutes before I met the participants to allow myself enough time to set up the room (Refer to fieldwork photographs in Appendix S for an example), as I wrote on my diary after I had met them for three or four times: 'I have to set up the classroom and put everything away at the end, EVERY TIME. It takes me between 15-20 minutes to set up: posters on the wall, flipcharts, material, audio recorders, video camera, guide, names of students on desks...' This became an issue at times when the keys of the room weren't available, for example. The original guides had to be adapted in situ, depending on last-minute issues with the room, attendance or school schedule changes. Usually, the students would leave behind their notebooks and material. However, because we did not have enough time to provide a space for editing, there were times when the students voluntarily took their notebook home to continue to work on pieces we had started writing in the workshops.

[22] The portraits developed for workshop 3 - *Writing the Other*, were introduced as a 'point of constructive contact' between participants (Lyon, 2020, p. 299), or as a 'draw-and-write' approach, 'adopted as means of eliciting reflections, perceptions, views and experiences [with adolescents]' (Lyon, 2020, p. 299). See footnote 32 on section 5.2.2., p. 146)

[23] For detailed information about each workshop, please see Appendices F-K. For the data selection process, see section 4.9.1.

From the focus group at the beginning of the fieldwork, every student created their own name tag on an index card. I used these cards to create different groups for discussion and opening opportunities for them to continue to know each other. Therefore, it was also a stage where we explored different group dynamics and ways of interacting within the workshops that were new to all of us. It was particularly interesting what happened in the last workshop, which was a one-day event on a Sunday. For the first time, we all got together at the end of the day to listen to each other's stories that were written that afternoon. Sharing your work in public is always difficult and we rarely had the opportunity to do it: only one for workshop 2 where every group presented the story to the rest and a winner story was chosen by everyone. However, they presented as a group, while this time, each of the 12 who attended the day, had to do it individually. The group not only listened respectfully to each other's stories but also commented on how impressed and surprised they were by some of them.

Through this stage, trust was the main element that permitted all creative data to be produced by the participants, the interviews to be done and the group dynamics to be explored in a safe space.

4.7.3. Delivering and presenting

The third stage of my study involved the participants choosing the material they wanted to publish, finishing and editing those pieces so they were happy with them, helping prepare the publication, writing the project narratives and preparing and presenting the project to peers, teachers and parents. Given the participatory nature of the study, the students chose which of their writings would go in a published book that would be given to them and the school. The book was designed by the students, and put in place and printed by the researcher. The students also created short activities for the peers, parents and teachers who would attend the final presentation, and created speeches to deliver on the day about their work and the importance of it for themselves and others. This particular way of presenting research projects is not new to educational research, since John Dewey proposed the concept of 'learning by doing'. Project Based Learning allows

students to gain insight into questions that spark their interest, in this case, using creative writing as a tool to do personal exploration of their own skills, thoughts and abilities.

The reflective narratives done by them at the end of the process reflected on three main topics: what they had expected and what they had achieved or learned in the process, their experience working with the group of students who volunteered, and their reflections on the work they chose to publish. It was agreed among the students that having a small published book with their work was important to them. All participants had the chance to go through their work and choose which written pieces they wanted to have included. We had three meetings between finishing the workshops and planning and editing their chosen pieces for publication.

The book was divided in seven chapters, one chapter per workshop, and one for the reflective narratives. In addition, I included an introduction, final acknowledgements, and references used. The front cover was designed by one of the students, and the title was chosen between them from a series of choices they came up with. The reflective narratives were the only piece of work that I asked everyone to include. Other than that, every chapter counts with a different number of pieces and a different group of authors each time. I published the book under a Creative Commons License that would respect the work of the students as much as possible

> 'Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs CC BY-NC-ND
>
> This license is the most restrictive of our six main licenses, only allowing others to download your works and share them with others as long as they credit you, but they can't change them in any way or use them commercially.' (Creative Commons, 2020)

For delivering the project, I provided the participants with some basic ideas that could be done. In different groups, they designed and delivered workshops for parents, teachers and peers, using our workshops as guides, material they had produced during the field work, and surveys for parents and teachers they created themselves. Two students took the initiative to write two speeches for the presentation. After presenting the project, students left for their summer break. We reconvened one month later to have a debrief

through a focus group to capture their perceptions of the project as a whole, reflect on the experience, and establish any further support that might be needed once I had left the field. My participants did not report or have contacted me after to report they might require support after we completed our time together.

As part of my commitment with the school and my participants, I will be presenting the findings of this research to them. I have therefore maintained contact with both. This next section explains the process of leaving the field and how contact has been maintained in these two years.

4.8. Leaving the field

Binns (2006) suggests that '[r]ather than abandoning local contacts after the fieldwork, it is important to involve them as far as possible in the data analysis and writingup phases of projects (…)' (p. 21), as well as finding opportunities to present the findings back to them. It was important for me to involve my participants as much as I could, especially since it is their work, time and ideas which feed my research. Therefore, during our last meeting, I suggested to keep them up to date with the project, particularly regarding data analysis, and other activities related to my research (for example participating as a presenter within my School of Education, or research events where I would share parts of my project). The suggestion was well received and they recommended Facebook as an easy was to do it. We therefore created a secret group with those interested (13 out of 15 participants) where I have shared updates.

In May 2019, I had the chance to be in Colombia for two weeks. I contacted the Head teacher to ask him for permission to meet the students, which he agreed to. Thirteen participants met with me, as one of them had left the school and moved to another municipality, and another one was absent on the day. I shared with them the analysis I had done so far, we took pictures together, and we updated each other on what had been going on in the last year. I still continue to keep them updated with my process, and hope to be able to present the findings before the end of 2020, when they will be finishing high school.

When carrying out a participative methodology, the participants become co-researchers, the project becomes theirs as much as it is mine. Removing myself from the field completely is not only impossible, but also irresponsible towards them and their work.

Given the important amount of information that was gathered for my study. The next section explains the framework for data selection for analysis, as well as the data analysis choices that were made.

4.9. Framework for data selection and analysis

This section has two main objectives. Firstly, it aims to explain how the data was organised and chosen for analysis as well as the rationale behind it. Secondly, it illustrates the methods for data analysis that were chosen, and the rationale behind it based on the methodological design of this study.

4.9.1. Data Selection

Qualitative research calls for multiple open-ended sources of information for data collection and production where participants are to speak or act spontaneously towards the topics being researched (Bryman, 2015; Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2019). These authors also state the importance of the researcher's goal, since it is the researcher who will have the responsibility of organising and making sense of the data which will inform the study. This research is no different. As a result of the data production process, an important amount of data was gathered. Table 4 below, gives a summary of all material collected, taking into consideration that all fieldwork interventions were audio recorded and filmed, and that all written materials developed by the students and researcher were kept as well[24].

[24] For more information on how the data was documented and stored, refer to sections 4.3.5. and 4.6.7.

Table 4. Data Collected

Fieldwork Activity	Minutes of video	Minutes of audio[25]	Written material	Others
Focus Group 1: Establishing the Reference Group	56 minutes	111 minutes	Group agreement, basic rules, project questions	Researcher's diary
Workshop 1	113 minutes	376 minutes	Participants' workbook	Researcher's diary, 15 photos
Workshop 2	216 minutes	741 minutes	Participants' workbook	Researcher's diary, 13 photos
Workshop 3	123 minutes	460 minutes	Participants' workbook	Researcher's diary
Workshop 4	90 minutes	460 minutes	Participants' workbook	Researcher's diary, 11 photos
In-depth Life Story Interviews	705 minutes	833 minutes	Consent forms - Participants	Interview guide
Workshop 5	106 minutes	345 minutes	Participants' workbook	Researcher's diary
Workshop 6	206 minutes	172 minutes	Participants' workbook	65 photos
Narratives and Book planning	No video	No audio	Narratives, title boards/voting, 'workshops for audience' written proposals	8 photos
Project presentation	73 minutes	No audio	Book Photocopied material of planned workshops.	All written material used in workshops, folder with workshops for the Spanish teacher, 142 photos
Debrief (Focus Group 2)	94 minutes	168 minutes	No material	
Total	**1,782 minutes** **Approx. 30 hours**	**3,666 minutes** **Approx. 61 hours**	N/A	N/A

[25] Two to four audio recorders were used in each workshop, therefore they can easily double video times.

Table 4 shows the total amount of information collected among all types of media used. It must be taken into account that four audio recorders were used for workshops, as small group discussions needed to take place. This meant that for every hour of group work and video, there are 4 hours of audio that give account of each of the group's conversations. The fieldwork plan for the number of sessions and objectives was clearly established before it started. However, each session design and development was dealt with in-situ, sometimes responding to factors outside my control, such as unexpected school schedule changes, room availability and group dynamics. In addition to this, all workshops were developed for this research in particular, and as with any class plan, every workshop needed to be flexible enough to adapt and change as the circumstances dictated. For these reasons, a major effort was made to record most of the fieldwork experience, in order not to risk loss of information that could have been fundamental for data analysis.

Notwithstanding, I needed to make a decision about data analysis, but time constraints, among other factors, did not allow for all material to be considered as data[26]. Creswell and Creswell (2018) point out different aspects that need to be taken into consideration when carrying out qualitative research. Unlike quantitative research, where there is a high value in having large quantities of data, these authors point out the need for aggregating qualitative data into smaller groups and themes that can make the analysis manageable. Therefore, Creswell and Creswell (2018) call researchers to examine and select from the qualitative data gathered, which they refer to as 'rich and dense', to achieve a more grounded analysis (p. 192).

Considering the foregoing, I took three factors into consideration when I selected the material that would count as data and hence, be used for analysis for this study. The first factor was related to time constraints; the second one was related to the participants' input about the information they wanted to make public; lastly, the third was related to the methodological design proposed. In terms of time constraints, it was important to choose information that could be analysed properly and in depth in the time frame set for

[26] It is important to clarify that having selected material to analyse that would best help answer the research question, does not mean that any unused material should be regarded as irrelevant. All the data production and collection process was necessary to attain the results that were presented and all data, therefore, serves a relevant function within this process.

my studies. In addition to this, the costs in time associated with transcribing or listening repeatedly to all the material would have been too high.

The participants had the power to make decisions about which parts of their work would be published for the small press book that would be given to them and the school. I considered it unethical to use written material that they had decided to keep private for one or more reasons (unfinished work, privacy, or not being happy with the result, among others), given they own the authorship rights and are decision makers within the research process itself, as stated on their consent forms. Finally, it was also important for me to choose material that would allow me to develop a data analysis framework that mixed more than one qualitative analysis method, in such a way that the data coming from Arts-based research and social sciences methods could be triangulated and thoroughly analysed.

Taking into consideration the previous, the following information was considered for data analysis for this research study:

- ***Reflective Narratives***: All participants wrote a narrative reflecting on three basic themes: (1) expectations and outcomes of their participation in the project; (2) perceptions of the group they worked with throughout the fieldwork; (3) reflections about themselves in relation to their creative work. Although this is one of the last pieces of collected data (being the project presentation and delivery last), it provides a starting point to answer two of the research questions at hand regarding the probability of exploring identity of self and others through a creative writing intervention[27]. It is also a piece of writing that was published, and therefore public, for all participants. Hence, it allows a holistic view of the project since all 15 pieces can be analysed for common themes.
- ***Interviews***: All students were interviewed. Given the interview's narrative structure, it became an important data artefact to (1) support the analysis of each

[27] RQ1: How does a short term creative writing programme within a school context help explore adolescents' identity formation? And RQ2: How is this creative writing programme perceived by the participants?

participant's creative writing project, as they give cues and explanations about their work and experience around it; and (2) an understanding of social interactions that have shaped their sense of identity. Given the openness of the interview questions, participants were free to explore their life in terms of what they considered relevant to who they are today. Thus, the interviews provided relevant information to be able to look at the identity themes and topics emerging from their creative work without risking over or under-interpreting it. Interviews were used throughout the analysis process to accompany and triangulate the analysis of the creative work, and therefore useful to approach all three research questions[28].

- ***Creative writing project***: This is the main data artefact. It includes all pieces of writing the students chose to share with each other and make public for others to be able to read. Although each workshop provided structure and themes, the content was free for them to choose and develop in their writing. This research aims to use creative writing as data to inform research whilst being supported in its analysis with the authors' voices from their interviews and narratives, therefore, relevant to properly answer research questions 1 and 3 (See footnote 28 below).

- ***Researcher's diary:*** Among the gathered information, the researcher's diary was used as a tool for reflection when reporting the findings with the intention of contributing to the validity of the analysis, as Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommend, and to comment on how the results might be shaped by my own experiences and background, which are described in this diary.

These pieces of data represent both the social and the creative aspects of my research. They are also three pieces of data that allow the interplay of analysis methods (see next section 4.9.2.), hence contributing to the study's validity (triangulating information from different sources), and reliability (comparing codes among data gathered; having enough

[28] RQ1: How does a short term creative writing programme within a school context help explore adolescents' identity formation? RQ2: How is this creative writing programme perceived by the participants? And RQ3: What aspects of adolescents' identity formation are portrayed through their creative writing?

information to achieve theoretical saturation) (Bryman, 2016; Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2019).

The analysis to answer the research questions at hand could have also been answered by analysing the workshops and focus groups' audio visual material, which together with the narratives, they make part of the creative writing programme as a whole. All workshops and focus groups were necessary to allow the development of the final book they created and published. However, choosing to listen and transcribe the material of each workshop not only would have been time consuming (approximately 1,560 minutes of audio data), but it would also require a more detailed discourse analysis approach of small conversations[29] that wouldn't necessarily reflect their general perceptions of the process as a whole. The conclusion of the focus groups where reflected in their narratives as well. Hence, the reflective narratives fit to provide a well-rounded answer to the research questions. For this reason, all additional data has been stored securely to be analysed at a later stage for future publications that can complement the findings of my PhD work.

Because of the participatory nature of the research, the creative material that was not published was not used for analysis as it is material that remains confidential between participants and researcher. These materials are securely stored and will be for up to a year after the dissertation is accepted to then be destroyed. Deciding not to use the audio and visual material of the workshops meant I was not able to do a detailed analysis of small changes in interactions, support shown when sharing stories with each other, possible additional conversations around their creative pieces, and looking at their leadership roles when presenting the project to their community, among other emerging data. Because these material might have complemented the findings and analysis, they will be securely stored to be used and analysed for future publications and conference papers resulting from my PhD[30].

[29] For 'small stories' research and analysis, see Georgakopoulou (2017a, 2017b) usually aligned with narrative analysis practices to understand narrative construction and other themes like relationships of power or construction of gender, more in line with micro-constructionist views.
[30] See section 4.6.7. for data protection and consent forms on Appendices A and B for more information on data management after the PhD thesis.

In order to answer my research question and taking into account the creative and social aspects of the data, two analysis methodologies were chosen to provide a sound, triangulated analysis of the data: thematic analysis and narrative analysis, which will be looked at in the following section.

4.9.2. Data Analysis

This section aims to explain the two data analysis methods that were used to work with the selected data: thematic and narrative analysis. Despite selecting raw data to work with, there was still a large amount of it. The interviews data included over 13 hours of audio, and 183 pages of transcribed data. Transcriptions were done single spaced and typed clean-verbatim. Because my research is focused on narrative identity, rather than individual discourse markers, not all pauses, laughter or gestures (if video was used) were transcribed. Raw data from the participants' reflective narratives corresponded to 11 pages from the published book (p. 77-88) and their creative work corresponded to 54 pages of the book, excluding introduction and pages written by me to introduce their work, as well as references and images.

Initially, I intended to use NVivo for data analysis, given the software allows researchers to easily create codes and categories for analysis. I knew I wanted to find patterns in the stories and reflective narratives they developed, as well as in their interviews. However, NVivo soon proved unhelpful to the process. The participants' reflections on a 19-week fieldwork started to look too fragmented, and different codes could not be properly analysed as the general context of what the student was reflecting on got easily lost. I have been very insistent with the need to respect the participants' voices as well as avoiding under or over-interpreting the information. Fragmenting their stories and experiences into words or short sentences and taking them out of the student's context, was not fair to their work, and did not allow me to do mine properly. Therefore, I decided to focus more on narrative enquiry techniques, as Lal, Suto and Ungar (2012) state:

> In narrative enquiry, the researcher strives to locate theory within a participant's narrative and keep participant stories intact. A story is considered to be a unit of

> analysis whereas grounded theory approach, a story is coded and then fragments based on one or several categories of emerging interest. (p. 11)

Although having the data digitised allowed me to quickly find information within the raw data I was using, I found it more useful for my own analysis process, to use other programmes like Word or Excel and manual coding using colours, post its, and personal notes across all data (see Appendix R for an example of my data analysis). Using narrative inquiry techniques was most useful for looking at their creative work, as well as their life-story interviews. However, I realised as themes emerged particularly from reflective narratives, that thematic analysis, rather than grounded theory coding and recoding process, could also be useful. Therefore, my data analysis framework needed to allow me to observe, detail and triangulate data coming from the reflective narratives, and from the students' work and interviews.

Bruner (1987/2004) states we build our sense of self through autobiographical accounts of our lives. When we face crisis, changes or moments of incoherence, it is through these autobiographical accounts that we look for ways of understanding them for both our identity and how we perceive others around us (Frost *et al.*, 2010). Sarbin (1986) bases the definition of narrative analysis upon this same premise: people use stories to make sense of themselves and the world around them. This data analysis approach is derived from literary disciplines, usually involving analysis of both the structure and content of texts in order to deepen understanding around them (Lal, Suto and Ungar, 2012; Griffin and May, 2018). However, it is relatively recent, that is in the past thirty years, that this approach has started to be used within the social sciences in the search for better understanding of qualitative accounts of data from participants in different areas such as medicine, psychology, sociology and education, among others (Griffin and May, 2018). The main objective of narrative analysis approaches, is to provide a better understanding of written or spoken narratives. Frost *et al.* (2010) state '[Narrative analysis] is thus especially useful in the study of formation, reformulation, and maintenance of identity since this approach gives prominence to human agency and imagination.' (p. 445).

McAdams (2012) defines two forms of narrative analysis: either in a context of *discovery,* or in a context of *justification.* The latter refers to narrative analysis that is done as means to test hypotheses, using validated coded themes and that usually involves statistical analysis. The former is when narratives are explored openly for broad patterns, or emerging themes or images in order to generate knowledge about a topic of interest. Narratives are explored in depth, and they are not broken into utterances or key words, but broader themes:

> (...) a theme is typically drawn as an inference from an extended passage of text. In the context of discovery, it is not necessary to specify strict or formal parameters for determining themes. In order to cast the widest possible exploratory net, the researcher needs to read the narrative passages with an open and discerning mind, searching for ideas that strike the ear as especially salient, recurrent, surprising, or potentially revealing (...) (McAdams, 2012, p. 18)

I chose this discovery approach for my research study. Since Gergen and Gergen's (1988) self in narrative and Gergen's (2009) relational being theory do not offer specific recommendations for action in narrative analysis (see end of section 2.4.2.), McAdams's (2012) approaches can be looked at as a guide to explore creative narratives in adolescents' identity formation.

As McAdams (2012) notes, observing broader themes within the data allows for a wider exploration of the narratives, therefore my coding was further enhanced by employing thematic analysis. Clarke and Braun (2017) propose a post-positivist thematic analysis approach, particularly developed for qualitative analysis. The authors define the aim of thematic analysis 'is not simply to summarize the data content, but to identify, and interpret, key, but not necessarily all, features of the data, guided by the research question.' (Clarke and Braun, 2017, p. 297). This particular way of analysing data makes the researcher an active participant to the analysis process. In addition to this, it also opens space for flexibility as it can be used with a varied arrange of data collection methods: 'TA can be used to identify patterns within and across data in relation to participants' lived experience, views and perspectives, and behavior and practices; 'experiential' research which seeks to understand what participants' think, feel, and do.'

(Clarke and Braun, 2017, p. 297). Therefore, I chose this additional data analysis approach to delve deeper into their project narratives and be able to capture my participants' views, thoughts and feelings towards the experience and their creative work.

Braun and Clarke (2012) state inductive thematic analysis is much closer to grounded theory as the codes and themes are driven by the data, yet they argue it is difficult to do this since the researcher's experiences and epistemological stands are usually driving the analysis.

> (…) inductive TA often is experiential in its orientation and essentialist in its theoretical framework, assuming a knowledgeable world and "giving voice" to experiences and meanings of that world, as reported in the data. Deductive TA is often critical in its orientation and constructionist in its theoretical framework, examining how the world is put together (i.e. constructed) and the ideas and assumptions that inform the data are gathered. These correspondences are not given, however, or necessary. Consistency and coherence of the overall framework and analysis is what's important. (Braun and Clarke, 2012, p. 59)

As this research is guided by a constructionist framework that does not negate the researcher as part of the data that is produced, I combined deductive and inductive approaches to thematic analysis. My project narratives had questions to help the students write their personal reflections, and my research questions as well as the questions in the narratives already established particular themes of interest for this research. However, unexpected themes and codes continued to emerge as I went through it.

4.10. Conclusion

While chapters two and three explained the theoretical, ontological and epistemological underpinnings of my research, this chapter explains how that theory translates into a mixed qualitative research design that responds to the aims of my study. I have provided a detailed account of how the research design translated into instruments for data production with a particular focus on the creative writing workshops that guided the nineteen weeks of field work. Other elements explained for data production include the researcher's diary, project-based learning structure and interviews and focus groups. An

overview of the setting, and participants of my study is provided, as well as an analysis of the ethical considerations of my study. Finally, a short recount of the field work is given, as well as an explanation for what data was selected for analysis and a framework used to analyse it. The next two chapters will present the findings of the study. Chapter five will analyse the different elements of the participatory research design that were found valuable to explore identity formation; while chapter six will analyse the main aspects of identity formation that emerged from the participants' creative writing work.

Chapter 5. Creative writing as a tool for enabling identity formation

5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented the methodological approach to the design I created for this study, as well as how it was carried out. As previously discussed throughout Chapter 5 on methods and methodology, the 6 workshops were designed to explore certain areas of relational identity formation, including the self, the other, the collective, those different from them, and conflict as an opportunity for transformation. In this chapter, I seek to analyse, not the content of the workshops, but how different constructionist aspects of this creative writing programme were designed, and their value to aid exploration of identity formation. Therefore, this section aims to answer two of the three research questions in my study:

1. How does a short term participatory creative writing programme within a school context help explore adolescents' identity formation?
2. How is this creative writing programme perceived by the participants?

In order to do this, I will focus on two particular elements of the research design: (1) the social and participatory aspects of the methodology, and (2) the role of the researcher as a trusted facilitator. These two aspects were fundamental for the fieldwork to be successful, aiding identity exploration of the students and others around them. In terms of the social and participatory elements of the methodology, I will argue the methodology became a tool for authentic self-expression. This, facilitated participants to show themselves openly, and therefore, see and have a high level of trust with each other. The workshops, therefore, facilitated empathy and trust bonds between participants. Regarding the role of the researcher as a trusted facilitator, in this chapter I will argue in favour of acknowledging bias and lack of neutrality towards the fieldwork as fundamental to establishing a meaningful relationship, and fostering positive outcomes in the methodology as a whole. In order to explore these two aspects, I will be looking at the students' reflective narratives, their interviews, and some of their written work.

I will conclude this chapter by showing how the trusted relationship with the facilitator together with the participatory elements, led to a positive evaluation of the programme as a space that allows and fosters creativity, authenticity, empathy and understanding of others and oneself. I will conclude this chapter by making a case for trust as the central element for the success of the methodological design as a whole.

5.2. A social-participative methodology: Creative writing as a tool to explore authenticity in identity formation

After all the workshops were completed, I asked my participants to choose the written pieces they wanted to publish, as well as to write a reflective narrative about what the process had been like for them since we began working together. In these reflective narratives, the students reflected on four main aspects: their initial expectations and learning outcomes; their reflections on working with that particular group of students; their pieces of writing and what they believed they reflected about themselves; and their thoughts on the project as a whole as a tool to explore identity. Their reflections reveal that 'socialising their writing' is a way for them to establish meaningful and open connections with others outside of the project.

All of my participants were aware that a book would be printed with the work they chose to publish. After following some basic guidelines, it was up to them what they wanted to write and share in each workshop in terms of content, and therefore, up to them to choose the pieces they wanted to share and make public. In their reflective narratives, when asked about how they would like to be perceived through those chosen pieces, the need for being understood by the other was identified as important. After reviewing their narratives, **authenticity** was central to their reflections, where their participation, writings, and ways of interacting with the material and each other were central to exploring it, expressing it, and communicating it to others through their pieces, their interview, or with each other. The reflective narratives on the project show what Gergen (2011) describes as one of the propositions of the relational self: authenticity, or discourse of the self, is ***performative***: '(…) it is not that one has emotions, a thought, or a memory,

so much as one *does* them.' (Gergen, 2011, p. 647). In this particular case, participants perform authenticity through their writing, and they expect to communicate their authentic selves through them: generally, through emotion, and through their personal interests. Isabel sums it up when she writes:

> *About the pieces I chose to publish, I hope that when others read them they become intrigued a little bit by them. I hope they manage to feel what I felt when I wrote each of those texts, that they can see in some cases what we, the 'youth', want to transmit: that we want to be heard and understood, what hurts us and what makes us happy, what we are afraid of, and what brings us peace…* (Isabel, Reflective Narrative, p. 84)

Here, Isabel emphasises how socialising their writing is a communication tool with others, one that seeks to show a truly raw and emotional face of who they are. She links her pieces to her own identity, as a way to portray herself in them for others to really understand who she is, what moves her, almost as if her pieces are an escape from a bounded self she has been showing to the world: what others expect, or want to see of her. Her pieces are her way out of that cage, she wants to socialise her emotions, her fragility and strength. She also generalises it to other participants around her, into a communal need of being seen for who they 'really' are. Her thoughts reflect three major tendencies that can be identified in the students' reflections around their chosen pieces: the role of emotions; being able to be authentic; and being open with what matters to them that others should know.

I will begin this section by discussing three areas of this performative authenticity: authenticity as a general purpose to their written pieces, authenticity through emotion, and authenticity through general interests. Then I will continue with another section to discuss how this authenticity, through group work and working with each other, enabled them to develop and show empathy towards each other, and see differences among themselves as valuable.

5.2.2. Writing for authenticity: An open and raw sense of self.

Six of the participants made reference to their writings as being that door into their most vulnerable or raw selves. These students chose to publish writings that showcased them for who they are, and not for who they are expected to be. The writing seems to act as a tool not for self-discovery, but for others to view themselves as they actually are. It allows them to be open and vulnerable, to others who might be their peers or readers. Tusitala, Naomi, Fernanda, Maggie and Andrés, together with Isabel, mention this aspect:

> *About the writings I chose to publish, I feel every piece represents a part of each person. Their aura is reflected in each letter. Based on that, when others read about me, I want to be able to say they discover a piece of my life, the most transparent part, a part of me.* (Tusitala, Reflective Narrative, p. 80)
>
> *From the pieces I chose to publish, I hope that when they read them, they perceive me as an authentic woman who likes to imagine things and that, through her stories, she likes to speak of her life and personality.* (Naomy, Reflective Narrative, p. 82)
>
> *About my work, I hope to be perceived for the way I express myself and in how I literally am, because there is a part of me in them.* (Fernanda, Reflective Narrative, p. 86)
>
> *My writings helped me to experiment with my own abilities to participate and talk about my own points of view and opinions.* (Maggie, Reflective Narrative, p. 86)
>
> *Through my writings, I hope that others can read them and know what a person is like and that they perceive me any way they want because I can't control others to make them think like me. What I can say is that my writings allowed me to get things off my chest and get to know myself more deeply (…).* (Andrés, Reflective Narrative, p. 87)

Although each of these four students speaks about using their writing to reflect who they are, there are different approaches to the same topic. Tusitala, for example, sees everyone's writings, not only hers, as authentic material. Her writings intend to reflect a very pure, raw part of herself, and she concludes this after mentioning *'Their aura is reflected in each letter'*, transferring this transparency to everyone's work. For Tusitala, the method was a window to get to know her peers as they 'really are'. By listening to their work, working with them, and doing her own pieces, she generalises her experience

to other participants by saying *'I feel every piece represents a part of each person'*. Tusitala generalises her experience to all other writers, mainly after the experience of having read and heard her peers' pieces. During her interview, I asked her if there were elements about herself reflected in her own writing:

> *Camila:* *Do you think there are (...) elements of yourself that are reflected in your writings?*
>
> *Tusitala:* *I say that in every person there's something about themselves because everyone wants to be noticed one way or another, anonymity or no anonymity, so we all reflect what we are, yes? Even if we are writing about Naomy[31] in the first person, there will always be something from us in it.*

Here Tusitala steps out of her own writing to generalise her experience of revealing herself through her writing to everyone else doing it as well. For Tusitala, writing is a tool for showing parts of oneself, as well as a means to understand the identity of others. Even when she writes about someone else's experience using the first-person point of view, she has had to listen to that person and use her own feelings, imagination, and empathy to be able to do so. Regarding this third workshop about writing the other, Tusitala expresses the following:

> *Camila:* *Tell me a little bit about this experience. Here you worked with Naomy, and I can see you are clearly close friends. What were you thinking about when you were developing it? How was this observation exercise for you? The exercise of listening to each other?*
>
> *Tusitala:* *Well, it was very much to the point. Because what I wanted was to reflect her life in two parts:* [referring to **Figure 3** below] *here she is full of colour, but she's crying; here she is full of darkness, but she's normal, neutral. In some way, this is her life, (…) because the way she loves is different from the rest. When you love someone, you are affectionate, caring, tender. She isn't. She is very sparing in her feelings, very cold, very Cortázar. There is a shield that protects her, as the text I wrote indicates. And it was amazing to listen to Naomy, because for the first time in my life I could listen to her in all seriousness, speaking about something serious, without having to mutter one word. (…)*

[31] Naomy is a participant in the study. Tusitala and Naomy, as very close friends, decided to work together for workshop 3 (Writing the other). They exchanged an event they lived together and told each other their side of the story. Each of them wrote the other's version using a first person point of view.

Camila: *Which is the writing piece you are the proudest of so far? (…)*
Tusitala: *The one about Naomy*

Camila: *The one about Naomy, why?*
Tusitala: *Because feeling… I mean, the other one* [I'm proud of] *is the piece about me in third person point of view, being in touch with myself is easy. Because it's me, yes? I'm always in touch with myself. Whereas, feeling that other person, I mean, without being that person and only by looking at her in the eye, is very complicated. And feeling proud of me and of her is something that I will never forget.*
Camila: *And the most challenging one so far?*
Tusitala: *The most challenging one?*
Camila: *Yes.*
Tusitala: *That one, as well.*

'(…) here she is full of colour, but she's crying; here she is full of darkness, but she's normal, neutral. In some way, this is her life (…)'

Figure 4. Tusitala's portrait of Naomy[32]

[32] Workshop 3 'Writing about the other' (Appendix H) included a creative activity in a 'draw-and-write' approach (Lyon, 2020) where students wrote an anecdote of a peer after observing making portraits of each other (similar exercise to what happens in the short story read (See Table 2 and Appendix N – Axolotl by Julio Cortázar)). Those who chose to publish this piece, in agreement with their peer, chose to publish it with the portraits. Also see Table 1 and footnote 22 in section 4.7.2. for use of drawings in workshops.

This workshop of writing the other, even if she was working with one of her closest friends, was challenging for her. She felt the responsibility of acknowledging her friend's experience and emotions in a way she had not done before. This workshop also enabled new ways of seeing each other, despite having spent so much time together before the workshops happened. The process of observing, painting, listening and writing the other becomes a powerful experience to create empathy bonds with others, in the need to be respectful of writing someone else's story. There is an understanding that others are sharing intimate experiences in a safe space, where there is a need of putting as much of themselves in the care of another's story, as they have put in telling their own to someone else. This is what Tusitala referred to in her reflective narrative when she mentions all written pieces carry pieces of the writers themselves. This is an experience that eleven more students had during this and other workshops and reported in their narratives, where the experience itself led to recognising a deeper, more authentic side to their peers, beyond what they get to see on the everyday school interactions.

Naomy and Fernanda, similar to Andrés but different from Tusitala, only speak of their own individual work and how they took the opportunity to use it to show their authentic selves. The workshops and spaces we created provided a space for them to explore more about their own feelings, expectations and ways of approaching the world around them. For them, the workshops and spaces we had together enabled them to explore authenticity with themselves, using their pieces to explore their own creativity, thoughts, ways of seeing the world around them and their own values. During her interview, Fernanda usually refers to her own experiences, referring to how important it was to find herself in some of the stories and pieces, and at the same time, how difficult it was to step away from that into understanding others:

Camila: [In this first workshop] *you wrote a short narrative on a 'What if' question of your choice, and we then read the story about the princess and the dragon, and there we had to write like a fairy tale but changing one element of the story…*

Fernanda: *I really liked that short story because it was like the dragon trying to protect the princess, but the princess didn't want to be protected. It was similar to*

what happens to me with my dad because he is also like super overprotective with me, so something like that. I really felt identified with that story.

Camila: *(…) In this* [fifth] *workshop we had to write about someone different from you, but as if that person were you, meaning using the first person point of view. What happened in that workshop?*

Fernanda: *I didn't do it. But yesterday I was thinking about it and well, someone opposite to me would be a negative person that even the smallest thing that happens, they already start crying and all these and that, so, well, I actually like to see the positive side to everything, even if everything is bad, you equally have to see even a tiny positive side to it.*

Camila: *Would you like to write that story? Is it something that you would be interested in?*

Fernanda: [Nods a 'no']

Camila: *Why?*

Fernanda: *Because it would be like very disinterested, because since it is something opposite to me, then no.*

Camila: *So in this case, putting yourself in someone else's place, who's too different from you, then, in this case, it would be pretty difficult.*

Fernanda: *Yes.*

Camila: *Which writing exercise has been the most difficult one for you?*

Fernanda: *Write about someone else's situation as if it were mine.*

Camila: *This fifth workshop? Or the one we did before with the painting?*

Fernanda: *This one.*

Camila: *Why was it challenging?*

Fernanda: *Because since I haven't been through that experience, then you could say it's something like, weird, because I wasn't in that moment, so I have to imagine more about everything that could have happened, so that's the reason.*

Fernanda enjoys her writing when she can use it to explore her own world and see where it can take her, she finds it easier to approach exercises where she feels she can touch base with her own experiences and ways of seeing the world. Her sense of self seems strong and defined, and stepping away from that comfort zone is difficult for her. Authenticity is showing who she truly is through those pieces she decided to get involved with and develop, rather than trying to portray others. When I asked her how she would define herself, she turned back to her metaphor which she published in the book (see

below), by saying '*Remember what we did with the categories? (…) I chose sweets, so I wrote I come trying to satisfy your appetite, but in the end, I end up completing you. (…) I want to be recognised (…) for being brave, applied and hardworking.'*

Metaphor by Fernanda

I'm something simple,
Something that looks so normal.
But when I reach your inner self,
I'm something else:
Something really sweet,
Even more: Purposeful.

I'm that which arrives
Trying to fill your appetite
And ends up filling your soul.
(Workshop 4: Metaphors as poetry, p. 52)

She defines herself as sweet, authentic, complete, enough in her own nature, and being a strong presence in others' lives. She defines her presence as one that others might feel, once they have it, they realise how much it was missing from their lives. Having, therefore, a creative writing 'unworkshop' approach (Harper, 2019) allows participants to become more confident with their own creative writing abilities without the fear of being judged on the idea of being good enough or not. In addition to this, an 'unworkshop' approach helped the students to explore their own personal stories and writing in a safe space, safe enough for them to choose to do this in a shared space with their peers. This methodology allows their sense of identity to permeate in their creative writing, where they can express their inner selves freely, and hence, show themselves as authentic. During her interview, Naomy mentions how she perceives this methodology, and how some stories and exercises have helped her explore her authentic self and not feel judged:

Camila: *And then you had to write a short story about something changing in your daily routine…*

Naomy: *Ah! Yes. I wrote that I met with an alien. My mum helped me create it because she wrote like a 500-page book, so like, she imagines a lot and that helped me. (…) I imagined something different happening in my day from*

what usually happens. I love to go to the kitchen to cook. So I imagined I would come into the kitchen to do what I love most. So when I am about to come in, I find an alien, and that is like something I would like to see. So, yes, it would be like something weird happening to me.

Camila: *And when you say your mum helped you to write this because she wrote a book, how did she help you? (…)*

Naomy: *No, she said like "what would you like your story to be about?" and I said, "I want it to be about this, so help me find the words, I mean, so it doesn't sound always like 'and then, and then, and then." So I would tell her what I wanted to see happening, and she would help me find other words. (…) So she said we should imagine what I would like to see happening and I said I wanted to find the alien, but to be very shocking at the beginning, like wow! and then I would befriend him and he would take me to know his world and he would know mine. So he would spend the day with me and get to know each other's worlds, and super cool, it was the best!*

Camila: *The 'you' you describe in this story, is you? Or a different character?*

Naomy: *Well, partly it's me because I love to be sociable. Like when I meet someone and 'oh! That's so cool!" (…)*

Camila: *Regarding the writings you have developed, do you think they have impacted the way you see yourself or how or how you see others?*

Naomy: *Yes, obviously. Because, for example, one writes and like, realises that you are describing yourself more. And you are like… wow, this is how I am?*

Naomy used some of her pieces and stories to write and discover more about herself, and finds herself surprised about her own pieces, particularly her metaphor, where she becomes music that allows her to be authentic, pure and free of being who she is:

Metaphor by Naomy

She turned on the music
To turn off her life for a while.
This took her to infinity,
Between two souls,
As she feels her loneliness
Suddenly becomes full.

She enters a magical world
Where she is free to be and feel,

Since it is a straightforward art:
Because it goes in through your ears
And goes straight to the heart.
(Workshop 4: Metaphors as poetry, p. 52)

Naomy uses the fourth workshop (Writing the Self) as a space to explore her own story, and rewrite herself in ways that are even surprising to her. Elements of loneliness she has not expressed before in the workshops come out, as well as her love for music and how it allows her to feel free from expectations and connect with her own pure inner self. Both Naomy and Fernanda mention in their narrative reflections their individual goals and experiences, while Andrés talks about his individual experience in relation to the reader.

Andrés feels writing was his way to *'get things off* [his] *chest'* and '*get to know* [himself] *more deeply'* (Reflective Narrative, p. 87), and therefore, his pieces should reflect who he really is. However, he is the only one who refers to the reader as someone he cannot really know or control and leaves it to him or her to decide how his writings should be interpreted. Despite this, he is not afraid to show his pieces of writing as a way to put himself out there as clearly as possible, with his 'truths'. During his interview, Andrés refers to the fourth workshop (Writing the Self) as the most challenging one:

Camila: *How did you do that week with the workshops?*

Andrés: *Well, it was… so to speak, since I wrote about rap, it was something like, too painful, because the songs… rap, although they tell us it's ugly, in reality, it isn't if you put yourself to the task to listen to what it really says, they would realise what it's actually talking about. It was very hard… about the way I felt… very emotional.*

Camila: *The workshop of writing about yourself…*

Andrés: *It's like… I let go. I mean, in writing you can write what you want, so I got everything off my chest, and that is really beautiful.*

Camila: *So it was painful to put out things that are personal to you.*

Andrés: *Yes, getting the truth out.*

Camila: *But at the same time beautiful because you get the opportunity to express how you feel, how you are, in that precise moment?*

Andrés: *Yes.*

Andrés got the opportunity to use his own personal interests, like rap music, to write about who he really is, *'getting the truth out'*, while at the same time using a symbol that has been judged by others as ugly, and making it beautiful for others to read, despite having no control over what their readers might think about rap music. Andrés decided to publish his metaphor, which he refers to as the most difficult piece of writing, as a way of putting himself out to the reader to be acknowledged in all his rawness and authenticity:

Metaphor by Andrés

Rap.
I think about its lyrics
And I feel like if I was
Inside the song.

Sometimes it's so true like it isn't.
It can encompass several people
Making them feel like part of a cruel world,
But so true, so bitter and unfair
That we would like
To change the circumstances of life
That could have happened to us at some point,
And at the same time,
Unburden in it.

Feel a world of fantasy,
And after listening to its lyrics,
Coming back to the world we know
-which is repugnance and misery in itself-
And the world is like that because of the people
That do not know how to value others.
(Workshop 4: Metaphors as poetry, p. 53)

Through this metaphor, Andrés becomes an insider, where he gets to experience first-hand, the cruelty, bitterness and unfairness of the world that surrounds him. He does not want to submit to that reality, and his own lyrics become a vehicle for releasing and showing his true frustrations he cannot vent anywhere else. He finishes his metaphor by coming back to that world where he cannot always speak his mind, a world with 'others'

who do not value him and others around him. Rap is his vehicle to his inner, darker, more authentic self. He uses this metaphor and other exercises in the workshop to write (and publish) a final piece where he describes himself using the third person point of view:

> *I saw him there, so lonely, but pretending to be fine. He unburdens with the music he listens to, feeling Loneliness at his side, but with friends who are there for him. Sometimes it is shit to be at home. But when he gets to school, he renews himself thinking everything can change. When he comes home, everything has passed. He tidies the house and gets ready to train. When training, he alleviates all his problems, since he is doing what he loves. Football is his relief since he decides to get better and go far with it.* (Andrés, Chapter 4, Story, p. 56)

Here, Andrés mentions music, school, sports and friends, as the escape and relief from his home life. He feels trapped and unable to feel at ease there, and looks for ways to fight that loneliness and have a sense of purpose. He shows himself openly to the reader, giving him or her details into his private life and telling who he really wants to be, his true feelings, and what keeps him afloat. Workshops like this one, enabled Andrés to show his authentic self for a reader to interpret at his will, which, however, will not stop him from continuing to explore and express who he is. As he concludes in his interview:

Camila: *What inspires you to write, in general?*

Andrés: *Sometimes… for example, I wrote a book in Sixth grade that is titled 'The Dog and the Princess', and it's not that I like to write…*

Camila: *Did you write it as part of a class, or for yourself?*

Andrés: *It was for a class, but it was also for the National Short Story Competition, and well, I wrote it but never submitted it, so it just stayed there. Is not that much that I like to write, but the opportunity that you came and gave us immediately the ease to put out there what we can't express to others.*

This methodology of creative writing, linked to the topical exploration of themselves, the group and others, becomes a tool for the students to communicate their own authentic selves which are not necessarily shown to everyone or have been kept to themselves for some time. The workshops enabled them to socialise and open their authentic selves to others both in and outside the participant group. The workshops are important to explore, strengthen and communicate their own sense of self, learn about others in the process,

and to be brave enough, or bold enough to make it public. Participants speak of their pieces of writing as reflections of who they are, as well as a reflection of their emotions, that they cannot see as separate from them. Authenticity is not just about how each of the participants writes about themselves, their emotions, circumstances and experiences, but also involves the fact that they are doing so in relation to others around them. Even Fernanda or Naomy, who reflect about using their writing for themselves, still include in their pieces how being who they are touches other people's lives, and they want to be seen. Authenticity is not an individual, isolated concept, but built in relationship to their particular circumstances, and closely related to their emotional states, as I will discuss below.

The writings and interview fragments shown above reflect what Saavedra Rey (2017) argues in favour of literary creation: it is a way to promote bildung (becoming what one is) through self-observation and reflection. Through their writing, Tusitala discovers how others become and show who they are through language; Fernanda and Naomy use their writing to explore and confirm aspects of themselves. Naomy, through self-observation, allows herself to be surprised by seeing herself in a new light. Andrés reflects and observes his own reality, finding in this methodology a space, as he said, to 'put out there what we can't express to others.' Their writings help them show and become what they are. These findings also reflect Lockney's (2012) approach to creative writing as art insofar as it engenders feelings, different ways of exploring ourselves, and brings new understandings.

Whitney (2017) advocates for authenticity in the writing classroom. She defined authenticity as doing things that reveal something real about the person and what they are doing. Among the four ways of bringing authenticity into the writing classroom, she discusses the role of the teacher and the importance of the teacher to lead by example when asking authenticity from their students. This happened particularly in workshop 4 when I asked the students to develop and write a narrative about themselves, and I created my own to be able to show them my process of creating a metaphor about myself. I spoke of myself as a puddle of water, and explored my feelings and ideas about

my teaching career and having to leave it behind to do this PhD, as teaching was and is, an important part of my identity:

> *When the storm comes,*
> *Everybody hides,*
> *But I am what remains.*
> *I am what survives.*
> *A proof of what happened.*
>
> *When they come out again,*
> *They can see their reflection in me.*
> *Children play with me,*
> *I become their accomplice*
> *by reflecting back their innocence.*
>
> *As the sun goes down*
> *I disappear with it.*
> *But hopefully not*
> *from the memories of those*
> *who spent their time with me…*
> (Camila Fuentes Díaz, unpublished)

After I shared my metaphor out loud with them, by allowing myself to be vulnerable, I helped them to explore their own vulnerabilities, and they were able to show their authentic selves through metaphor in a constructive social space. Whitney (2017) is right when she suggests we cannot ask from students what we are not willing to give. The process of sharing my own writing with them and making myself vulnerable, also allowed me to experience what they were about to experience in such a personal workshop, and therefore provide better support in the process. Empathy, as Broome (2009) states, is relational, built when both facilitator and participants focus on the process, and an environment of joint action and collaboration is fostered. Sharing my own work with them not only promotes different constructions of themselves, but also alternative ways of being a 'teacher' in the classroom.

5.2.3. Authenticity through emotion: relational self in action.

One-third of the participants considered the pieces they wrote were a reflection of their true emotions. The fact they could choose what to publish and share with peers and others, it was important for me to understand why they chose them and what they were expecting others to see or understand after reading them. The written exercises within the context of the workshops enabled participants to connect with emotions they believed important not just to define who they are, or carry forward their stories, but as a linking element with the reader. Communicating emotions seems one of the fundamental aspects to creating a genuine connection with the reader by being honest and true to who they are. Alejandra, Marian, Ariadna and Dany for example, reflected:

> *Regarding the pieces I chose to publish, I hope they feel the same emotions I wrote them with. That my written pieces reach their soul and heart. That they conquer and remain in their minds. Because in each encounter and in each workshop I learnt about topics that moved my soul and heart to the core (…).* (Alejandra, Reflective Narrative, p. 79)
>
> *About the pieces I chose, I hope that those who read them understand what I feel and how I express myself. There they can understand my sorrows and joys.* (Marian, Reflective Narrative, p. 81)
>
> *Regarding the pieces I chose, I hope that when reading them, others feel the passion with which I wrote them. They helped me discover sensations that no other human being had made me feel: only writing and reading, by writing and reading I came to notice them.* (Ariadna, Reflective Narrative, p. 85)
>
> *From my writings, I hope they can express what I feel, and that they can produce feelings no one else feels. I hope to share my feelings and joys through them.* (Dany, Reflective Narrative, p. 88)

In three of the four fragments, the participants are referring to the reader indistinctly by using pronouns like ‘they’, ‘them’ ‘those who…’ and ‘others’, and Dany does not even refer to the reader, but the long-lasting effect of her writings, independently of who reads them. This means the pieces they chose are an open door for anyone to read, see and comprehend, not just their peers, family or community. Students chose pieces that reflect and communicate emotions, not as inaccessible inner states that can only be understood

through actions, but as a way of relating with the reader. This would point in the direction of Burkitt's central thesis about emotion, which he defines as a mode of communication to establish relationships with others (Burkitt, 1997, p. 37). These emotional states to which the students are referring, arise in relation to the experiences they have gone through, mediated by the content they read, the pieces they wrote and the interactions they had during the time we were together, all which have inspired their work.

When reflecting on their published work, the participants also want to create a lasting emotional connection with the reader, claiming that, as young adults, they are not invisible. They expect their pieces to be like landmarks in the readers' minds. Expressions like '*reach their soul and heart', 'conquer and remain in their minds', 'they can understand my sorrows and joys',* and *'*[I hope] *they can produce feelings no one else has'* point to the fact that this particular method enables them to express that need of connecting with others, creating lasting empathic connections with their readers.

My findings, therefore, support Broome's (2009) principles of social construction of empathy, particularly two of them regarding the role of the facilitator. First, to focus on the process and not the result, and second, to provide space to talk about negative emotions without making it the primary focus. Regarding the first, by developing and focusing on a creative reading and writing methodology that took away all evaluative measures, I created the space for students to explore emotions more freely. Regarding the second, it was important to provide safe spaces for them to explore experiences that although emotionally difficult, could help them build on their resilience and connect with their readers. This empathic element in their narrative reflections are also evidence of one of Gergen and Gergen's (2006) narrative efficacy elements: *empathetic witnessing*, which states that an effective narrative created intimacy, in this case with the readers, by helping them witness what the author went through and experienced.

Further examples and explanations on how they portray their emotions in their pieces of writing will be explored in the next chapter.

5.2.4. A practical authentic expression of self: Their interests and passions.

Three students reflected on how their pieces of writing should be a window for their readers to understand what they like and are passionate about:

> *About me, I hope that through my writings they understand that I can express myself doing the things I like the most, like drawing, and that they see I really understand the others' situation, like what they go through, if they are good or bad experiences, and how they feel.* (Yuniok, Reflective Narrative, p. 82)

> *I hope to be known as a person who loves sports, like a person who always has the word 'success' in his mind.* (Mark, Reflective Narrative, p. 78)

> *Through my writings, I hope to be perceived as someone creative, that I love reading horror stories, that I like adrenaline and to be expectant of what's going to happen.* (Irene, Reflective Narrative, p. 83)

In Yuniok's case, two of the four pieces of writing he published, speak directly of his passion. The first one is a different fairy tale he wrote during Workshop 1 (Writing is in all of us), inspired by Odin Dupeyron's short story *Not the End: Life Isn't Over Until is Over: Chapter 1.* The second one, is from Workshop 4 (Writing about yourself), with the piece about himself written using the third person point of view:

> *On a very cold night, Odaí was lying on her backyard's lawn with her blue* ruana*, observing the beautiful sparkling night sky. Every night she dreamt about being in Paris as a designer, getting to know new places and living new experiences. But then she heard her father come home, a reminder he wouldn't let her follow her dreams.*
> *-Ah… you're home- she said disappointedly.*
> *As he came into the garden, her father said, -What are you doing out here so late? Tomorrow is your first day at the office. -*
> *Odaí got up and went to her room without saying a word. Her father, feeling desperate, said –I don't want you to suffer. I just want you to have an organised life. I don't want you to go through what I went through-.*
> *Odaí knew her father only wanted to protect her since he had lost his wife due to a long sickness; a time when he wasn't doing well financially and couldn't afford the treatments she needed. Since then, he promised himself he would always provide for Odaí. She looked up at her father and said, -Leave the past behind. You have protected me long enough. I want to live new experiences so, even if you don't agree, come alongside me in this journey. -*

> *And like that, father and daughter began a new life, fulfilling their dreams.* (Yuniok, A different fairy tale, p. 16)

> *Yuniok is a sad boy, tired of doing the same routine every day. He wanted to talk to his peers, but he wasn't that good at expressing himself; plus, he was afraid of what others might think of him. One day he decided to go to an Internet café. While he watched Anime, he decided to print his favourite characters, tracing them by hand. To be honest, he wasn't too great at it. But he didn't care and continued to trace them with his own style. After a while, he showed them to his peers and family. Most of them were surprised by his work since it was new to them. He felt motivated by the positive feedback about his art and decided to improve his technique since it is because of drawing that he could express his feelings and his thoughts to others.* (Yuniok, Chapter 4: Story, p. 54)

Yuniok, who designed the cover of *Life as a Book*, has had drawing as his way of getting out of routines in his life that he defines as monotonous and dragging: a means to escape. Through writing, he has been able to express his interests and wants to be seen for what he loves the most: drawing. During his interview, he mentions the following regarding these two pieces: *'I really liked it* [Workshop 1 – Fairy tale] *because when I changed the fairy tale, I would see myself as who I really want to be seen as. I don't want to stay in that place. She* [the character] *experiments ugly feelings.'*

Regarding the second piece, he mentions: '[I'm proudest of] *the one writing about myself (…) because it was a way of seeing who I was because I have always examined myself and it had been a while since I had done it, so I wanted to do it again.'* Yuniok uses his pieces to show his authentic self through his passion, which is drawing, and how this passion enables him to take a look at himself and others around them. In his first piece, he is able not only to talk about his frustrations with his routine and his passion for art, but he is also able (replacing the gatekeeper dragon for the father) to describe the father in the story as someone who has also gone through difficult situations that make him who he is. This erases the stigma of the evil dragon that needs to be vanquished and places the character as someone that has feelings, a backstory that needs to be acknowledged rather than being stigmatised as 'the bad guy' because of his role in the story. Yuniok reflects on his

final narrative that he wants to be seen as a person that not only likes to draw, but that can see others and understand what they go through.

Mark, (as it will be seen and further explained in the next chapter), uses his pieces of writing to explore his passion for football and the importance of becoming part of a team, support and being supported by them, and achieving goals together. During his interview, before he wrote his reflective narrative, he was already reflecting on how he has been showing who he is through his pieces:

Camila: *And everything you have written so far has been related to football?*

Mark: *You could say it is. And during the last workshop* [Challenging Our Views]*, when I took my notebook home, I chose to write about challenging thoughts. I chose to write about negative thoughts that I usually have, and it turned out to be a piece completely about football when I joined the league, I wrote everything about football.* (…)

Camila: *Which one is the one you feel the proudest of? Which text?*

Mark: *I would say this last one in the room over there* [Challenging your Views], *the one about having different beliefs to ours, or the things that bother us deeply. (…) I think we also read the story about the old man and the Martian and that they couldn't communicate very well, like looking in their eyes and seeing something different (…). I connected a lot because it was like they both were trying to see why one couldn't see what the other could. So I very much related it to the things we don't like because they seemed to be mad because they couldn't understand each other, so I related it to the things I don't like, to what makes me mad.*

Camila: *Which is the workshop you've enjoyed the most?*

Mark: *This one as well because we had to do a story using the first-person point of view, like if I were that character, and I wrote it all about football so it was the one I loved the most.*

Even when Mark has to portray someone who thinks differently or with a characteristic he does not quite like, he uses that opportunity to re-evaluate his own thoughts, and uses football, his passion, to show how negative thoughts also come to him and how he wants to deal with it

Irene reflects she wants to be seen through her writings as a creative, exciting person who loves to read horror stories. During her interview, she referred to her love for the horror genre:

> *Camila:* *What do you like to write about? About which themes? What things?*
>
> *Irene:* *Horror.*
>
> *Camila:* *Why?*
>
> *Irene:* *I love horror. I am like… very masochistic, because I get easily scared. At night I stay awake watching a movie about something that traumatises me, or stories like that, I love to watch them! It's like three things: anime, k-pop and horror.*

For the last workshop where they had to write their own short story, she wrote a horror one, using expressions and sentences like these:

> *(…) When* [the family] *got there, they had to stay at a hotel close to the road, all surrounded by lots of trees and vegetation. During the day, this town was so beautiful! But at night, it only gave chills of terror. This is what Josephine thought, who was always uninterested in everything. (…) Josephine, who asked to sleep in a separate room, felt she was being watched at night. (…) Suddenly, she decided to open her door to leave the room, when she noticed a shadow that was moving away from the room and realised the 'kind' and 'sweet' old man* [who owned the hotel] *was spying on her behind the bedroom door.*
>
> *(…) Suddenly, her eyes and mouth are covered and she loses consciousness. When she wakes up, she finds herself in a different place, arms and legs tied, and her mouth covered. But the worst of all was the scene she found that would scar her forever: it was her family, cut into quarters. Josephine lets some tears fall and the old man says:*
>
> *-Ah, you're awake. Good. Did you think you were the only one in danger? No! While you slept, I slowly killed your family, one by one, to have them for dinner in a great banquet with my children. But don't you worry! You are too beautiful and I won't kill you. That would be a waste. I'll better make you one of my many dolls. -*
>
> *Josephine, panicked, tries to escape, but the old man chops off her legs with his machete and says, 'You won't be needing this anymore.'*
>
> *Next day, at dusk, a new family arrives looking for lodging in the old hotel.*
>
> *THE END.* (Irene, Chapter 6, On the Other Side of the Hotel, p. 74)

Her story shows her true interests and the way she wants to be perceived, not only to the reader but to the participants who were present during the last workshop, as all students present on the day shared their short stories with the group. The group made similar comments in their reflective narratives about being surprised by other participants:

> *These encounters helped me see how truly surprising other's thoughts are (…)* – Mark, p.78
>
> *Each one is someone different and unique, and I cannot underestimate anyone!* – Tusitala, p. 80
>
> *When I read their stories, there was a little bit of their lives in them, and each of them spoke of different things. For example, some spoke of love stories that describe difficult moments they have gone through, others speak of death, which helped me to see each of them has a different world.* – Naomy, p. 83

Authenticity is not only communicated to the reader, but also among the students who participated in this study. These findings support Cavendish, Vess and Li-Barber's (2016) who designed a creative writing programme to research writer's identity with children. Two of their findings pointed out the importance given to the social aspect of the intervention, as well as to the freedom to explore personal interests. This methodology does both, and furthermore, the relationships the students valued were not only the ones established within our working group, but also those they could establish with their potential readers. In addition to this, the findings evidence some of the elements Larmer and Mergendoller (2010) define for a successful project-based learning project, where providing students with choice and an active voice, and respecting personal rhythms in non-directive environments, fosters spaces for students to explore their personal interests.

Through their pieces, they were able to show aspects of themselves, not necessarily evident for others, through their experiences, emotions and passions. And by doing this, it opened a door to appreciating the differences between them, understanding and seeing them as valuable, and in some cases, empathising with their peers. This next section will consider this.

5.3. Socialising reading and writing as a tool for finding value in each other

In this last section, I discussed how creative writing, through a social-participatory methodology, enabled students to reflect and perform their authentic selves. This section will continue to explore how working with each other through this designed methodology enabled participants to appreciate differences among them as valuable and be empathetic towards each other.

Socialising the project with others (the published book) is not the only type of 'socialisation' that is valued by the students, they also valued the social aspect of the workshop, similar to what Cavendish, Vess and Li-Barber (2016) found in the programme they designed. All workshops had participative elements which gave them the freedom to make choices about what to do, write or share, as well as an open space to create their own rules, as a group, to make the space work for everybody (see picture of group rules (Spanish) in Appendix S). During our first meetings, students quickly chose to sit next to their closest friends, as they clearly were not allowed to do so inside the classroom. They each made their own name tag after the first session, which I used in the following workshops, particularly those that required group work, to help them sit with different peers every time. The students were encouraged to work with each other in different groups every time and in different classroom setups (for example round tables, small groups, floor work, outdoor activities, standing around the room, among others), whilst sharing ideas, observing each other and sharing personal experiences they might have not shared with many people before. These workshops also required them, if they wanted to, to work with peers they might not have been accustomed to working or talking with outside this particular research project.

When I first went into their classroom to look for volunteers, it was clear the students were part of a very structured environment, possibly rigid in its ways of working and expectations upon them. This was my reflection in my researcher's diary the day I met the students:

> *Today was the day when it all became too real!* [The Spanish teacher][33] *was not in because she had a doctor's appointment, so* [her boss] *took me to the classroom to introduce me. When I came in, I noticed 5 very aligned lines of desks. They have the same desk for the entire year! I wonder if that's a good thing or a bad thing… I guess if this is what you are used to, then it can't be "bad" as you don't have much to compare it with. They are so… behaved…* (01 March 2018, Researcher's diary, p. 15)

The social aspect of the methodology, necessary to the writing process of the students, enabled them to recognise qualities in their peers and friends, they had not had the chance to explore and see before. All fifteen students, with no exceptions, wrote the project enabled them to understand how different they all were, where 'being different' was not seen as negative or limiting in the relationships they could establish. Some general reflections that illustrate the latter, are:

> *"I learnt that each one of them has different points of view. That they have different feelings and express differently*. *(…) I could understand (…) their being and their particular way of doing things, it's something marvellous."* (Marian, Reflective Narrative, p. 81)

> *"I learnt not everything has to be me; that they all have different ways of thinking and I have to accept that. I learnt to value their work and create different stories."* (Naomy, Reflective Narrative, p. 82)

> *"This project helped me change a little how I think about other people and why they act in different ways, that you can put together many ideas and do something magnificent together. (…) I learnt that each one of them has different points of view."* (Fernanda, Reflective Narrative, p. 86)

> *"I learnt that each of them has values, they think and act differently, that each one has their own way of interacting when they talk or socialise with people in the group, friends or family. I also learnt we are very different from each other, there's no one like us, we are unique, each one has their own way of expressing themselves."* (Dany, Reflective Narrative, p. 88)

These examples are just four of many that can be found throughout the students' reflective narratives of the project. Words like *marvellous, value, magnificent, unique,*

[33] Removed names for confidentiality purposes.

make a point for how differences among them started being seen not as points of separation between them, but points of contact to learn and appreciate from each other. When Tusitala reflected on what she had learnt about the group and herself in the process, she wrote:

> *Regarding the group, I learnt each person is a world. Each being is full of things to navigate, explore new universes. Each one is someone different and unique and I can't underestimate anyone. (…) Identity originates from our lived adversities. Everything that transforms us is that which characterizes us, meaning we all arrive being alike, but after a conflict, the character changes and transforms, takes different turns. So by reading about the other, we discover and understand them.* (Tusitala, Reflective Narrative, p. 80)

Tusitala reflects on the process as one that enabled her to see how people are unique and the role of reading and writing, like used in this project, helped her to explore that uniqueness. She was open to listen and read others' stories to understand how they have been transformed, and by doing that, transform herself as well. In her interview, which took place before she wrote her final reflections, she said:

> *Camila: (…) Do you feel this has been a space where you have been able to reaffirm what you already knew about your peers, or has it allowed you to see different things about others?*
>
> *Tusitala: I don't… I mean, in every person… in each group, I have had to work with different people. And those different people looked like me: Normal-ish, in place, nothing out of this world. But you start to see what they are writing, what they are thinking, what they are feeling, what they like, what the person dislikes, and you say 'wow!' Wow! I remember this particular workshop very well. There was this girl, and that girl is… not from here, not from there… normal, normal, neutral. And she left me astonished! Really. Because she began to write in a very 'bloody' way, that you go and say that… wow, I mean… what could have happened to her that she likes to write about blood so much? What would happen if, what would have happened if not, what would have happened if… I mean, imagine all those things! And at the same time write what you imagine.*

Tusitala finds the words to express how surprised she was to get to know so many things about other peers within the workshops and particularly to see a different side of this

participant and her writings. The space they created as the workshops developed was safe enough for students to feel free to write and express what they wanted, even to peers who they might not interact with on a regular basis. The fact that students bring it up in their final reflections as well as in their narratives, shows how the social element of this methodology can open ways for participants to see each other differently and acknowledge that difference as interesting and valuable. It is interesting to notice that Tusitala defines herself in this fragment as *'normal-ish', 'nothing out of this world',* just like she thought this particular participant was as well, and how by saying her peer isn't, is like she has proven herself right as being unnoticed. However, other participants, including myself as the facilitator, noticed her as she noticed this peer. When I first met her, I reflected: *"*[Tusitala] *is my dominant student. Yes, she's brilliant, yes, she's authentic and 'deep' in her thoughts, but I have to be careful she doesn't overshadow others or generate some kind of weariness in others."* (08 March 2018, Researcher's diary, p.16). Although she was usually the first one to participate, as the weeks went by, particularly for the last three workshops, I could see her observe more, leading less, almost like letting herself be surprised or amazed by others. Despite what she thinks of herself, other participants noticed her as well. For example, in his interview Mark explains:

> *Camila: (…) How has it been for you to work with these other fourteen people that belong to different groups (…)? How has this experience been for you?*
>
> *Mark: Well, it was a completely different experience to what I imagined because I thought that Rick, because he likes football, he was going to write about football as well, but no, he also wrote about other things, and I didn't think he was going to do that. So I started seeing how he wrote different things. Even the story that Tusitala wrote, the one of pride and prejudice… I've never read a story like that, I've never heard it before, and she writes so well, she has different thoughts. Listening to everyone else's thoughts was like something good, like taking from different ideas, different ways of thinking, I mean... like you feel different. Get some distance for a moment from something and turning everything upside down, like thinking backwards.*

Mark mentions two peers: Rick, one of his closest friends at school; and Tusitala, who he did not interact much with in general. He sees Tusitala as a great writer, with original

interesting thoughts he had never expected. Mark does not see her as Tusitala sees herself. Mark is not only taken aback by getting to know other peers in the group but surprised about seeing one of his closest friends in a different light. He sees Rick does not just write about football, which is what they share on a daily basis, and this intrigues him. It makes him more observant and curious about someone he already thought he knew well. The fact that students had to socialise with each other on a regular basis within each of the workshops, enabled them to be surprised by the other, to recognise that what makes them different and unique, makes them special. Other reflections written by the students that show how difference is understood as valuable can be found below:

> *"It also helped me to understand others, that we are all different, and very different, like some are more joyful and others are braver."* (Yuniok, Reflective Narrative, p. 77)
>
> *"I also understood that other people are creative, have different personalities, all unique and to which I can relate. Each of them has their own way of being and I can learn to create a bond with them that is not one of conflict."* (Rick, Reflective Narrative, p. 80)
>
> *"I also feel that it allowed me to understand other people's identity, for example, their likes, their ways of behaving, their way of expressing and speaking their mind, their attitude. That was very beautiful: getting to know people so different from us, yet the same."* (Andrea, Reflective Narrative, p. 82)
>
> *"I got to know certain things that I didn't know before, like for example their way of seeing the world: while others think the world is beautiful and happy, others see their own problems and try to find a way to solve them."* (Isabel, Reflective Narrative, p. 84)
>
> *"Now I know what it means to know other people and learn that we are all different and that we can understand each other in that difference."* (Ariadna, Reflective Narrative, p. 85)

All of these students mention discovering different characteristics of others in a positive way. For example, students who are joyful, or brave, creative, who have a positive view of the world or are problem solvers. Andrea writes *'(…) so different from us, yet the same'.* This expression sums up the feeling that we had inside the group: it was clear the students

who volunteered came from different friendship groups and did not necessarily interact with each other unless they had to. However, the project gave them a space they all felt they belonged to, that made them equals, and at the same time opened a space to discover how different they are: a difference that was valued and treasured as positive.

Socialising their ideas, lived experiences and pieces of writing, allowed the participants to appreciate characteristics in others they had not expected or seen before. Sharing what they wrote enabled them to see positive writing and speaking skills in their peers. Alejandra, for example, reflected that one of the learning outcomes she got from participating in the project, was that she learned about some of her peers' voices, which she had not heard inside the classroom before or frequently:

> *(…) I learnt to know the absent voice of my peers. (…) I learnt they are wonderful people, with incredible ideas and feelings. That each one has a way of acting and thinking differently, where each of them writes and creates stories that transmit something to the heart. Their absent voices were heard and they filled the space with their perfect ideas.*
>
> *"*[This project] *transformed how I understand what others read, I mean, understand better what they write and what they mean by it. (…) About the group, I learnt about their writing skills, their opinions and how they express themselves to others*." (Yuniok, Reflective Narrative, p. 77)

Alejandra was positively impressed by having the opportunity to see some of her peers participate and share ideas, which they might not do inside more traditional classroom settings. Not only did she get to hear them, but she was also pleasantly surprised by the ideas and stories she got to hear. During her interview, she had referred to this as well, particularly referring to workshop 2 (Collaborative Writing):

> *Camila:* [Referring to Workshop 2] *After reading the short story* [The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World] *we wrote stories in groups. (…) How was this experience for you? Tell me a little bit about what you felt and thought during this exercise?*

Alejandra: *It was so much fun because Yuniok… I had to work with Yuniok and he is a very shy and quiet person. So when he was saying to me "no, I want to do this" or "no, I want to do that" … and because our other group member was absent, it was only the two of us for the first session… So he was like… speaking and choosing the images… and the thing is that in the classroom he doesn't talk, he doesn't have the opportunity to express himself the way he did here.*

Alejandra, together with seven other students, reflected on this learning outcome regarding their peers and group work. They referred to feeling positive about the group and the way they expressed themselves, participated and wrote. Andrés, for example, referred to how the latter happened by listening to others' writings: *'(…) We all respect each other, we share and have great abilities. (…) I could get to know the identity of others because everyone expressed themselves marvellously with what they said and laid bare their feelings.'* (Andrés, Reflective Narrative, p. 87). Similarly, Ariadna wrote *'(…) they express themselves so well, there is no doubt they are people with huge abilities!* [I learned] *that they have an amazing imagination, that they are really good people.'* (Ariadna, Reflective Narrative, p. 85). Maggie also reflected how hearing them participate in the group opened another way of seeing her peers:

> *We all have great abilities and can respect each other. (..) I could see that some of them had their own way of participating from what I had seen before, and I could listen to them. (…) Some peers, when they spoke, they contributed so coherently! I also learnt to get to know them, their personalities and how they behaved, and because we spent so much time together, we could get to know each other better. They are more open to talking than I thought!* (Maggie, Reflective Narrative, p. 86)

One of my participants, Andrea, went a step further by writing about specific qualities she saw in her peers:

> *I learned more about my peers. It helped me to find better things in them, that they are kind, that they go through difficult times but they always try to show a smile. (…)* [I learned] *we make a good team. That they are nice, intelligent, sociable and very studious. I learnt to socialise more with them and to get to know them better.* (Andrea, Reflective Narrative, p. 82)

Gergen (2009) places social processes as fundamental for knowledge to be constructed among individuals: '*knowing comes into existence only through social participation… (…) In effect, "I speak with others, and therefore I can know."'* (Gergen, 2009, p. 229). It is in the social process that my participants are able to build knowledge about their peers and themselves authentically. These elements, recognising the difference as positive and learning new aspects about each other, were important vehicles for some students to build empathetic responses towards each other. This means, not only did the participants understand how others were different, but some of them directly expressed how the project enabled them to place themselves 'in someone else's shoes'. From all 15 participants, seven of them wrote about having empathetic responses towards the group. Mark wrote:

> *I realised that when you work in groups, things are not as easy to do. But when you start sharing ideas and thoughts, I learnt a new way of seeing things. I mean I will always have to share and work as part of a collective, that if I want to be part of a football team, I have to understand others as if we were one.* (Mark, Reflective Narrative, p. 78)

Mark reflected how participating in this project enabled him to be more open and understanding of other people's ideas. And from his love of football, he transferred that learning outcome into what it means to be part of a successful team: 'understand others as if we were one'. Mark was able to transfer his experiences with other peers within the workshops, into what it meant to become part of a team outside the project: just listening to others is not enough, but also being able to put himself in the minds of others: a collective understanding to be able to see new ways of approaching an issue. Broome (2009) placed empathy as 'relational', defining it as the 'co-creation of meaning by participants in an interpersonal or group setting (…) process [that] is characterised by a series of constantly evolving approximations, allowing new understandings to emerge, creative approaches to be developed, and innovative ideas to be proposed' (Broome, 2009, p. 185). Mark's new understanding of what 'being part of a team' should mean, is not just an understanding about another's experiences and ideas, but also a new understanding about himself:

> *I learned to know myself more. Now I know I have different ways of thinking. I mean, before I only thought about myself, I did things on my own, I was the only person that could do it all, that I was the one who needed to stand out. But I learned to share ideas and thoughts with other people; to receive help and work with others, and I think this can help me improve.* (Mark, Reflective Narrative, p.78)

Hence, the participatory element of the project enabled participants to learn and appreciate different aspects of peers, and by doing so, opened new ways of connecting with and understanding each other. This new understanding allowed them to learn new aspects about themselves. Therefore, as a result of the methodology, students developed relational empathy, which aided positive identity formation. Another example that illustrates this is from Isabel's Reflective Narrative when she refers to learning outcomes about the group that participated in the project: '*It was a marvellous and unique experience to be able to share, contribute, smile, cry and feel so many emotions with them, and know what they think about life and those who surround them.'* (Isabel, Reflective Narrative, p. 84). She complemented this with what she took from the project as personal learning outcomes:

> *I learned how to express myself without the fear of being judged. I learned it is good to say what I feel. At the beginning, some things will hurt but in the end, everything comes out and you feel a great relief. This transformed me in ways I cannot fully understand, but I became more confident about what I say, and at times, with what I write. (…) I can now help others feel confident through writing and free through reading. Sometimes reading or writing transport us in a way to places where we can feel what the reading says, and make others feel what we write.* (Isabel, Reflective Narrative, p. 84)

For Isabel, participating in this project allowed her to feel and share emotions with and about her peers. By the end of the experience, she reflected on how powerful reading and writing are when done in these shared spaces. So powerful, she felt confident that she could possibly interact and support other people in feeling confident with reading and writing because of the opportunities it provides to share and understand feelings. Being able to read, write, and share feelings with her peers also transferred into a new understanding of herself: she felt more confident to speak her mind, and relieved to have

been able to explore her own experiences and understand those of others. She felt the project enabled her to construct a more authentic and positive self. The same can be seen in Alejandra's reflections. When she wrote about her learning outcomes from the project, she said:

> *(…) It transformed me in unimaginable ways: I started to use my voice to stand out and transmit what I feel. I will never forget my voice is important. That the others will always lend me a helping hand. (…) In each encounter and in each workshop, I learnt about what moved me to the core, and I learned new sensations about me and my peers. I felt their emotions as if they were my own. Our hearts joined together to transmit one singular sensation: our voices and thoughts were heard in all directions.* (Alejandra, Reflective Narrative, p. 79)

Like Mark and Isabel, through group work, Alejandra comes to a new understanding of herself at the same time as, or as a result, of connecting emotionally to others. However, differently from Mark, she learns how to stand out more on her own, how to make her voice and opinions be heard, while Mark comes to a different understanding relevant to his own circumstances and interests: he understands that he needs to listen more to others and stand out less to be more open to new ideas. These two examples clearly exemplify what Kushner (2009) observed in his music students: adolescents are already highly reflective, and by giving them creative reading and writing spaces inside the school, we provide a vehicle to foster further reflection. Kushner said: 'their art required them so frequently to question self that they were well-rehearsed and ready to relieve themselves of the burden of their internal soul-searching. All art, I would contend, is self-knowledge.' (p. 15). It can be inferred then, that creative writing fosters self-knowledge and positive identity emerges from such reflections.

Gergen (2009) highlights the importance of language for the relational self: we use our vocabulary within our groups to be able to relate to our groups. This methodology opened opportunities of communication among students that otherwise, would have not communicated in more formal classroom spaces. These opportunities translated into using language, spoken and written in service of those new relationships. Language was the tool to re-create and re-signify not only the way they related to each other, but to

themselves. The varying stories and genres drawn upon enabled the young people to begin to articulate and explore their lives with new vocabularies and in new ways.

Having the participants reflect so frequently about what the others feel, think, write, or do, also evidences the 'ability to understand others', or Theory of Mind. All the stories chosen for this project are literary fiction narratives, narratives they engage with, reflect on, and are inspired by to write their own creative pieces. Their final reflections on understanding difference as valuable, only mirrors what other cognitive and developmental research have found through quantitative research: Literary fiction with high relational content aids the process of recognising emotions in others (Black and Barnes, 2015); and fosters empathy and the ability to comprehend, process and apply information about others in social situations (Tamir *et al.*, 2016).

Therefore, the social-participatory aspect of this methodology allows an authentic positive identity formation and genuine empathetic responses among the participants. They feel safe enough to be who they are, come to new understandings of themselves and others, and reflect on their own individual processes and needs.

This last section will reflect on a different aspect of the methodology: my role as a facilitator.

5.4. The role of the researcher: the trusted facilitator

This section will close this chapter by doing a personal reflection on a third element that was fundamental when designing, developing and carrying out this participatory methodology: the role of the researcher as a trustworthy facilitator. This role was necessary in order for my participants to feel safe to be able to work together, share their authentic selves, recognise and value others in the group, and generate genuine empathetic bonds. Gergen (2009) proposes collaboration as central to establishing the order of a classroom. This means that rather than the teacher leading, it is together with the students that rules of interaction and work are set. I believe this is fundamental in any educational or participative research practice. For this reason, I placed myself within the

methodology as a facilitator, providing them with multiple choices and opportunities to carry out the work. My participants felt comfortable enough to ask questions, write, participate, feel at ease to be and say what they wanted to.

One of my main concerns was how to keep myself as an observer and researcher, while at the same time, trying to provide an environment where the students could be researchers as well and feel safe enough to trust me with their work and experiences. As a language teacher, I have always found it impossible to not get emotionally involved with the classroom, and I truly believe that effective teaching must come from a place of genuine interest for the students. My struggle was understanding how to find a middle ground between facilitating the workshops for a long period of time (which would place me as some sort of teacher) and remaining with a researcher 'eye' that observes from a distance and can remain objective. Taking into consideration Mannay's (2010) discussion on the insider/outsider binary, I was not an insider, meaning that I was getting to know my participants as much as they were getting to know me. We did not share similar life experiences or issues that would immediately help us connect. But I was not an outsider either: being in a classroom, at a school, with adolescents was natural to me, it was not unfamiliar territory. Connecting to students was a skill I felt comfortable with, and I had worked for seven years at a private school in the same municipality that is widely known by the community. Therefore, I needed to find a way to remain very aware of my own emotions, involvement and actions and how they could interfere with the project, which was the reason why I started a reflective diary at the beginning of the research until about twelve weeks into the workshop. This is how I became comfortable with the fact that objectivity, or trying to establish myself as an outsider by distancing myself to 'properly' look at the data was not achievable. However, what was achievable, was to be aware of it and being able to constantly reflect on it.

Some reflections in my diary consider the role I was fulfilling, my beliefs as a teacher (and just my personal beliefs: I have realised they are not so different from each other), my emotions and my thoughts on the students and workshops. Gergen (2009) explains that a 'facilitator role' aims to: (1) generate more inclusive participation; (2) make myself less

controlling of what is happening and discussions in general; (3) credit participants' knowledge and intelligence; and (4) expand the range of experiences and multiple social realities (Gergen, 2009, p. 250). Looking back on it, I find very intriguing how ironic it is that the more I wanted to 'let go' and be a facilitator, the more I wanted and needed to control myself to make sure that was possible. Some extracts from my diary[34] reflect this struggle:

> *(…) I explained the project after* [the Head of Spanish] *introduced me. She said I came from England, which got them talking. (…) I explained* [what] *my project intended (…).*
>
> *They were sooo quiet! No questions, no nothing! I was afraid no one would want to do it.* [The Head of Spanish] *asked them and said I needed 12. BOOM!* ***16****.* ***SIXTEEN!!!*** *Will they all stay? No idea. And not just* ***SIXTEEN****, but* ***FOUR*** *boys! FOUR! O.M.G.! I am beyond excited!! (…)*[35]
>
> *We all went to a different room & we read together the consent form and answered the only question there was → the schedule. I emphasized the voluntary aspect of their participation. Lovely kids. Need to find the way to break the "teacher Camila" relationship to "Camila and a group of students" relationship! (…)* (01 March 2018, Researcher's Diary, pp. 14-15)

Right from the beginning, this extract shows my worries about my role and how to establish a genuine, less 'schooled' relationship with my participants, despite having to work with them in their own school setting. From the moment I met them until I stopped writing in my diary, I was constantly reflecting on my role and how I got involved, on how the participants responded, or even pedagogical practices:

[34] Extracts from my Researcher's Diary are written and represented as closely as possibly to the handwritten original document. Language, spelling and grammar mistakes/inconsistencies were kept with the intention of showing my authentic thoughts and feelings at the time.

[35] My MA dissertation (Fuentes Díaz, 2016) explored reading for pleasure with Colombian men and women with a postgraduate level of education. My research explored some of the gender differences in reading, with men usually self-reporting as less capable and interested in reading for pleasure than women. I felt really positive to have four boys join the program, especially after explaining it would require an important amount of reading and creative writing within a group setting. For more information on gender differences in reading and writing for pleasure, see Ivinson and Murphy (2006) and Uusen and Müürsepp (2012).

(…) There's a girl/woman who doesn't seem quite engaged. (…) It's fine, though, I have to remind myself I work at a school but in this case, I'm not "schooling".

(…) LOVE that 3 girls read anime & manga, LOVE to have a girl who loves to write about her feelings and impossible love & reading romance! Having a student who LOVES football and also loves to write; a group who loves reading about psychology, who associate writing and reading with freedom! ♥♥♥♥♥ So in love! Need to watch my emotions and how they guide how I look at the students' work and ideas. (…) (08 March 2018, Researcher's Diary, pp. 16-17)

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(…) Last week we had a great Wednesday in terms of time. However, it was heavily based on reading and I felt the kids… sleepy and bored. To my surprise, feedback was not too much aligned with my perceptions. HOWEVER, is this because "they like me" or is it because they really think that? I need to make sure to include in my limitations that all students working with me are volunteers and in one way or another, they want to and like to write and read, which might be (surely is) different than asking students who don't necessarily enjoy this… (28 March 2020, Researcher's Diary, pp. 24-25)

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So just a small parenthesis → we work in the AUDIOVISUAL ROOM. It is a small building set apart from the two main ones and separated [from them] *by the recess yard. That means, no one really takes the time to come and… interrupt… (end of parenthesis) …*

[Today] *we were put in the "multiple room" in the High School building. My participants take class on the first floor of that building. (…) It is clearly not as isolated as the other room. In addition to that, there are only chairs, no tables to be seen. (…) The workshop required them to develop a short story, collaboratively, from an image or set of images, on a flip chart. Therefore, the room kind of worked well in terms of the distribution. They seemed to enjoy working on the floor & creating their own space different from 7x5 small desk rows they are used to 5 days a week.*

This gives me something to think about in terms of teaching and learning: does breaking away from the "ideal" set up, and what is "good for them" → no music, no sitting on the floor, good posture, being lined up, have set seats… does it affect the learning process? Is part of the creative jolt these kids are having, also related

> *to the fact they are experimenting other ways of working different from the daily routines they are used to?* (22 April 2018, Researcher's Diary, pp. 26-27)

In general, I was questioning different elements of the workshops, working spaces, and their answers or responses to the methodology, trying to find a way to remain grounded, like separating emotion from experience, as if that were possible. Writing the diary was a way to respond to a question I was asked during my interview to get accepted for the PhD: I remember one of my PhD interview panellists asked me if my project was a serious piece of research, or if it was rather a way to prove myself and/or to feel better about myself. Therefore, designing a methodology that would provide enough, sufficient, relevant and most of all, valid data and results, became my first priority. Monitoring my role when designing and carrying out the workshops was fundamental. Being a facilitator was everything but an easy task.

How could objectivity be maintained when I was (am) emotionally connected to the topic of interest? How could I remain objective in participatory research I did not only design but also facilitated?

> *I can't seem to stop thinking about my quantitative mind; how much I'm affecting these outcomes; how much the success is reflected in the workshop itself or on the person running it; how much my "need" for acceptance, as someone who easily clicks with this age, is the one driving the whole thing. What would happen if someone completely different, <u>any</u> teacher at all, would deliver the workshops and what the result and engagement would be… Why do I keep somehow wishing for it to be about <u>me</u> and not the material? AAAAH! Good stuff to reflect on…* (14 March 2018, Researcher's Diary, pp. 21-22)

I have come to the conclusion that absolute objectivity in participatory research is not possible. Bolton and Delderfield (2018) explain 'practitioners bring their own whole selves to reflective practice; and that whole person has vulnerabilities: this is part of the work.' (Bolton and Delderfield, 2018, p. 34). They acknowledge that vulnerabilities, in this case of the researcher, should be acknowledged through reflection, and by reflecting on them, is when empathetic understanding can take place, as long as clear ground rules and agreements on information handling and confidentiality take place. My own awareness

and constant reflections on my emotions and role, together with providing the participants with a clear outline of what to expect, giving them the opportunity to take responsibility for creating rules, and making decisions on their own work, were necessary to provide a safe environment for participants to take risks with their choices, words and actions. It was important that my participants felt empowered to make choices, to reflect and act in social relationships with peers, to feel respected and valued in all their opinions, and be aware of their own abilities, ideas, feelings and experiences.

It was reflecting on my own vulnerabilities that I was able to be vulnerable with them, be open to being challenged in my understanding of the reality I was exploring, as well as feeling more open to the participants' experiences, stories and interactions. I could not ask for vulnerability if I was not willing to expose my own. This connected us and made us partners and co-researchers in the field. This is what made this project mine as much as theirs. Reflecting on my own vulnerability, allowed trust to emerge, and through trust, commitment to the project from the 16 of us.

During the interviews with my participants, we discussed what the time together, (workshops and work done so far) had been like for them. At the end of the interview, I needed to make sure they were leaving the space feeling supported, heard and feeling okay. Some of the students mentioned how the interview space was one where they felt they could be vulnerable, as well as appreciative of a genuine relationship we had established. The interviews were done during the first week of May 2018, about two long months after we first met. And this was done with that purpose: allow the students to meet me and know me, give them enough time to make a decision if they wanted or not to be part of what I was offering, and of course, feel comfortable enough to want to have an interview space, one-to-one conversation about their lives and the project itself. Ariadna described what the interview meant for her:

> *Camila:* *One last question, how was this interview experience for you? How are you feeling? (…)*

Ariadna: *Well, in the beginning, I arrived feeling bored, sad, and well, I cried. I know I didn't vent like aaaaah! But I had to get some things off my chest and cry (…), and I know one day I'll be able to do it completely. And well, in that moment, in the beginning, I felt very like… moved. But then I had the chance to talk about my dreams, and like about who I want to be and all that, so I don't know, I leave feeling happy, I mean I already have that weird answer about who I am and where I am going to.*

Ariadna felt safe enough to discuss personal life experiences with me, cry during the interview, and at the same time, speak openly of her dreams and aspirations in the same space. Andrés, for example, mentions how the interview is an interesting space given he can talk more openly with me directly:

Camila: *And the last question, what did you think about this interview space?*

Andrés: *Really cool because you are alone with that person, so you can express yourself better.*

Camila: *How are you feeling? Do you have any questions?*

Andrés: *One question for you. Can you easily forget someone?*

Camila: *No and… well, no.*

Andrés: *Hurts a lot, right?*

When I asked Andrés if he had any questions for me, I always assumed that questions would possibly be about the project itself. However, he asked me a very personal question, about a situation he was going through, and he wanted to know how I dealt with possible similar situations. After this extract, we stopped the interview, which I had already finished, and continued to have a conversation about how he was feeling and he continued to ask for advice. This ending took me by surprise. The fact he found in me an adult he could be vulnerable with and share some of his emotional experiences was powerful and important for both of us. A clear bond of trust was established.

Tusitala had the longest interview out of the fifteen. Answers to open questions about her life opened a door she possibly had not opened for a while, and it seemed important to

her that I understood her past and the situations she had been through. This is how we closed the interview:

> *Camila:* *How was this interview experience for you in general? How are you feeling? I mean, you have spoken about moments that have been very hard for you… How do you feel now as you leave this space?*
>
> *Tusitala:* *Calmed. Honestly, there's something different about this conversation, because I have had to talk about my life with many people, whether I wanted it or not. But I'm leaving here feeling calmed because I know you will value what I'm giving you, more than any other person. Not only because of a doctorate but because you are a person who cares. Because if you look at me like you do, with such transparency and nobility, I know that you will keep my deepest secrets safe with you. So I know that I built a small part of your soul and that you did it immensely with me too.*

Tusitala perceives the interview as a space that was more of a conversation, less formal and deeper in meaning. She ends her intervention by trusting me with her secrets, and knowing that by sharing them with me, she has built part of my soul, as much as I built a part of hers by listening honestly and openly without judgement.

Some students connected not only with me as a facilitator but with the proposal as a whole: as a space where they could write, say and be who they wanted to be. The participants were free to come up with the rules they perceived important for the group to work properly, and because they all agreed to them, they all made sure everyone followed them. They also chose what to write, what pieces to publish, the title of their book, what information to share, what activities to design to show their project to the community (peers, teachers and parents), and to attend to the workshops or not, among other decisions. They negotiated, voted, spoke to each other and to me about their thoughts and ideas, and shared personal information with each other. Students who participated recognised these opportunities, different from what a more traditional schooled context has offered them before, which validated my role as trustworthy facilitator. Students, like Andrés, Rick, Yuniok and Ariadna, referred to the project in the following words:

Camila: *What's your opinion about this proposal, this way of working that I am offering?*

Andrés: *Well, first of all, you take us out from a class that sometimes is really boring, so it becomes another way of being distracted here at school. Because, as it is, we the students are only used to copying, class workshops, homework, essays, among others, and you are giving us a space where we can create our own world, so to speak. Everything is so beautiful!*

Camila: *What do you think about this proposal with the workshops and in general what we've done with it? (…)*

Rick: *It is a space where I can be honest, I can be… like that… be how I like to be, not because somebody is forcing me to be someone else. It is also a way to get closer to writing, that we can all be free to write, to write what we think, and that is good because people can be freer, feel freer.*

Camila: *What is your opinion about this kind of proposal?*

Yuniok: *That is really cool, it's something different than what we are used to here, to the workshops they do here. The activities are fun and I like that we are with other peers because you get to know other people's opinions.*

Camila: *What do you think about this proposal or workshop spaces, and what we've done in them?*

Ariadna: *I think it's really beautiful, like writing about… write, I mean, let the imagination fly (…). Because these are workshops like outside the institution, on the contrary, I mean you don't feel that pressure that you feel when you're inside a classroom, because is not like 'Oh… for sure* [the teacher] *will mark me poorly because I'm writing things I shouldn't be writing', yes? So, it's very… I don't know… I think* [the workshops] *are cooler here than there. Here, is also to help you out, and there, is only for a grade.*

Camila: *Ok. So here is like writing… let me check if I got this right… writing what you think and what you want, while over there you have to write what you have to. Yes? Or what you…*

Ariadna: *What they want us to.*

Camila: *Why did you want to be a part of this project?*

Ariadna: *To step out of my role, like… not just sit there and like 'Spanish is this, and this is a comma, and this is this other thing…' yes? Like to have a new experience. Also, like I haven't been in that many workshops, or socialised as much, so like it has helped me in some things.*

In general, the students believed the methodology provided them with a space to be genuine, to step out of the routine. They felt that they had the freedom to write what they needed or wanted to write, without judgement, and in addition to this, they felt that the space was safe enough for them to socialise with peers they did not necessarily know outside of class.

Creating and facilitating this methodology is not just about providing a series of workshops, stories and exercises. The success of the program relied on the caring, supportive, trustworthy and non-judgemental position of the facilitator. Opening and creating spaces for negotiation and understanding among all participants, self-monitoring, and being able to show vulnerability, are elements that created the conditions of possibility for establishing authentic relationships with and among the participants. In doing so, they became comfortable enough to feel they could be authentic. As a facilitator, then, I was able to generate inclusive participation, to be less controlling, to work with them as equals, and to openly validate their experiences and their multiplicity of social realities as true (Gergen, 2009).

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter documented the methodological constructionist elements that were valuable to enable exploration of identity formation processes in adolescents. Two elements were discussed: the social and participatory aspects, and the role of the researcher as a facilitator.

The former revealed two main outcomes. Firstly, the participants were able to express an authentic sense of self throughout their creative work with a particular focus on exploring their personal interests and expressing emotions as vehicles to relate and communicate to others. Secondly, the participatory and social aspect of the methodology show students were able to identify the differences among them and value them as positive and enriching for their own development. The participants' reflections on the project evidenced an enhanced ability to understand others around them (Theory of Mind) (Kidd, Ongis and Castano, 2016), which highlighted the valuable role of literary fiction.

In terms of the role of the researcher as a facilitator, I reflected on the difficulties of assuming a 'detached' position in a fieldwork process that required care, support and trust to be built, not only among the participants, but with me as a facilitator. This section highlighted the importance of self-monitoring, showing vulnerability, and showing yourself authentically, if you are expecting authentic responses from the group. These findings supported Gergen's (2009) case in favour of teachers assuming more of a 'facilitator role' to generate inclusive participation; being less controlling; crediting participants' knowledge as valuable; and opening the space for acknowledging and valuing multiple social realities. The next chapter will discuss the content of the participants' creative work throughout the workshops, and show how they enabled different aspects of identity formation to emerge.

Chapter 6. The relational self: the coexistence of self and others

6.1. Introduction

The previous chapter presented an analysis of my designed methodology as a tool to explore identity with adolescents. The chapter presented how each of the workshops enabled different aspects of identity to emerge; how individual and collaborative work enabled new ways of relating among the group; and an analysis of the participants' reflections on the methodology as a way to explore themselves, the group, and their work.

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the participants' creative work, particularly on the aspects of identity formation that the participants explored through their individual and collaborative pieces. Therefore, this section aims to answer the third research question of my study: What aspects of adolescents' identity formation are portrayed through their creative writing?

Here I argue that the creative narratives of the students show that identity formation is built in the constant and inseparable multifaceted interactions of the self and the other. My analysis shows the *self* is relational (i.e. relational being (Gergen, 2009)), and is constructed in two different ways: by negotiating inner thoughts and feelings (built as a result of relating to others) with outer expressions of who we are; and by exploring bonds of trust in the relationship with others around them as the backbone of building one's sense of identity. In order to do this, students use and rely on stylistic choices, emotions, and cultural references, to show in writing their own process of identity building through their values and beliefs.

A great deal of the data explored in this chapter is derived from the book created and published by the youth participants. This will be referred to by its title 'Of Life as a Book' (see Appendix P). Hence, this chapter uses creative writing data to inform research.

6.2. The Self as Yin and Yang: the coexistence of light and dark

Throughout the published pieces of creative writing, students usually write about themselves by discussing an *inner* and an *outer self*. The former, hidden to the world, is usually filled with strong negative emotions such as sadness, despair, emptiness, being misunderstood, fear, feeling broken-hearted, and loneliness. The outer self seems to be connected to a more positive vibe, less connected to emotions and more towards enacting, or impersonating creativity, strength, sweetness, determination, smiling against adversity, the ability to move on, making others happy, and showing passion. As dichotomous as they may seem, they are connected. The inner, darker self is a result of events that have happened to them, so although hidden, is still built through the social: death, separation, difficult family dynamics, judgement, or fear of what others might think. Whilst the outer self is an enactment of what they like, feel passionate or care about. One cannot seem to be separated from the other. Although it seems like the outer hides the inner self, the students' writing also shows they complement and coexist with each other, rather than living in opposition.

This pattern can be seen in eight students across their writings in different workshops. Students who write about this 'inner-outer self' relationship usually mention experiences surrounding loss, complicated family dynamics, or situations that have made them feel at risk at some point. It seems then, that there is more 'awareness' of inner states and outer expressions when they have had or faced experiences that mark a 'before and after' in the short span of their lives.

For example, here is this piece by Isabel in Chapter 4 of the book (Workshop *Writing About the Self)*:

> *She is a brave girl despite her short life. Without the accompaniment of her father, she fights together with her sister and her mother to get their lives off the ground. She fears loneliness. She is afraid to lose everything she has built up to now: her friendships, her memories. But what she is most afraid of is death. Despite all those moments, she continues to smile in the face of each problem. She is the one who inspires and transmits feelings.* ***She depicts this art and regains from other bodies the vibration of her lyrics and the emotion of being***

> ***her own self.*** *She doesn't always like to show her soul is broken, but she likes to transmit the happiness in her heart to others.* (Of Life as a Book, p. 54)

Here, Isabel talks of her struggles and inner emotions from not having her father around. She speaks of her inner fears of death, loss and feeling lonely, possibly connected to what it meant to not have her father around, and not wanting to go back to that emotional state. However, she turns to her outer self, recognising her own strength to move on, and claiming her right to be who she wants to be. It is because of this she can show a positive vibe to the outside. Her 'selves' are different but never separate entities. Moreover, when she writes "She depicts this art, and regains from other bodies the vibration of her lyrics and the emotion of being her own self", she goes one step further by stating she gains that strength and happiness from the people she surrounds herself with, acknowledging the need for others external to her, to build her inner sense of self.

For the fourth workshop, the students were asked to reflect on the short story *House Taken* Over by Julio Cortázar. Irene decided to publish this piece, reflecting not only on the story's symbolism but her own human nature, which again, reveals that connection between her inner and outer self:

> *(…) the story* House Taken Over *has left a few open questions. First, it leaves a metaphor of what the taken house represents. The house tries to represent that the difficulties and memories push us to step out from our comfort zone to confront things and leave behind the memories that leave us at a standstill. However, we don't want that. Some people don't want those memories to be entirely lost, so they leave them hidden in the deepest part of their being so that no one can invade them.* (Of Life as a Book, p. 48)

Given the nature of the questions, where they had to think about their own hopes and fears, Irene speaks of the house as a metaphor for the place in oneself where negative experiences are taken as the strength to move forward and try new things. At the same time, she says how the house is also that inner self where we store our fears, difficulties and difficult memories from the world, to keep them safe, because they are an important part of who that person is today, although hidden from others who might interfere with them. Her reflection reveals the strengths of the outer self that allow her to move on:

feeling strong, keeping alive the need to escape from her current situation as a motivation to move on.

In Chapter 1 (*What would happen if…* piece) three students write about the relationship between the inner and outer self as analogous to feeling they are two opposite things at the same time: antihero and hero, victim and monster, jailed and jailer. All three participants show an understanding that they need both sides to exist and they cannot be one without the other. Maggie, for example, when writing about a post-apocalyptic scenario, positions herself both as antihero (each man to his own) and hero (saving family and friends):

> *The truth is, the first thing I would do would be to go back home and protect myself, save myself, hide in a safe place, and then I would tell my family to protect themselves, or maybe just call and tell them my last words. If there were people who needed my help, I would help and protect them. If something were to happen to me, I would sacrifice myself for them, because even if I lost my life, I would save many others.* (What would happen if one day I would walk out of my house and see people eating each other? Chapter 1, p. 12)

In Maggie's case, her first reaction to this hypothetical situation is the need to save herself first. Her instincts are not to try and save those around her, particularly family members. Only once she has saved herself, does she consider helping others and sacrificing herself for them (not referring specifically to family). Throughout Maggie's interview, to better understand her work, her storyline seems connected with the way she discusses family relationships:

> *I don't get along with my dad that much. We fight a lot (…).* [There are things] *I don't like about my dad. So we have a very conflictive relationship (…). With my mum, we have a more trustworthy relationship because I can tell her things just as they are. So I say 'oh! This happened at school today' or 'I didn't do so well at school' or 'I felt this way today'.*

She mentions a difficult relationship with her father. Maggie wants to set a different example for herself and others as she grows up. She also discusses other difficult situations at home, which have made her reflect on the importance of becoming her own

person. This is what she says in her interview when asked to talk about her dreams and her future:

> *Well… mmm… like to try to move forward and have like my own house, or have my own family. And well… like… the way to move forward is like telling my mind that I can do it and not… not… I mean, don't let those negative thoughts not allow me to follow that dream….*

Her dreams and hopes are to be able to move on following her own individual path, not letting negative thoughts and situations get in the way of her possibility of success. Similarly, to her creative writing piece, she therefore writes about her need to help herself first in a difficult situation. It is only once her inner self feels safe, that she tries to reach out for others, becoming the hero character through her actions. It is interesting to see how only after making it to safety herself would she try to let her family know they should go to a safe place and try to actively help others that might need her. She would even sacrifice herself for strangers, but she does not mention her family directly. In her writing, she is both antihero – 'each man to his own' – and hero (sacrificing herself for others). However, she would not be able to be a hero (outer self), without being an antihero and thinking of herself first (inner self), and so both roles coexist.

In the same chapter, Andrea writes the piece *'What would happen if a vampire flew all around the world'*, where she defines herself both as a victim and as a monster. She writes:

> *For me, a vampire is very sacred, because everything a vampire is, it is mine too. People hate you, fear you, have made you suffer and cry. But what's the point in feeling sorry for yourself? Well, I don't, but I am strong. (…)* [The vampire] *is my place where I can break free, be another being and not the character who feared blood and lost everything.'* (Of Life as a Book, What would happen if I were a vampire that flew all around the world? Chapter 1, p. 13)

From talking about what vampires represent for her, and referring to a vampire in the third person point of view, halfway through her piece she shifts to speaking about the vampire from the first person point of view, indicating she becomes one. She explains to the reader that all that a vampire is, is hers as well. Her inner self is filled with fear of loss, describing herself as a victim who lost it all. Becoming that vampire, acting it out, helps

her to feel freed from those feelings and explore a need for taking justice into her own hands. She needs both, her feelings of loss and feeling victimised, in order to become the strong character, she wants to represent with her actions. When I asked her during her interview which was the workshop she found more difficult, she mentioned workshop 4: Writing the self:

Camila: *What has been the most difficult or challenging workshop for you?*

Andrea: *The one about myself because I don't really like talking about the past, that makes me so sad and I have blocked that part of my mind: my past, but I have tried to overcome it myself. (…)*

Camila: *It must be difficult to write about all that.*

Andrea: *Yes, and explaining it. I have never really liked explaining anything; I prefer to keep quiet and rather talk about my future, about what I like, all that.*

Camila: *And which one is the one you feel the proudest of? Which one do you believe is your best piece of writing?*

Andrea: *The one about myself. The five fragments of my life. I really liked that workshop because I didn't know I had done all those things, what I had said, I didn't know about any of that.*

Camila: *Did you do it on your own, or with your mother?*

Andrea: *My mum was telling me all those things. That was so beautiful* […]

Camila: *So, it was the most difficult workshop, but at the same time, the one where you feel the proudest?*

Andrea: *Yes, mam.*

Here, Andrea is very clear about her stand in not wanting to talk about the past. She prefers to keep it with her and rather focus her actions and words on her future and her passions, much like the vampire she describes in her initial piece during the first workshop. However, she continues to say that despite being the most difficult one, the fourth workshop was the one she felt the proudest of in the end because, it seems, it helped her see her childhood from a different perspective, and learn things about herself she did not know before. Andrea continues to learn about her childhood but is still attached to that moment of loss and still keeping it hidden from the outside world, while showing an outer self that is strong and determined.

Andrea speaks openly of her likes, values and inspiration for her pieces. She likes to read horror books and those with dark fantasy characters. She also has an interest in criminal investigation TV series and wants to become a criminologist herself. When I asked her what inspired her work, she answered:

> *I like everything about horror and suffering, as well as justice, because when a person is sad and lonely and all that, that grabs my attention, but when you get to know more things… (pause) but I've always liked all that is black, dark, this is what I like.*

Her published pieces speak of that darkness of the human soul, or inner self, darkened and victimised by external situations related to loss and hate, where the actions become a response that looks to restore justice, a balance between good and evil. One (inner self) could not be without the other (outer self).

One last example of how the inner and outer self of these participants complement each other can be found in Tusitala's piece, published as part of the first workshop: In this fragment, she is both jailed and jailer:

> *Among the wreckage, my most profound demons come out. At the front of the line, Sadness, Melancholy and Great Despair, leaving Happiness with wounds bigger than the will to give up. These demons look for a way out from this "cage", and they only find it in my eye sockets. Those tears scream in silence.'* (What would happen if I stopped feeling? Chapter 1, p. 14)

Here, Tusitala does not give explanations, as other students do, to explain the 'darkness' that she is. Her physical body seems to become the barrier that keeps emotions inside, emotions defined as demons (sadness, melancholy, despair). Here the inner self carries that negativity and her body becomes the 'cage' that keeps them locked in until they find a way out: through tears. By guarding those demons inside, she becomes a demon herself, a 'guardian of the doors of hell', trying to keep that sadness and negativity from taking over her outer life, although she is not always successful. When I asked her about this particular piece, she mentions a profound melancholy that was triggered by a fight with her mom that same morning:

> '*I was with the imagination under my skin, and I was also feeling terrible melancholy. So I started writing… loneliness is terribly beautiful because it is profoundly free… So everything was there. That day I woke up 'con el hígado en el hombro' (with the liver in my shoulder[36])* [see below]*… let me explain. There are days when one can't take it anymore, and my mum picked a fight with me. So one thing led to another, and I don't like fighting with her.'*

The relationship with her mother, when conflictive, seems to crack the 'cage' where she keeps her demons. Her outer self becomes an expression of what she holds on the inside, and she becomes both: jailed and a jailer of emotional demons. Tusitala writes again about the struggle between inner and outer self later on when she writes about herself using the third person point of view for workshop four, using similar wording and images:

> *(…) She builds from the wreckage, blooming from the deepest pit of shadows. The light she brings with her, is infectious, radiates… a little girl. (…) Feelings overflow, nicotine comes and goes, the heart's ups and downs… Everything that belongs to her is destroyed. Although, human brother, her smile will always disguise it.* (Woman, Chapter 4, p. 56).

In this fragment, Tusitala writes again about the delicate balance between a dark inner self which feels everything she cared about has been destroyed, and what she manages to make from that destruction: something which helps her build herself again into an outer self that brings more light, like a childlike innocence. Her physical actions, like smoking, play this 'jailer' role, almost cathartic by helping the 'overflow' of negative emotions be released and/or kept in such a way that they are not shown to the world as they really are. She finds the light she projects to the outer world from the darkness that lies within her. It is interesting to see how, during her interview, she retells her own life story in the third person point of view, almost as if she is separating herself from her past, looking at it from afar, or from above, keeping her strong, happy self, and safe from a darker inside where her memories of destruction live:

> *The first chapter I would practically say it's 'The Abandonment'. A little girl by the name of* [Tusitala] *was born, and a year after her birth, the mother leaves her in a place with X family, with X characteristics, extremely distant, she doesn't have a*

[36] NT - The words were kept in translation. In Spanish, when 'liver' is used to describe emotions, means feeling enraged, awful, uneasy, frayed or on edge, or all at the same time. The expression encompasses a group of emotions that cannot be translated into one word.

> *relationship with her, like if she weren't her daughter. And this little girl starts growing up and starts to get acquainted and creates her own family, to whom she owes everything she is, everything she has. So, that's like the main thing, and that's where* [Tusitala]*'s double life begins. One life is like the way her mother sees her; and the other, how she sees herself being with another family, in another family circle she doesn't see herself in because she breaks the mould.*

Being separated from her mother not out of chance but out of her mother's choice, clearly marks a before and after in her life. She feels from very early on, she does not fit within this new family that was forced upon her. Tusitala feels she 'breaks the mould' of that family: she is too different, and at the same time, she cannot act like her real self. It is, however, impossible for her to discuss who she is without speaking of these two worlds or lives that are part of her at the same time.

In all three cases, just as in Isabel's piece at the opening of this section, there are family situations and conflictive relationships with parents that seem to have triggered these pieces of writing. These situations seem to aid the identity formation process where feelings of loss, misunderstanding, detachment, uncertainty, among others, remain as part of an inner self that is necessary to allow a stronger outer self to be expressed: happy, determined, strong, friendly, and passionate. Both inner and outer spheres complement each other despite how different they seem, and both are necessary when making sense of the social reality around them. Together, they seem to define the ways in which the students relate to others.

Erikson (1968) refers to the *identity versus role confusion* crisis when discussing mid-adolescents. He states this is a period of time when they start looking for their place in the world and therefore define what they want to do for a living. In addition to this, there is a heightened sense of self-awareness, avoiding situations that might ridicule them in front of others, as well as looking for ways to be 'affirmed by peers, be confirmed by teachers, and to be inspired by worth-while "ways of life."' (Erikson, 1968, p. 130). Similarly, Kroger (2007) points out how mid-adolescents start to move away from parental control, and relationships with peers and friends become more intense and fundamental: '(…) feedback from friendships and the peer group provides not only support but also a mirror

for the self as different behaviours are tried and different possibilities for self-definition are tested.' (Kroger, 2007, p. 78). However, these written pieces show that: (1) it is family relationships, particularly with parents, that have the *deepest* effect in helping to balance one's sense of self, and although some of the students' pieces do mention friendships and other social circles, family continues to be the backbone of students' reflections and inspiration in their writing; and that (2) participants in this study do not struggle to find a joint and coherent sense of self in the relationships they have with family or friends, rather it is through the contrasts between emotions and actions that they define who they are. My field work was carried out over nineteen weeks of work, and therefore cannot give an account of the longitudinal self-development of these adolescents. Yet, their writings during those weeks do not show adolescents in 'moratorium' or identity crisis (Erikson, 1968). The students who participated actually have a strong idea of self – stemming from social (particularly family) experiences in their past and present– that enables them to know quite firmly where they stand. As in the Yin and Yang of Chinese philosophy, darkness and light coexist and interconnect. One cannot exist without the other.

This Yin-Yang dynamic can be seen not only in the students' individual work, but also in their collaborative pieces. For example, in Chapter 2 of the book, (*Collaborative Writing)*, Rick, Cristian, Irene and Andrea wrote a short story, '*The Story of a Life'* (Of Life as a Book, p. 21), exploring a man's life from when he was a child until his death. His life is shaped by an early encounter with a clown he meets when he first goes to the circus. He finds out 15 years later that that clown died from a terminal disease a few days after they met. During that time, he has to quit his own dream of becoming a photographer in order to find a job to support his family. The boy wonders how the clown was able to put on a happy face when he was carrying so much pain inside of him. This encounter, and finding out what happened to the clown later, are reflected in what happens in his own future, where first his mother, and finally he himself, get leukaemia. He quits his job to take care of his mother and in doing so, is left homeless, dying alone in the cold streets of Berlin reminiscing about the clown he once met. The main and secondary characters of the students' story live in what seem to be opposites: happiness that is sadness, health that

becomes sickness, dreams that will be fulfilled turning into dreams never accomplished. All these, around the sense of utter loss: loss of dreams, childhood, mother, comfort, home, life. The loss, the 'darkness' it represents, is necessary to be able to appreciate the 'light' that surrounds them: the circus, the love of the mother (another central figure of the story), having a job, the support of those we love.

In another collaborative story, written by Ariadna, Naomy and Mark, titled '*Terroristsaur'*, they speak of a dinosaur created in the times of black magic to cause harm to others, because a human soul was trapped inside it: '*One day, a dinosaur was created to cause harm by the work of black magic… According to the story, there is a human being trapped in that loving dinosaur that makes it evil.'* (p. 25). When it was found by Nazis during the Second World War, it was used as a lethal weapon. The dinosaur attracted his victims by singing a catchy song *'I love you, you love me…'*[37] only to then exterminate them as enemies. However, many years later the dinosaur is found abandoned by an old man with a 'big heart', who transforms the dinosaur's lifestyle through love, hugs and a big smile. Ariadna, in particular, speaks in her interview about her grandmother and how devastating her death was for her; given that for her, her grandmother represented stability and peace, she was eager to include more sweetness in the story, hence the old man character. Mark wanted to include elements that reminded him of his childhood, so this is how Barney the dinosaur came into play, also with some darkness that could balance the sweetness of the 'old man' ending, and Naomy describes this piece in her interview as one where she worked on putting together ideas that were so opposed to each other into an incredible story. The group dynamics show how 'dark' and 'lighter' elements interplay to create one story. At the same time, the dinosaur also represents the sweetness of character with the dark inside represented by a 'human soul'.

This 'Yin and Yang' does not seem to be 'in construction', or 'in the process of being solved', as cognitive developmental theorists describe for adolescents (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2009; Cobb, 2010). In fact, the play and contrast between colours (darkness and

[37] This extract belongs to the theme song of the TV kids show 'Barney & Friends', created by Dennis DeShazer, Sheryl Leach and Kathy Parker (IMBD, 2020).

light) show the adolescents have a very clear idea of what builds their sense of self, as if they needed those opposing forces to define one true sense of self that involves both worlds. In addition to this, it is significant that their 'inner self' is actually built from the social experiences and interactions that have stayed with them. Emotions, negative or positive, are created through those events and help shape the colours they stylistically use in their writing, to show who they are. This is coherent with Gergen's (2009) approach to the relational being: we are not bounded individuals, we actually create who we are, inside and outside, in our experiences with the world (Gergen, 2009; 2015). Keeping that balance of inner and outer selves, keeping the balance between darker and lighter emotions and memories built in the relationship to others around them, helps towards a positive construction of identity.

Youth participants construct meaning about who they are *in* the interaction with those around them, particularly family members. This is a clear example of social constructionist theory in practice: knowledge about who they are is a result of past and present relationships (Gubrium and Holstein, 2008; Burr, 2015; Gergen, 1973; 1985; 2009; 2011; 2015). Their sense of self and how its bright side is built upon the darkness of experiences of loss and disappointment, is openly spoken of in their written pieces and interviews. This reinforces the idea that all individual thoughts and ideas are a result of the social process (Flick, 1998; Gubrium and Holstein, 2008; Burr, 2015, Gergen, 2009). Like Gergen (2011) states: we become in the relationship with others.

This section shows how adolescents in this particular study know exactly who they are today. Just as explained by Gergen's (2009) relational being theory: identity is not a static linear process. They are constantly building their sense of self through relationships. The Yin and Yang metaphor is one way to describe the constant negotiation that happens between the inner and outer selves that only affirms their values.

6.3. Building a sense of self through the relationship with others: Trust as the engine for self-construction

The findings from the previous section demonstrate the delicate balance between the inner and outer self as fundamental to a positive construction of identity. This balance is

built in the creation, experience and development of social relations. It is important to explore how, for the participants, the outer self makes sense of these relationships to help them build that balance, and this will be the primary focus on the following section.

Although students were given a general guide for content, they were free to decide what to write about, what to share with others, and what to finally publish to make public for this research. They also had decision making power in terms of what was made available to their family and school. Most of their pieces of writing are not only autobiographical but also written in relation to others around them. That *'otherness'* they play with in their pieces is of two kinds. The first relates to others who are reliable or show themselves as reliable in time, which helps build that outer 'lighter' self described in the previous section. The second relates to others that are unreliable, where a lack of trust and predictability can permeate that darker inner self. The students' written pieces, together with their interviews, give the idea that trust in the relationships with those 'others' is a fundamental concept in building, or not, a sense of self that is coherent and balanced. The following four subsections will explore and analyse this idea by exploring and explaining the impact of trusting relationships in building their sense of self.

The first section will discuss relationships where trust is not built, but accepted and given from the beginning. When this is the case, these relationships feed the outer self that feels stronger and more resilient to circumstances that might be difficult for them to manage. The second section will explore trust as an extrinsic value which must be built when relating to others. Building trust through what can be seen as a 'trial and error' process is necessary to clarify their values, and provides that balance of 'dark and light' I have previously discussed. The third section discusses the impact of losing bonds of trust due to death, separation or disappointment, and how these experiences mark turning points in the young people's lives and provide critical moments of self-development. Finally, the fourth section delves into one case study where trust has not been attained or kept within any relationship. This case reveals how this results in a fragmented self where inner and outer selves do not complement each other. This last section ends with a more

hopeful note since the student explains the methodology of this project enabled her to navigate safely through this, providing her with a space in which she could trust others.

6.3.1. Inbuilt Trust: The Reliable Other as a space to build resilience

Within the participants' stories the known other is usually represented within the family. All participants, at least once, talk about at least one reliable adult or one reliable relationship with an 'other' in their writing, usually referenced back to a family member (parents, siblings, grandparents, great grandparents, godparents, uncles, and cousins). Family builds what the students define as 'home'. They are role models and represent security, protection or guidance, trust and comfort. Family continues to be central to the students' writing when building characters or talking about their own lives, even more than friendship and love interests. Although some students discuss family members they have a difficult or non-existent relationship with, in general family members seem to be *reliable* and participants perceive trust to be already inbuilt in that relationship.

The adult mentioned the most is their mother, or the figure of the mother, mentioned by at least nine of the authors. From barely mentioning her once in the piece, to describing the type of relationship they might have, the mother represents reliability in her strength, guidance and protection. Rick, for example, speaks of his mother to Mark during the third workshop (*Writing about the other*). Mark then rewrote Rick's experience using the first person point of view. Rick tells an anecdote of a younger him getting into an accident with his sister's bike when his mother asked him to go buy a pound of rice. Here, Rick's mother is mentioned in two ways that complement each other: as an organised housewife, and protector of her children:

> *On a May night in 2013, my mum sent me to the store for a small, insignificant pound of rice. But what she didn't know at the time, was that this small, insignificant chore would turn out to be a very big problem. (…) Sometime later, a few minutes must have passed, my mum received a call, and she would not be happy with what she was about to hear! She left home quickly. I now even think she was faster than Flash himself! (…) She approached me and asked me about what had happened, but I didn't know what to tell her.* (Little Big Problems, Chapter 3, p. 41)

Rick's experience, as told by Mark, places his mother at the beginning and ending of the narrative, making her an important secondary character of the story. Rick's mother holds the reins of the household: whatever happens inside and outside of home, she is alert and ready. Despite his story being written and told by someone else, during our interview, Rick puts his mother first in what is most important to him: "C: What things are important to you? R: Important to me? My mum. Football, but then… but then football is not as important. First is my mum above all." Mark, therefore, adequately represents this meaningful relationship through the retold anecdote.

In the same written exercise, Naomy and Tusitala pair up to write the same anecdote they both went through together, but explore how it was lived and perceived by the other at the time: Tusitala talked to her sister, who lives about a three-hour bus drive from her, to find out she was feeling down and sad. Tusitala made the decision to run away from home to go see her and come back without her mother noticing. Naomy, when she hears about this plan, decides to support her. They tell each other's side of the story and how it all happened. Naomy writes about the reactions of her friend's mum before and after finding out about the plan:

> *We got home, we knocked and my mum opened up. My friend explains our plotted plan to her. My mother, a little bit confused, gives me permission (that was the whole point of the plan in the first place). And so, we carried on with this great adventure. Both of us, a little bit scared, showed firmness. We would not let anything overshadow us. (…)*
> *(…) When I got there I called my sister but she didn't answer. I tried many times, but had no success. I didn't want to go back until I could get a hold of my sister and see her and make sure she was going to be fine, so I decided to go to the house where she lived. I knew if I did this, everyone would notice. But I didn't care.*
> *(…) Everyone told my mum. I knew what would be waiting for me.*
> *(…) I went back. I had a lot of problems at home. I couldn't call my friend to tell her what had happened.*
> *We met back at school thinking the worst was over, but it wasn't like that. No one knows everything came tumbling down (…).* (Portrait of an Experience, Chapter 4, pp. 36-37)

Here, Naomy speaks of Tusitala's side of the story and mentions Tusitala's mother twice. First, is a mother who trusts them. Although it seems Tusitala's mother had an intuition

that there was something more going on, she still gave her permission for Tusitala not to spend that night at home. She is also portrayed as an obstacle they had to overcome, as her refusal would have overshadowed the plan. Earning her trust and keeping it was important for Tusitala. However, next time Naomy mentions her, the trust has been broken, and that brings consequences that the girls had attempted to avoid. The use of expressions like '*I knew what would be waiting for me*' and '*everything came tumbling down*' describe that 'darkness' that is built in the breaking of trust. It is important to mention, accompanying this analysis, how Tusitala speaks of her mother during her interview:

> *This one time, my mum was one of those who would seize any opportunity to get a job, and we sold yucca pasties. And once I was walking by and a strong wind or a man, I can't remember well, drove past with his car and ruined everything. Pure Grimm Brothers' style. I see how my mum drops everything and I stood there watching her, and something moved inside me and I helped her. And she said 'Hi lovely, how are you?' and I said 'fine, thanks'. And I was about to leave and not say anything else, and she said 'Would you like a pasty?' and I said 'Ok, fine', and she packed two and I took them home. And then, how do I get home to my mother, the one that has given me everything for so long and tell her 'ah, no, is that my other mum gave me these pasties'? No, that has no logic! (…) because I felt I was ungrateful, sort of, yes? Because it's like if I took care of a plant, and for so long, I give it what it needs, I give it care and love, and another gardener comes along later, and one day, the plant blooms in his care and not mine. It is an ugly situation, and I, being the plant, felt awful, because I felt I didn't belong but that I should belong to that place. Because I felt my wings were in another nest but the nest I got is the one I had. I couldn't migrate. Why? Because of that feeling, that link of gratefulness I had, and that I have with my other parents. So that's when* [Tusitala] *started being terribly confused and her life became a big mess.*

Her biological mother abandoned her when she was little, leaving her in the care of a couple who raised her. She felt, for a very long time, she did not properly belong in this family, but still recognises them as the mother and father who raised her and have given her everything she has today. The sister she visited is her biological sister. She flees her home to go to find that connection by attending to her sister's needs. She is still careful not to break the bond of trust she continues to value, despite her hidden feelings of not quite belonging. In this previous quote from her interview she explains how important it is for her to maintain her adoptive mother's trust, and how grateful she is to be in her care,

despite her feelings of not belonging. The mother figure for Tusitala seems to be very important, something you can also see in the use of two different metaphors: (1) being a plant that despite the care and love she receives from her carers, she ends up blooming better in different hands. However, she wants to bloom for those who have cared for her for so long, but cannot; (2) and being a bird who has been placed in the wrong nest and has still been raised by love, despite being different. By telling stories about herself to others and writing about herself, she is highlighting the importance of having a reliable, trustworthy relationship with her mother, biological or adoptive, and knows that having it or not makes the difference between feeding on her inner, darker self, or on her brighter, stronger outer self.

A final example is provided through Isabel's writings. Isabel, discusses her mother in two pieces of writing (*What if…* and *My Life Story*) in the first and fourth workshops. In the first piece her mother is mentioned only briefly, while in the second one, she expands on what her mother means to her:

> *The day had just started when I met my friends. They talked to me in a way they never had before. The only thing I said was that I wish I was dead so I never had to see them again. I felt so awful, that for the rest of the day, this was the only thing I could think about. When I came home*[38]*, my mum was there, and she asked me if I was ok, if something was wrong. I just started crying and she hugged me…*
> (What would happen if when I went to bed, I never got up again? Chapter 1, p. 11)
>
> *'My mum didn't allow me to have a boyfriend: "At your age it is not normal to have a boyfriend because you don't have a clear mind, or your goals in life." So it was a forbidden love, but even so… 'everything the sun touches will never be hidden', and so this is true. My mum found out and there were lots of arguments. (…) Here I am to continue to achieve my goals together with my mother, a warrior of a woman, and my sister: together, the three of us, going after our daily goals.'*
> (My Life, Chapter 4, pp. 46-47)

[38] NT: 'When I came *home'* has two words in Spanish: *casa* and *hogar.* The latter is a literal translation of home. The former, translates literally to *house*, as a building. However, in Colombia, it is colloquially used (and very frequently) to refer to *home.* In this particular case, the author decided to use the word *hogar* rather than *casa*, which gives it a more powerful meaning to the word.

In the previous fragments, Isabel speaks of her mother three times. In the first fragment, she mentions her as the mother who understands that something might not be right, and provides comfort in such situations. In the second fragment, Isabel speaks of her mother in two ways. First, as a mother who 'knows better', who sets expectations for her as her daughter and wants to guide her on what she might consider 'a better path': someone who thinks first about her own development and goals, and then thinks of having a relationship. Second, Isabel writes of her mother as someone who is strong and determined: at the end of the same piece, after narrating the main events in her life, Isabel mentions that, today, she continues to pursue her personal goals and dreams (as per the expectations her mother has set for her), not on her own, but in the company of her mother who she defines as a warrior. Her own sense of self seems to be built upon, and inseparable from, this mother-daughter relationship, as she continues to follow her advice.

Other reliable relationships are explored in the participants' creative writing pieces, usually with regard to adult family members such as great grandparents and grandparents (four mentions), the figure of the father (two mentions), uncles and godmother (three mentions); and others more similar in age, like siblings and cousins (three mentions). Despite being scattered mentions in a group of 15 participants, the relationships with these groups of people share similar characteristics when the students write about them. Firstly, as it has been mentioned before, there is a sense of trust and reliability with people who belong to the family circle, more so than with outsiders like friends, love interests, or peers. For example, Andrés wrote an account of Yuniok's experience as a child, portraying family relationships during a memorable episode:

> *I was 5 years old, and they took me to the doctor to get my shots. Frightened, I ran and escaped the doctor who was trying to poke me! My dad got a hold of me and said – "Everything will be ok"-. He held me tight while I had a tantrum. But when everything was over, my uncles pampered me and gave me lots of sweets. After that, my dad gave me a ride on his motorcycle and everything was finally over!* (Portrait of an Experience, Chapter 4, p. 40)

Yuniok's uncles and father are remembered as family members who he can rely on, and can be trusted during a moment that is recalled as almost traumatic for him. Andrés

retells this anecdote by placing emphasis on Yuniok's father who states 'everything will be ok', and shows us how in the end, everything actually was.

Secondly, and independently of the type of relationship mentioned above, reliability among the students was defined in terms of positive attributes such as: understanding, support, unity, guidance, being comforting, and being an example or role model. In addition to these, when the relationship is with family members closer in age to them, there is a feeling of shared complicity. For example, when Isabel writes about Ariadna's experience during a family dispute, she places emphasis on positive family relationships that became stronger and more valued in the process:

> *I was at a family party. Suddenly, they started fighting about someone important. Because I was so little, and so were my cousins, our parents didn't want us to watch what was going on. So they took us all… it was like 15 of us… to a room where we were supposed to be with our grandmother. We all agreed and took turns to go to the bathroom to spy and see what was going on! They would take us in twos and my grandma would keep us company. When they would come back, they would tell us what was happening outside. At that moment I felt nervous and at the same time joyful about getting along so well with my cousins, since our innocent minds made us all laugh together.* (Portrait of an Experience, Chapter 4, p. 30)

Here, the focus is not the mother, or the fight that's happening, but how Ariadna lived and shared that experience in the company of her cousins and the protection of her grandmother, a situation that made them closer and minimised feelings of fear and her sense of misunderstanding.

Examples of trust described within these relationships, either with the mother or other family members, is already given, in-built, rather than built in time. This trust enables them to build *resilience* to face difficult circumstances outside these relationships. Reviewing how my participants remember some difficult moments (like a bicycle accident, trying to run away from home without being caught, having a forbidden relationship, having a disagreement with friends, getting a vaccination, or reliving a family fight), suggests that trusted and reliable relationships, usually with family members, allowed them to revisit those incidents as being already solved and dealt with, most of them with a happy ending that was possible because of the in-built trust in these relationships. This

type of narrative is consistent with what Gergen and Gergen (2008) define as progressive narrative, and McAdams (2006; 2011) as redemptive narratives, where the students see themselves usually in a positive light after a series of challenging events. These difficult episodes which in turn build that darker inner self, also allow them to build a stronger outer one which enables them to face past or possible future events they might find challenging.

According to Cowan *et at.* (2019), the participants' narratives in this section reflect a positive identity formation insofar as they show three key elements the authors found in their study with adults: a positive view of the future; resilience; and a sense of agency, which means they feel empowered to move on in their own terms, rather than being pushed forward by 'destiny'. Their trust in the relationship with their mothers, even through tough love, is important to maintain. They are looked at as protectors and help overpower negative emotions. A similar role for mothers was found in McLean and Mansfield (2011) study on past event conversations with mothers. Although in my study the mothers are not present to discuss past experiences, or even to discuss any content their sons and daughters are writing about, when the young people decide to write about the mother figure, she is a figure that reduces feelings of aloneness and vulnerability. Finally, the key to this section is pointing out how fundamental trust bonds are for my participants. Family members are portrayed as emotionally supportive. Breen and McLean (2017) make a case for mid-adolescents' redemptive narratives by concluding they are favourable at this age, only if they come with the necessary emotional support to see a 'better future' for themselves.

6.3.2. Extrinsic trust: trial and error in self-definition

The reliable other, the one which can be trusted, is not necessarily a given, however frequently it appears in the participants' writing. Relationships outside the family circle are approached with caution and not trusted until proven otherwise. This happens particularly when referring to friendship: trust within a friendship is not a given, but is built in time, and even with time, it is a concept that my participants were still trying to navigate and resolve. Contrary to some family bonds that are naturally created and

trusted, friendship does not lead to a trust bond that can be established and taken for granted from childhood. Nine out of fifteen students wrote one or more pieces that explored potential or current friendship relationships, and summarised what they and another four students discuss in their interviews.

For my participants, meeting and establishing relationships with others outside their trusted family circle is not an easy task. Two main reasons can be identified:

(1) Firstly, four of them through their pieces, and five more in their interviews, do not see themselves as very '*sociable'* when it comes to establishing relationships outside their circle of trust. They state they are 'people of few friends', or who enjoy spending time on their own;

(2) Secondly, and linked to the previous point, five students in their pieces and two more in their interviews, speak of *false friendships*, referring to negative experiences they have had in the past with peers. This reason for being unable to make stable relationships outside the family is linked to clearly stated definitions of what friendship should be (therefore, not everyone is deserving of their trust, hence few friends, given that few comply with such definitions). Having said that, there was a common ground for them to experiment building new circles of trust. Two students in their writing and five more during their interviews, refer back to their hobbies and personal interests. Participants discussed how they have found in them common ground for establishing new connections they can try out, without feeling too inadequate, as outsiders, or too distrustful.

Irene, for example, wrote a piece for the workshop *Challenging our views* (see Appendix J for workshop objectives) where, using the first person, she describes a character who believes she is better than everybody else because she comes from a wealthier family:

> *I was born within a wealthy family, without any financial difficulties or anything like that. As I grew up, they raised me with the idea that because I was part of a well-off family, I was better than others. Also, that created hypocrisy in my friends and even with my family.*
>
> *My name is Ana María. I have a very complex way of being with those I live with, even with those I don't. My family is divided and my parents will be getting a divorce because of a couple of disagreements. Since I was in preschool, everyone*

> *has come close to me out of self-interest and I don't believe there is such a thing as friendship.* (A Character Different to Me, Chapter 5, p. 61)

Irene writes about different aspects of this character's family life which might explain her behaviours (loss of trust will be discussed in the next section). She connects to friendship twice: as a relationship that is not sincere because Ana Maria believes she is better than others; and as a relationship that is not possible or non-existent, for the same reason. Friends, in this particular case, must be second guessed or doubted, lacking trust and a suspicion surrounding motives in establishing a relationship with her; a relationship where trust still needs to be built. She defines these attempts at friendship in terms of hypocrisy. A false connection where two people might talk to each other, but the fictional Ana Maria's attitude and the hidden motives of others do not allow for a genuine connection to take place. At the same time, in this piece Irene provides a definition of what she feels friendship should really be about: genuine, sincere connections, with interests in common, and distanced from material possessions. In her interview, Irene uses similar words to those she used in her pieces when referring to friendship:

> *Camila:* *What has been the happiest moment in your life?*
>
> *Irene:* *Now. From all my life, now, because I have found peers, and* ***the girls I spend time with are like very sincere and I think they are good people****. I don't know them very well, but the first impression is that they have been good friends,* ***even though there is no such thing as friendship in the world****, but I call them friends because they are my confidants, the ones I have spent the most time with, even if little time has passed, you can see they are good people.*
>
> *Camila:* *Let's talk about these four, five months you've been at this school: your class, friends, teachers, classes (…)*
>
> *Irene:* *At the beginning it wasn't easy because I didn't know anyone. The only one that would spend time with me was my cousin (…) but then he became more distant and he started leaving me alone and I would spend the break over there in the classroom and stayed there. Until one day I (…) found Andrea in the classroom and she was drawing in a window and I just watched her and I said to myself,* ***I'm going to try and socialise because I am a person of few friendships, but I said I'm already tired of being alone, let's make a friend or something, I have to now, it's been like a month in this situation! And I said, well, friendships are like, important****, so I asked her a question (…)* [and then] *I heard they were talking about K-Pop and I was super surprised, (…) so I came closer and (…) we talked about K-Pop and I settled in. When there's group work,* ***we all support each other and we explain it to each other****.*

Irene had recently joined the school, in that academic year, and therefore she was only a few months in when I interviewed her. She defines herself as a person of few friends, however considers them important in her life. Being new at her school there is a sense of distrust, of not knowing how to approach others and create new relationships. Now that she has found and established connections with other girls, Irene defines her friends as sincere, good people, confidants, and supportive with academic work, whilst acknowledging this is what she has seen so far, and that trust is still being established in the process of getting to know them. She states in her interview, as she does in her piece, '*there is no such thing as friendship',* possibly referring to that construction of trust: do you ever get to know people outside your trusted circle enough? It is important to point out, though, that it is their common interest in K-Pop culture that initially gives Irene the impulse to approach this group of girls and establish a connection. Common interests and shared cultural references might be a door to exploring and creating new bonds of trust.

This latter point can also be seen in other written pieces, for example Rick's piece about Mark for the workshop *Writing the Other*. Mark shares with Rick his first football match with his new team, a match that would earn them a place in the regional football league. Rick writes the story using the first person point of view, focusing on emotions and thoughts Mark experienced before, during and after the match. These are some quotes from that piece relating to his teammates:

> *The day of the match came, on the 28th April to be exact. I felt tingling between my legs. It was my opportunity to show that I was good at football. (…) My team trusted my assurance and confidence. After a while, my team scored the first goal. I was happy for them, excited I was doing everything right. Then the second goal came along. I was more confident and assured. (…)*
>
> *After a few minutes, the second half starts. (…) Time went by and my team continued to score goals. I would tackle shots and a moment came when my team was way up there. They left me alone in a counter attack. I reacted the best that I could and avoided a complicated goal. After that, my team was more relaxed. They scored a few more goals and then the game was over. We crushed the other team with a final score of 8-0. (…)* (The Match of My Life, Chapter 4, p. 39)

Here, differing from other similar pieces in this workshop, there are many references to the first person plural: *we* and *us*, and an interesting transition between *them* and *us* as

well. According to Rick's piece, Mark felt his performance was being judged not only by his coach but by his teammates as well, and the use of pronouns in the piece show how through the game he becomes a part of the team. They trusted his actions, and after he proved them right by tackling a complicated shot, avoiding a goal being scored, the team 'relaxed'. He proved them right. Through the game, trust between the players increased, until he can finally say '*we* crushed the other team'. Football becomes the common ground that brings him closer to his teammates, the point of contact where he feels he can experiment and do his best to fit in. Mark explores this directly in his piece *'I Found a True Friend: Football'* which he wrote for the workshop *Challenging Our Beliefs*. He describes a character who brings the morale of the team down, and how the team helps his character overcome that, through trust and being open with each other:

> *I was 5 years old when I met the best sport there is: "Football". As the years went by, I became very fond of it. When I was 12 years old I joined a team where I didn't know anybody else, and much less trusted them! Time went by and I started to get to know my teammates much better. (…) but there was a problem. I had a very negative set of mind (…) My teammates realised this and came to talk to me, and each of them told me the story of how they came to be part of the team, and I told them mine. I started to trust them more, which made the team perform at its 100%. (…)* (I Found a True Friend: Football, Chapter 5, p. 61)

Mark also speaks about friendship and football in his interview, providing more context for his stories:

> *Mark:* *I've always tried to get along with everyone in my class and have never had problems here at school or with anyone, and the friends I have, well, they also play football, only football. My friends from primary, as well, even if we don't play football together, they all keep playing. (…)*
>
> *Camila:* *When someone sees you with your friends in the classroom, what group would they say you belong to? The football players, maybe?*
>
> *Mark:* *I would say so, although they would say that we are the annoying ones (…). It's not that we are all annoying, but there are like two that are like that and if we are all together it is like saying that everyone pays for the actions of that one, and then we are all boxed in there.*

Here, Mark explains how his friends have been those with whom he shares the same interest for football. It is football that provides him with a platform to relate to others. However, football is not enough for him to connect significantly with his peers, despite the

shared interest. A few of his friends seem to behave in such a way that others judge him incorrectly when he is with them. He says later in the interview he is the captain of his current football team, which places him as a leader. He discusses this position as one of great responsibility as he needs to support, encourage and motivate those in his team to perform the best that they can. Therefore, in a similar way to Rick's retelling of his story, he fluctuates between the captain role (*I*) and a player of the same team (*we*). The football field becomes his safe place to establish those relationships of trust with others, trust which at times is broken away from the field, when the actions of others make both other adults and peers lose sight of his work and the motivations he values so much. Through Rick's piece, it can be seen Mark places trust, assurance and teamwork as the core attributes to define friendship, all of which take time to build, either in the football field, or at school.

Particularly Mark's stories and interview mirror Flanagan, Gill and Gallay's (2005) findings on social participation and social trust. The authors found that mid adolescents who belong to community groups or after-school programmes show more benevolence in others, manage more horizontal relationships, and can easily build trust to maintain a group working together towards a similar goal. These adolescents can set their individual interests second for the benefit of the group. Narratives like Irene's where she finds common interests through K-pop, or Yuniok being recognised for his drawings are also good examples of this. Irene and Andrea, for example, study Korean together in their own free time, which has brought them closer and talking about common dreams for the future. Both want to become criminalists. In Yuniok's case, the group asked him if he wanted to design the front cover of the published book, which he gladly offered to do. For this group of fifteen students, in a way, this space became an after-school programme for them, where relationships of respect and benevolence were built through nineteen weeks (see Chapter 5 for an in depth analysis of what the methodology permitted for identity formation).

Using common and shared interests and cultural references becomes fundamental to enabling them to explore these questions, and realise why today they have people they

can actually call friends, rather than just peers. This aligns with Gergen (2009) as he discusses how predictable scenarios allow trust to be created, or as he says 'bred'. He continues by saying that these scenarios provide certain ground rules that are common knowledge for that group who trust others will follow them, common rules that become a common language. Whether it is knowing the same K-Pop references or jargon, or knowing football rules and what makes a good team or not, or in one of Yuniok's pieces when others see he is good at drawing, all these are criteria that provide common ground for creating a safe space for building trust: 'As widely recognized, without the sense of trust, there is little room for intimacy, family, organization, or community.' (Gergen, 2009, p. 153).

Trust helps build a positive sense of self in adolescents, which can evolve in an environment they consider safe. At the same time, the lack of trust can push them to question more who they are and what they value most when relating to others. By saying what they do not like or trust in others, for example through the narratives they created for workshop 5, they begin defining important aspects of themselves moving forwards: what is friendship? What do I value in it? What raises alarms when relating to others? Who can I trust? How do I know?

Interestingly, Jackson (1993, in Kroger, 2007) states it is in middle adolescence where young people become more involved with peers and friendships and distance themselves from parental control. However, this research shows my participants approach those friendships with caution and continue to have their families as the main point of support for their development. Kroger (2007) highlights friendships and peer relationships are a social space to experiment different possibilities of beings, but that space for experimenting does not imply they feel comfortable, confident, or certain they can do this freely with peers or friends. There is a sense of mistrust that needs to be overcome first, and a step to do that, is finding shared cultural references and interests. These adolescents, through trial and error, and I would say, bravery, come to clear definitions of what they value in relationships they can trust -like sincerity, teamwork and genuineness-, and in doing so, they continue to build a balanced and positive sense of self.

6.3.3. Losing trust: loss and the self-awareness of change

'In order to win something you have to lose something'. This popular saying is an accurate reflection of identity formation in these adolescents. Loss, or the breaking of trust were important passages of growth for my participants. In general, loss marked a before and after, a hard push into 'being more mature' and understanding the adult world around them. Loss of trust is expressed in different ways, and mostly involves the loss or near loss of a family member. These experiences are expressed not only in the students' creative writing pieces but also in their interviews. These are their first experiences with death, and that brings them into a different world of emotions they were not aware of before. However, loss is not only about death. Losing friendships, health, important relationships and dreams, among others, are also topics that are written about. Eleven out of fifteen students refer to experiences of loss and the significance of this in their pieces.

Alejandra, for example, writes a piece about herself using the third person point of view for workshop four, *Writing about the self* (see Appendix I for workshop guide). In this piece, she narrates her grandfather's funeral, an event she also speaks about during her interview:

> *With such a short life and having all her life ahead of her, she had already lived one of her biggest losses. She wept bitterly, wishing that maybe that shadow that would not wait, that did not give away one moment, not even a little more time, would allow her to hear a simple goodbye, or maybe she just wanted one last memory. She wanted the warmth of an embrace, or a kiss in her forehead, of one "I love you". Or maybe she just wanted to stop feeling that emptiness or that cold in her soul that would make her burst into tears of rage and hate against all those years, the world, time, life. She would defy it all with her single wish of living one more moment by his side, having one last memory. Being able to tell him not one last "goodbye", but a "see you soon". All this went through her mind while she said "I love you, Grandpa", as she watched his coffin descend and being covered by soil.* (Account, Chapter 4, p. 54)

In this piece, Alejandra deals with losing her great grandfather (in her interview she clarifies they called him Grandpa). She has a realisation she is going through a very important loss and this makes her aware of her own life: it has been short, in the great

scheme of things. This self-awareness does not happen in any of her other pieces, which tend towards happy endings. This moment of loss brings a moment of confusion, a mixed emotional state between sadness and anger. Her metaphor of death as a shadow is interesting, a shadow that covers all light up, including hers, and her opportunities to have made more memories with her great grandfather. During her interview, Alejandra describes this moment in relation not to herself, but to her family and how they coped with it:

Camila: *Is there any other chapter in your life you would consider key in your life?*

Alejandra: *I think of my Grandpa's death. Well… my great grandfather, but… A Great Grandfather's Love?*

Camila: *Yes. What a beautiful title. What happened in this chapter?*

Alejandra: *So, my family was very joyful, they would play music. My grandpa died like two years ago. (…) So everybody started feeling sad, crying, they remember him as a sad moment. They are not as happy as they used to be.*

Camila: *I see. And what did it mean to you?*

Alejandra: *It meant a lot because my family is very charismatic, they make a joke out of everything, and at that moment there were people crying who I have never seen sad or crying in my family. And there I saw them completely inconsolable.*

This 'outsider's' perspective, different from her creative piece, gives another dimension to what Alejandra was going through at the time. While the creative writing piece enabled her to look at herself and how his death actually affected her, her interview gives her a chance to look at her family as an outsider, looking at the changes in emotion and how the adult world around her deals with this loss. Although told from two very different points of view, the components complement each other in the understanding that her trust in the happy, peaceful environment and interactions within her family, has now been broken. It cannot be taken for granted, and that raises questions for Alejandra in terms of how she will redefine how that 'happiness' will look from now on. During her interview, when I asked her about important members in her family, she mentioned her great grandmother as the centre of her family, who represents this sense of happiness in her life in the two years since her great grandfather died.

This break, and dealing with emotions of loss, are discussed by other students as well. Yuniok, for example, writes about Andres's experience of loss in the piece Portrait of an Experience, for workshop three, Writing the other (see Appendix H for workshop guide):

> *One day at home, when I was 12 years old, I was watching telly like any other day; but when the phone started to ring, all the house became gloomy. My older sister came into the room with news that would hurt me: my grandfather had died. My mother broke down in tears with my sisters. I did not know how to react to the situation. I started to feel empty. Next day, when the funeral began, I remained quiet during the mass, looking at my sad family members. But no tears came. At the burial, that emptiness grew in me, making me cry as I remembered how he treated me so lovingly when he took me to work to be with him. I started feeling rage against God for taking him away, but then I understood this 'is all part of life' and we have to move on because we still have a life ahead of us.* (Portrait of an Experience, Chapter 4, p. 32)

When Yuniok wrote this piece, he focused on the emotions Andrés was going through at the time; emotions that transition from perplexity to emptiness, to sadness, to rage, to acceptance and understanding the need to move on. Andrés's routine is disrupted because this family member he deeply trusted (in-built trust), and who took care of him, has now died. Similarly to Alejandra, observing other adults around him react to this death is part of the process, as well as reflecting on what was actually lost, that is the love and care of the person who died, or the tranquil environment they shared before this death disrupted it. In this piece, Andrés is also portrayed in his resilience to move on from negative emotions and understand his life in 'the greater scheme of things': '(…) because we still have a life ahead of us'. Throughout his interview, Andrés speaks of his grandfather's death as a major event in his life:

Andrés: *(…) When my mum left for her job, everything came tumbling down, sort of, like academically. (…)*

Camila: *And you believe this was because your mother was not there with you?*

Andrés: *Yes, because she motivates me to be responsible, so when she left I wasn't tied down to someone who would tell me what to do, and she trusted me because I had good grades. (…) Then in November, I came here to be with her. And so it was one 11th of November. My mum left work and they called around seven in the evening to tell us our grandad had died.*

Camila: *Did he use to live in Mongua?*[39]

Andrés: *Yes. And at the time it didn't hit me so hard, I mean, I didn't cry. We then arrived at Mongua and two days later we buried him, and when they were taking him away from home, then I started crying a lot, and when they buried him as well.*

Camila: *Were you close to your grandad?*

Andrés: *When they changed me from school and my mum left to go to Sogamoso, I was left alone with my godmother, my grandma and my grandpa. So my godmother, so to speak, was unfair towards me because she wouldn't tell her son to do the daily chores and she would tell me to do them all. She would scream at me and all, and my grandpa would protect me. And when I was little, he would take me everywhere with him. He was very good to me. It hurt a lot that he was gone.*

Camila: *What does this moment represent for you?*

Andrés: *When I go to Mongua it's not the same anymore because one gets used to my grandad always being there. And, well, it feels lonely over there.*

Different changes had happened during that time: when his mother got a job at a nearby municipality, she had to leave her children in the care of his grandparents and godmother. Andrés had already changed schools at least once. He had temporarily lost his mother's guidance which would keep him accountable for his schoolwork and was also left in the care of his godmother who, he felt, was unfair to him. Then Andres's mother had gotten a job closer to where they live today, and that was yet another move and a new school. His grandfather was a family figure that provided him with a sense of stability through all these changes. He remembers his grandfather as a protector who filled in for his mother, as well as a companion and carer in his younger years. Losing this anchor, a person he could trust and count on in spite of the circumstances, marks an end to his childhood. Similarly to Alejandra, he assimilates his grandfather's death when he is finally able to cry and express, like the adults around him, that his departure is real. Having the opportunity in the workshop to retell this experience to a peer, so someone else could interpret this moment in writing, provided him with the tools to reflect on this moment and see how far he has come since then.

[39] Municipality in Boyacá where he is originally from. Part of Boyacá and about 3 to 4-hour drive away from the municipality I worked at in Cundinamarca.

Irene and Andrea also speak of similar losses. They worked together for the Portrait of an Experience piece. As I discussed in the previous section, Irene was new at the school and she had made friends with Andrea through common interests. It is interesting to see how both decided to share intimate moments of loss with each other, to be rewritten by the other, and both were pieces which they decided to publish. Irene's piece on Andrea reads:

> *Some time ago, in my childhood, I lived something that even now, I can't easily forget. She was a very special person to me, even though I didn't spend that much time with her. My great grandmother passed over one morning. They gave me the news of her death. Because of this news' impact, I didn't know how to react, but I didn't feel like crying or acting any differently to what I was feeling like at the moment: staying still, without blinking or thinking about anything. But because I was so young, I couldn't yet understand why they cried, why my family cried and those close to us.*
>
> *This happened in Tolima when I was one year old. This was important because she, in that short amount of time, was the one who took care of me. And that's how I became very fond of her.* (Portrait of an Experience, Chapter 3, p. 40)

Andrea's piece on Irene reads:

> *In the year 2013, a seemingly warm, flowery, cheerful and happy morning, unfortunately, my godmother died. She was a woman I admired deeply, she was a second mother to me: she was with my family and hers. It was painful to know I would never see her again. She died in Bogotá. She was so important to me! Because for me, she was like a mother, another friend, my sidekick that would always be by my side…*
>
> *I acted selfishly because I tried to hold back my feelings. The pain I felt when I saw my second mother had died, really made an impression on me. It is very painful. But the pain eases and everything goes on… but the impact remains.* (Portrait of an Experience, Chapter 3, p. 33)

Similarly to the previous examples, Andrea and Irene write about personal losses that mark important moments in their lives. Even Andrea, though being so young, still remembers what it felt like not to have her great grandmother around. Both students lost people they trusted and loved and are still trying to find a way to cope with it. In both cases, they find themselves unsure of how to react to the situation and reflect on it from a more 'mature' place. Irene, in Andrea's words, defines her 'emotional confusion' as a selfish act when she was not able to express what was expected under the circumstances. She then acknowledged time as a tool for healing, but not forgetting. Andrea looks back

on the moment with an understanding that her age at the time was the reason she could not cry like the adults around her did. Today she is able to understand emotions that arise during moments of loss as an entry or initiation into 'adult expectations'.

During her interview, Irene defines three key moments in her life linked to loss. Firstly, loss of trust: she was held back a year[40] in primary school despite recovering her academic standards and having a teacher make that decision for her:

Camila: *What three subjects had you failed?*

Irene: *It was Maths, because I always fail Maths, Physics because I'm lazy (…) and I don't like Physics! (…) and Spanish. (…)* [I made up for] a*ll three of them (…) and they wouldn't let me through. They tested me and all and the teacher wouldn't let me go through. I think she held a grudge against me, I don't know why, I was always all very quiet. Now I'm still quiet, sort of… but back then…*

Camila: *Why is this moment so important to you?*

Irene: *Because I let my parents down and they grounded me a lot. What really made a mark on me was not being held back a year, but the fact that when I found out I did, I made myself the promise I would pass all my subjects, no setbacks, and not pay attention to anything but being focused in my future. So I set myself that goal, as something that would keep me motivated to not fail at my own plans. That* [setting of a goal, and motivating myself, was] *what made a mark on me, not being held back a year. (…)*

Camila: *How would you name this chapter?*

Irene: *The Beginning… or something like that. In essence, everything begins there because anything before that, there's nothing really important.*

Secondly, loss of life: losing her godmother who was like a second mother to her:

Irene: *(…) my godmother's name was María, and we had a relationship like… I was always very close to her because my parents work and they fought a lot, there were always a couple issues and all that and I tried not to pay attention to that. So when there was a family issue, I went to my godmother's house and I would spend time with her kids and all that and so we had a very close relationship. And then when she got… (…) a disease in her feet and she couldn't*

[40] In Colombia's education system, students must complete minimum curriculum requirements to be able to successfully continue to the next class. More frequently in private schools than in public ones, students who fail three or more academic subjects, cannot be promoted. At the end of the year, they are given time to study and an additional opportunity to repeat the level exams of the subjects they failed. If they are not successful in doing so, they are 'held back a year' and cannot move forward to the next class. In Irene's case, she failed three subjects and although she passed the level exams, seems her Maths teacher at the time did not agree she had the academic competences in the subject to be able to move on to the next year group.

walk and was almost like disabled and she even had to use diapers, so I didn't understand that, and she had many problems, despite being so young (…), and she then had a stroke (…). And according to the doctor she was… she had like paralysis, but [actually] *she was dead. I mean, like, I don't know why they had kept her there then, to cash the insurance or something? Who knows? And then when they let me know that she had died I didn't know how to react. And when they took her to La Dorada and did the novena and the funeral and all, I didn't feel like crying, I mean, I was there just all like in shock. Then after that I just thought and said, now that she's not going to be here, what do I do now? And so that is what made a mark on me because she was a very special person, (…). Like the love and understanding. Because my mum worked and she didn't have any time left to see us, to ask us… how are you doing?... I mean, she would give us everything, but… how can I explain this to you? Not ask us how we were because she was very busy at work like my dad, <u>and instead it was my godmother who gave me all that affection and love of a mother</u>. It was like one's mother had died.*

And finally, loss of her family structure: her parents' break up.

Irene: *When my family separated there were various family problems: my parents didn't want to be together anymore because of different complications they had, and we were tired of so much fighting between them. We were three siblings (…). (…) My dad would go his way, mum would go her way and my brothers, because they were older, they could go out, and because I was a girl, I couldn't just go out and about, so I was the one to bear the brunt, because I was the one who had to stay. (…) And no one can cope like that, I was like hummm, no… and when they came home at night, we would have dinner and then go to bed and no, I didn't want that. So it was like the same routine every day. So when they split up I felt so relieved and I also felt like… I mean, I had a family that was like… close, yes? I mean, really close. (…) We would go out on road trips and make plans, and now no one did that anymore. Or we would go out and have to go back immediately because there would be a disagreement or a fight, so I would say, no… I wish things would have stayed the same, all together, when we would all support each other (…).*

Camila: *So you just got here like four, five months ago?*

Irene: *Yes, it hasn't been long. I spent Christmas here and thought about my decision. My mum said 'if you want to, come and live with me, I'll take responsibility for you'. But my dad had told me lots of things about my mum that… and they say you can't speak badly of your partner, and even less about your mother, right? And my dad would tell me many things and I was all resentful, shut off, with my mum, but I realised many of the things my dad said were wrong and he would say them so we would resent her, and yes, it was a good decision to come live with her. (…) I'm very happy with everything. I think that if I had stayed and gone on like this, I wouldn't have stood it for much longer.*

In all three cases, she speaks of trust that was broken as key to each experience: by the teacher as an adult who was supposed to help her but failed to do so; a break in the security of having someone (her godmother) to give her the time and care she believed her mother should have (see underlined quote above); and in her belief that a family should be happy and united. She realises that she may need to stop trusting even those close to her.

Irene's key moments that have marked her life, all include a breaking of trust in the adult world around her. Her experiences illustrate one of many examples in the participants' work and interviews about loss of trust. Going back to section *The Self as Yin and Yang*, about the delicate balance between outer and inner self, I concluded:

> *These situations seem to aid the identity formation process, where feelings of loss, misunderstanding, detachment, uncertainty, among others, seem to remain as part of an inner self that is necessary to allow a stronger outer self to be expressed: happy, determined, strong, friendly, and passionate.*

These experiences of loss become embedded at the core of their inner 'darker' selves. Breaking of trust, although connected to situations that are not easy, does bring together different aspects that support a positive identity formation, such as: a) building resilience, as long as relationships where trust is in-built exist; b) understanding emotions, like sadness, as a way to cope and transition into a more 'adult world'; and c) establishing or defining characteristics they value in relationships with family and friends, moving forward.

Irene's experiences are an example of the above. Her first recollection where she describes how trust was broken with this teacher, allowed her to establish goals for herself that will keep her focused in her studies, which she considers very important. The teacher might not have supported her, but Irene makes sure she relies on herself. She uses this experience to find strength to achieve academically despite difficulties she might find in the way, enabling her to build her own resilience. In addition to this, losing her godmother is her first close experience of death. Both in her creative piece and her interview, she discusses the inability of crying and how she slowly comes to the realisation

that her godmother is gone. Further, she realises that being economically supported as a child is not what is important, but rather the love and genuine care of an adult. Her words reflect a maturity that is expected from an adult than a child, and it is this event that marks a transition in thought to 'not being a child anymore'. Finally, Irene's reflections on her family's separation shows this same maturity (her thinking about the injustice in being treated differently because she was a girl, to the relief of her parents finally separating). The separation is a moment that enables her to value and understand what she wants in her relationships moving forward. She misses the unity she once experienced in her family, and values that fact that she can once again focus on her studies in an environment that she considers emotionally safe. Although she still defines her outer self as quiet and not trusting of others, she still makes the effort to establish relationships she feels safe in, like making her group of friends and rediscovering her relationship with her mother.

Although loss of trust involves emotions that are evaluated as negative, it also provides moments of growth, maturity, and resilience building that are necessary to establish a positive sense of identity. The participants' life stories and creative pieces illustrate how losses became the bookmarks in their lives, the moments that define a before and after in their way of thinking and seeing the social world around them. At the same time, they bring a sense of moving forward, with a clearer mind about what they can expect in the relationship with others and what they want their potential future relationships to be like. Although there are some family relationships that are not necessarily trustworthy for some participants, when this trust is lost, broken or tested, it marks in these participants a 'before and after' in their own sense of maturity. Loss therefore, feeds a darker inner self that simultaneously enables the participants to find new ways to relate socially to the world around them. Loss helps to drive forward their sense of self and provides a clearer idea of what they want to do to succeed in the future.

The above narratives classify into McLean's (2005) narratives of self-explanation, usually highly relational and exploring situations of loss (like death or divorce) or gains (related to love or closeness). In line with my findings, McLean highlights self-explanation narratives

are not only important for self-representation, but also crucial when it comes to telling 'the self' to others. Narratives of loss like the ones in this section not only help my participants define a before and after in their identity formation, but also serve as trust-building vehicles with me and their readers: they want their audience to understand raw, honest, authentic experiences that define who they 'really' are (For more on authenticity refer to the previous chapter). These narratives of loss are also examples of what Alvez Rizzo *et al.* (2013) define as *progressive* identity orientation, where individuals, after an important individual loss, assume a resilient attitude, and reconfigure themselves by building new positive meanings in the narratives they construct about themselves and others. Narratives of loss in this study reflect what McAdams (2006; 2011) defined as redemptive narratives, or narratives that reflect the ability to derive positive meaning from negative experiences.

However, Breen and McLean (2017) have found in previous research that adolescents do not necessarily benefit from telling these redemptive narratives as correlations have been found between redemptive narratives and criminal and antisocial behaviour. Yet, Breen and McLean studies have usually focused in vulnerable/at-risk youth, as well as in research that has focused in understanding redemptive narratives directly. That means, participants have been asked to directly recall and retell narratives that have been emotionally difficult, and usually in interview and survey contexts. On the contrary, my study openly explores how identity formation is explored in their creative writing, supported by their interviews, in a context that prioritises decision making, participation, trust and rapport. Their creative work, as well as their interview, was open enough for them to decide what they wanted to share or not, and no particular focus was given to particular events. They decided to share memories of loss as elements that define them, rather than been asked to directly retell a negative experience. Redemptive narratives, under these circumstances help them tell authentic stories and give them a positive meaning for their present definition of self.

Finally, narratives of loss told by my participants are a clear example of Burkitt's (1997) concept of emotions as complexes that are performed and constructed in the social, and

have a communicative purpose in relationships. These narratives have one important element in common: they do not know how to react when they first face death or loss of someone dear to them. Alejandra, Irene, Andrés and Andrea Burkitt in a way, 'looked up to' the adult world in search of cues to understand their own feelings, they culturally link death to sadness to be able to perform it (crying) once they grasp the feeling, it is not immediate. This follows up with Gergen's propositions (2009): emotions build ways of relating to others depending on other's response to one's performed emotions.

These narratives were not necessarily told to me in an interview, but shared among them to be re-written and re-interpreted by others. Redemptive narratives in this research were told and shared as a personal choice of the participants, rather than by instruction. Narratives of loss open paths to build empathic relationships among peers, as well as positive identity formation as they tell, retell, write and reinterpret.

Narratives of loss by my participants are a clear example of what Gergen and Gergen (2006) describe as narrative efficacy, as cited in the literature review: '(...) there is something particularly effective about listening to others' narratives that crosses boundaries of meaning and brings people into a state of mutuality.' (Gergen and Gergen, 2006, p. 117). Students clearly, and without knowing, make use of the five elements of narrative efficacy by 1) showing receptivity when listening, 2) telling stories easy to follow and understand, 3) allowing trust to be built, 4) creating empathic witnessing, and 5) recreating themselves and others through their own stories.

6.3.4. The Unattainable trust: The Unreliable Other and the constant search for self-coherence

Out of the fifteen students, one in particular stands out from the rest: Marian. Like most students, she made use of all of her written pieces to explore her own story. In addition, and like the rest of the group, most of her pieces included situations that although, possibly fictional, included adults in her life that she talks about in her interview as well. However, and unlike all the other students' pieces, most of the adults she describes around her are family members who have not been reliable during her childhood and adolescence. In her case, she has no adult relationship that she can describe where she

has felt that in-built trust. Therefore, even with family members like her mother or father, trust is something she is still trying to establish or that she feels can never really be built.

Excluding her written reflection on the project which were all published, the narrative in six of the seven pieces she chose to publish differ in nature from other pieces from the members of the group. The following significant differences can be observed in all of them: (1) Her narrative style, although chronologically organised, is fragmented; (2) her endings are usually sad, unresolved or with negative outcomes; and (3) she shows a certain level of detachment and little self-reflection through all the pieces but the very last two she wrote: Her short story, and her reflection on the project as a whole. For example, when she retells her life story in one of her pieces for the 'Writing about Yourself' workshop (see Appendix I), these three characteristics can be seen:

> *When I was born, the doctors told my mum that I was born asleep. I moved to La Capilla[41]. I remember when I was about four years old, a man came to get paid and my parents told me "go and tell him we are not here". When I opened the door I told him "my parents send the word they are not here." And my parents had to flee the house quickly!*
>
> *When I was five, I started going to school. I almost didn't have any friends. One time the teacher that was teaching me took my snack from me, telling me that it was junk food. And when I saw out the window, I could see she was eating them…*
>
> *When I was eight, I had my first boyfriend. When I turned 9, they celebrated my sister's Sweet Fifteen[42]. That time my dad got drunk and it was a whole scandal. A few years later we came to live to El Salitre[43], I was baptised and had my first communion in La Calera.*
>
> *A couple of years ago, I started working and helping my mum with the house chores.* (My Life, Chapter 4, p. 47)

In this particular piece, Marian writes events in her life chronologically, briefly expanding on three moments she remembers as key: (1) getting her parents in trouble by not being able to lie properly on their behalf; (2) a teacher taking her snack only to eat it herself; and

[41] Municipal rural settlement between Bogota city and La Calera municipality.
[42] In Colombia, adolescents celebrate Sweet Fifteen rather than Sweet Sixteen.
[43] Another municipal rural settlement much closer to La Calera municipality.

(3) her father getting drunk at her sister's 'Sweet Fifteen' party. Around these three events, little facts are put in, but none of them are particularly developed. Her events are chronologically in place but still fragmented, like quick snapshots of her life, or photographs in an old family album with no one to tell the story behind the images. Furthermore, the ending to her piece is the present time, meaning there is no future narrative about what can happen, what she sees in store for herself or others around them.

Three students decided to publish this creative piece where they put together important personal life events: Marian (shown above), Isabel and Ariadna (which will be shown below). Let us compare the writings of Isabel and Ariadna to Marian's. Despite Ariadna going through difficult moments with few friends or in Isabel's case, no father figure since she was little, they both end their pieces on a hopeful note, speaking about the future, their goals, who they want to become and the type of person they want to be. Here are some fragments of Ariadna's piece on her life story:

> *(…) "Time goes by so quickly", my mum exclaimed, sighing. Four years later, that I can remember, I was in day care, and I made my first friends!!!... Nah, actually I didn't like them. Sorry, but I have been very antisocial since I was very little. (…)*
>
> *Between 9 and 10 years old I still hated my peers. (…) But at 11, on my first day of high school, I finally thought "I got rid of those fools. Let's see how high school surprises me". And it did for the first time in my life: I knew what it was like to have friends.*
>
> *From then until I was 14, I think my life was pretty normal, but a big loss left my life upside down, and that's what it feels like when you become an orphan from losing your grandparents… tough life hardships. However, today I love my friends and family. They are my reason to live. I know that one day I will finish high school, and guess what? I am going to cry so much. I am used to them and their bad jokes. Although my teenage years have been a little traumatic, "I have clear goals and a brilliant future awaits me".* (Ariadna, My Story, Chapter 4, p. 45)

Here is Isabel's creative piece on her life story:

> *Until I was 3, in all that time, I can't remember very well what was going on with me, but the little I remember is that my dad left home. For what I've heard, is that he left with someone else. I remember this because it was very hard for me to see*

> *how he left one day out of the blue, "me and my innocent mind" without knowing what was going on. (…)*
>
> *(…)* [W]*hen I started high school, I started a new life with my studies, while our family still remained together. At school I met good friends and I got used to it quickly, since at my last school I didn't have a good relationship with my peers. In fact, I was bullied at some point, but oh, well… (…)*
>
> *From 12 to 14, I learnt the true meaning of friendship, that not everyone can be called a "friend". I met a big group of friends who, up to this moment, are still by my side, and two of them are almost part of my family. Here, like any adolescent, I find everything boring and I lose my temper very quickly. But I try to improve that. (…) I'm still close to my sister, although we fight. (…) But more than anything, I still do what I feel passionate about: football and singing. Here I am to continue to achieve my goals together with my mother, a warrior of a woman, and my sister: together, the three of us, going after our daily goals.'* (Isabel, My Life, Chapter 4, pp. 46-47)

Both Ariadna and Isabel describe difficult moments for them (including processes of building and breaking the bonds of trust). They both acknowledge adolescence as a stage they are going through, Ariadna described it as 'a little traumatic', and Isabel as a more stereotypical stage in her life where she finds she gets easily upset and finds everything boring. However, they see it as a transitional period, rather than a stage that defines them as individuals. They both imprint hope and future thinking on their narratives, a 'to be continued', and recognise this is the stage they are at, but one of many to come.

Marian, by contrast, finishes her narrative by describing what is happening at the present time, as if she is not going through a stage, but experiencing her life as a series of events that she is still trying to make sense of, which might make it difficult for her to think about her future goals.

In addition to this, both of Marian's parents and the teacher she mentions are not shown as reliable adults. Rather than taking care of her, her parents put her in the position of protecting them from their own lack of responsibility, while the teacher who is supposed to provide a safe environment for learning and developing, uses her position of power to take food away from Marian. These unreliable adults show up in more of her pieces:

> *One day, like any other day of being 14 years old, the Spanish teacher left us homework. When I got home, ready to do it, I started thinking about what would*

> *happen if when I opened my notebook, letters would just run away from it. (…) When I stopped thinking about that, it was almost time for bed. (…) My mother yelled at me telling me to hurry up, or I would end up alone. I, with that question in my mind, went to open my notebook. But when I was about to write on it, the notebook jumped and wouldn't let me write in it. Next day, I was ready to go tell my teacher what happened and why I couldn't do my homework: so I opened the notebook and I could write on it. I thought, then, that all had been my imagination, and I got a bad mark for believing in those things.* (What would happen if my notebook wouldn't let me write on it, or letters would just run away from it? Chapter 1, p. 12)

Marian again speaks of a parent, in this case her mother, and a teacher. In this piece, she presents her mother as a pressuring figure who conditions a general affective presence to what Marian does or does not do by saying '*if… you'll end up alone*'. The teacher is portrayed as an adult that will not believe her, even if Marian tried to explain, and therefore she passively accepts a bad mark for it. The lack of unreliable adults permeates each of her writings, including her father leaving home, which she mentions in the following two pieces. In this first one, she wrote a piece about herself using the third person point of view:

> *Once upon a time there was a girl that, as time went by, grew up and left all things fun behind her. One time, she sat down to remember her past, when it was all about laughter and games. She remembered her dad left when she was only 10 years old. She could only wonder why he left and abandoned them. She couldn't believe it. With that question in mind and with tears in her eyes, she asked her mother. Her mother told her he had fallen in love with another woman and he didn't care about saying goodbye or apologising to us.*
>
> *Time went by and the girl didn't want to have feelings for anything anymore. She became antisocial and without a life*[44]*.* (Account: Her, in the past, Chapter 4, p. 55)

In this second one, she had to tell a story behind a character that would act in a way Marian would not personally understand or agree with:

> *When I was 8 years old, I saw how my dad and my mum separated because of a gossipy woman who was very unpleasant to my mum, but with my dad she was very loving and would cry telling him what was wrong in her marriage. My dad, little by little, fell for it. One time, this woman told my dad that my mum had treated her very badly. My dad, furious, went and complained to my mum. My*

[44] NT – '*Sin vida alguna*' is a Spanish expression the author uses to reflect a lack vitality or 'spark' of joy.

> *mum, with teary eyes, told him "I didn't say any of those things", but my dad wouldn't believe her. So, my mum turned around and said "I don't recognise you anymore, how can you believe her and not me?" My mum packed my dad's things and my dad left the house forever. Two years went by. I was already 10 years old and this one time I remembered how a woman had separated my parents. I felt enraged, and I started spreading gossip that was never true. Everybody gave me this funny look but they believed me. I started making up more and more lies. I was 11 years old and one time a friend came to me feeling very mad. She treated me horribly while she told me "Say goodbye to all our friendship!" I didn't care and we never spoke again.* (A world of fantasy, Chapter 5, p. 59)

Particularly in this last piece, she ended writing again about her own story. She had chosen 'gossip' as the characteristic in others she did not like. The purpose of the piece was to generate empathy in the reader so the reader could understand why a person would gossip in a way it could harm others. However, she did not create a new character, instead she wrote how her own life story could possibly make her this kind of person. For the first piece, she explains how a gossipy woman separated her parents, a characteristic she chooses to explore during the fifth workshop. Marian expresses no trust in any relationship around her apart from her brother. She created this following piece after answering some questions around the story 'House Taken Over' by Julio Cortázar. She used her answers to create the following narrative:

> *It was the 16th of April. My brother and I were playing at the park. Suddenly, a thought crossed my mind… "they are looking at me", and I stopped playing. I stood still. My brother, Nicolás, looked at me and said, -Why are you not playing? -*
>
> *I told him, frightened and ashamed, -They are looking at me, and if I fall, they will make fun of me-.*
>
> *He said, -Don't be silly, no one's looking at you-.*
>
> *I told him -Really? I don't believe you-.*
>
> *-I'm telling you the truth. If you don't believe me, then let's just leave-.*
>
> *On our way home, mi brother asked me -What is your fear? -*
>
> *I got caught up in my own thoughts. After a long while I told him, -Is trying to be myself, or trying new things and that others will make fun of me because of that-.*

> *My brother looked at me, and with another question in mind, he said -Just like you have fears, you also have things that motivate you. So tell me… what motivates you? -.*
>
> *I said -Hummm, to be honest, is believing I can be strong and feeling all the time like I'm in a jail and wanting to escape from it all the time. -*
>
> *When we got home, I started thinking about the things that take me over. I sat there thinking for two hours. After reconsidering, I said to myself: "My brother, and thinking about how my dad is doing".* (My Deepest Feelings, Chapter 4, p. 48)

Her brother is the only person across all her written pieces that is portrayed as reliable and supportive. But even in this piece, the loss of her father and not having him around, leaves her wondering about him all the time. Themes of losing her father, having a distant relationship with both of her parents, having other adults who, she believes, are not trustworthy, and peers who are hard to trust or build strong relationships with, continue to show up in her writing, most of which have fatalistic endings. She accepts negative or sad outcomes as they are, as they come, with no hopeful view of what might change. Her narrations also have big gaps in time, they explain fragments of important events that have affected her negatively, and then jump years in time to the next one. She shows sadness or frustration as general emotions or feelings that have permeated her life for a long time rather than emotional states she is going through at the moment.

When we explored her pieces during her interview, she does not show a clear idea of what her future might look like, but instead uses the space provided by the workshops to be able to openly and freely explore those darker elements in her life to bring more sense to them. When she refers to her pieces in the interview, she mentions how important it is for her to use them to explore this darker side of a difficult life. At the same time, she uses her pieces as a means of realizing that in sharing her own experiences she not only reflects on them, but can show others that one must be strong enough to carry on, despite life not being easy:

Marian: *In this piece,* What would happen if…, *I wrote about what would happen if I were a notebook, so I felt what that would be like. I mean, I immersed myself in that notebook that doesn't want to be written and that, so it would be like… I felt like that feeling of joy, to feel that no one can write me anymore, and that…*

Camila: *What do you mean by 'the joy that no one can write you anymore?*

Marian: *Yes, I mean, it's like if the notebook was alive, it would be like after the tiniest scribble, the notebook would throw itself off the table, so it would be like I were in your tears, in your despair, in your everyday when you had dreams, and that's how you dispose of me, that's how I feel at times.*

Camila: *Like you are the notebook?*

Marian: *Yes. (…) In my life, from… since I was born until I was 15, I just wrote in there all my sorrows because, well… I haven't had that sensation of feeling so good.*

Camila: *Ok, one question about this piece* (above fragment p. 55) *which you chose to publish. Why show others… because I mean, this book is in a way open to the public, why is it important for you to show others such personal narrations of your life?*

Marian: *So they can see life is not always easy, and well, to see that despite the problems, it's like you have to move forward, no matter that others tell you bad things, or that you feel so trapped in a way, and well, because of that…*

Her pieces, together with her interview show how this 'unattainable trust' might hinder a positive identity formation. In Marian's particular case, her relationships with those around her, except for her brother, have not provided any support or evidence of trustworthiness that can enable her to positively embrace that darker inner self to move forward. Marian decided not to publish her metaphor, as well as other pieces that, in her words '*describe a darker side*' of her she does not feel comfortable sharing with others[45]. It is significant that despite her story being difficult to live, she still decides to publish very personal pieces in the book, as a way of voicing these events and making sense of them. She writes in her last piece reflecting on the project as a whole:

> *About the pieces I wrote, I hope that those who read them understand what I feel and how I express myself. There, you can understand my sorrows and my joys. I think this project allowed me to explore my own identity because there are parts of me I didn't understand (…).* (Marian, Narratives, p. 81)

[45] I have not included the fragments of her interview where she refers to those pieces she decided not to publish, as part of the confidentiality agreement and consent form we signed.

Marian is one of two students who published the most amount of pieces, all autobiographical, or connected to her own lived experiences. During her interview, she provides rich descriptions and reflections about her feelings and experiences which led to each of the pieces she wrote, even if she decided to publish them or not. Marian is a participant who still continues to look to establish bonds with people she can finally trust. Her brother is one of them. Her identity formation through her pieces is more fragmented and her narratives more linked to fatalist endings, negative experiences and lack of reflection on her future. However, her pieces and interview become a strong example that shows the importance of providing this methodology for self-exploration. Through it, Marian (1) finds a space where she can trust peers around her to be able to share personal stories with them; (2) finds a trustworthy adult she can talk to about these experiences; and (3) finds a space where, through writing, she can reflect on and make sense of what these experiences have been like for her, where she feels able to support others in understanding that it is okay if life is not always what we want it to be.

McAdams (2019) refers to a particular criticism that has been pointed out about Narrative Identity theory. He refers to this criticism in a concept he names the *Kumbaya Assumption* which refers to narrative identity and storytelling, as he presents them, 'all about heart-warming stories that make people feel good about themselves, even as they fail to capture the complexities of life experience (...). (...) always a good thing, akin to telling tales and singing songs around the campfire.' (McAdams, 2019, p. 81). He responds to this by acknowledging not everyone has a narrative sense of self, and acknowledges 'The truth is that stories run the gamut, from good to bad, and that storytelling can be used for positive purposes or for nefarious ones. In and of itself, storytelling is not necessarily good or bad. It simply is.' (p. 81). Marian is a reflection of storytelling that defies this *Kumbaya Assumption*. McAdams (2019) goes one step further and provides an example of a person with no narrative identity: Donald Trump. He defines his narrative as episodic, with little or non-existent intro-, retro- or prospection, inconsistent and with no moral accountability. Although Marian provides episodic narratives of herself with little reflection in 4 of her pieces, she does show consistency across her narratives and moral accountability and reflection of her actions and those of others that have hurt her.

Marian's narratives show a combination of what Gergen and Gergen (1988) define as *stable* and *regressive*. The episodic or fragmented nature of the events she narrates show a main character that is detached from what is happening, but at the same time, when we get to read her character's thoughts, she presents the situation in a negative light, with no possibilities of progression. It almost seems her narratives lack reflexivity. Yet, it is the methodology itself that moves her from episodic narratives to reflexive narratives as the workshops develop. Mead (1934) defines reflexivity as fundamental for identity formation, and so, as she is provided a space to both take the time to create and reflect upon her own story, as Rolling (2010) rightly claims, her creative writing becomes the space to negotiate her self-expression.

A creative writing programme that focuses on constructionist elements like enabling the participants to make their own personal, creative and stylistic choices, results in creative pieces of writing that - autobiographical or not - delineate trust as the backbone for adolescent identity formation. This major finding supports Flanagan's (2003) concept of trust as relationally constructed. He states that it is developed with their carers, and defines a way in which they can relate to the world and others. In Marian's writings, she shows attachment/trust towards her brother who seems to be Marian's carer in her narrative. This falls in line with some of the critiques that have been done to Bowlby's attachment theory, where the mother is not the only figure towards which attachment/trust is developed, taking into consideration her own social and cultural background where she has grown (Shaffer and Emerson, 1964; Rutter, 1972; 1979; Neckoway, Brownlee and Castellan, 2007).

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the elements of identity formation that emerged from the participants' creative writing work. It established the existence of both an inner and outer self, but in my analysis, unlike what might be suggested from a cognitive perspective, inner and outer selves complement each other and are both built in the social. The findings go on to say this complementarity is built in the balance of negative experiences that help frame a bright, positive, resilient self. This view provides a practical example that

enhances Gergen's (2009) relational self theory, which has not addressed adolescents' identity formation in particular. The second section of this chapter examines trust as the backbone of positive identity formation, where I make a case in favour of Flanagan's (2003) theory of trust as socially constructed, and particularly focused on trust built with carers as the base to establish healthy relationships. I disagree with theories of adolescence where they are portrayed as more focused on their social life and less interested in their family relationships. I identified four types of trust as I explored the participants' work and interviews: given or in-built trust, built trust, lost trust and unattainable trust. Implications for each are discussed. The following and final chapter of this thesis is my conclusion where I summarize key findings, implications for methodology and educational practice, my contributions to knowledge in the field, and recommendations for future work with adolescents.

Chapter 7. Conclusions

7.1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore Colombian adolescents' identity formation through a creative writing programme in a schooled context. The study took place over 19 weeks in a public school in Colombia, time that included previous planning with the school, carrying out the fieldwork and debriefing with the participants. Fifteen students volunteered to participate, all of whom remained part of my study from the beginning until now. The research was underpinned by a participatory mixed qualitative research design, which joined methods from Arts-based research, educational practice and the social sciences. The study was premised on a socio-constructionist ontology, basing itself on a belief that social interaction precedes our knowledge about ourselves, where language and the social are fundamental for identity formation.

The research questions addressed in this thesis were:

1. How does a short term participatory creative writing programme within a school context help explore adolescents' identity formation?
2. How is this creative writing programme perceived by the participants?
3. What aspects of adolescents' identity formation are portrayed through their creative writing?

In this final chapter I will return to the research questions that shaped this study and outline the key findings and the contribution I believe this study makes to a growing knowledge base on mid-adolescents' identity formation from a social-constructionist perspective. The following sections will discuss key issues emerging for the empirical data, theoretical and methodological aspects of the research, and will draw out implications for both practice and future work.

In order to do this, I will first summarise the main findings to each of the research questions. Then I will explore methodological insights and limitations of the study. Next, I will discuss the significance and implications for educational practice. I will finish the

conclusion by clearly outlining my contribution to knowledge and making recommendations for future work.

7.2. Using Creative Writing to Explore Identity Formation: A Participatory Study with Adolescents in Post-Conflict Colombia

The analysis of empirical data in chapter 5 responded to the first two research questions which refer to how the designed methodology aids adolescents' identity formation, and how this is valued by the youth participants. Chapter 6 does not focus on the methodology, but on the content of the students' creative writing. The analysis of the empirical data in this chapter is focused on the elements of identity formation that emerge from the creative pieces that were published as a result of the fieldwork. Below, I present a summary of the key findings for each of the research questions my study aimed to answer.

7.2.1. We are Authentic, Different and Valuable

How does a short term participatory creative writing programme within a school context help explore adolescents' identity formation? Two particular elements of the methodology were key to answer this question: (1) the participatory and social nature of the study, and (2) the role of the researcher. Three key findings emerged in relation to these.

A participatory creative writing programme within schooled contexts helps explore adolescents' identity formation by:

- Creating spaces for authentic self-expression, where emotions become a vehicle of communication with other participants, and where personal interests and hobbies can be freely explored.
- Providing opportunities to see each other through a different lens. What makes us different, makes us valuable. Being different is seen in a positive light, and by acknowledging it in others, the participants are able to reflect on new ways to see themselves as well.
- Facilitating choice and participation rather than leading them. Authentic expression of emotions and ideas can only be *performed* and appreciated in an

open authentic relationship with the facilitator, as long as the researcher breaks the vertical power relationship with the participants by:

- creating a safe environment for self-expression and collaboration.
- showing him or herself as authentic and vulnerable. Leading by example.
- constantly reflecting and acknowledging his or her own vulnerabilities, involvement and emotions throughout the process.

These elements translate into a group of participants who feel empowered, respected and valued and are open to challenge understandings of themselves and others around them. An open and honest relationship with the participants allows for trust and empathy to be built within the group, both necessary for positive identity formation.

7.2.2. An Innovative Space to Find My Place

How is this creative writing programme perceived by the participants? In general, the programme was perceived positively by all students. Three main themes were identified in the students' responses and perceptions around this methodology and their participation in it:

- ***Space to be (self):*** Youth participants perceived the methodology and their participation in it as a valuable space to create their own world, and to be free to write and express what they want to, rather than what they have to. The traditional classroom rarely offers this possibility. It is positive insofar as they feel free to be authentic (be how they like to be) and honest about their thoughts and feelings.
- ***Space to become (self-other):*** The students perceive the methodology to have created spaces to get to know others in a different light through their opinions, thoughts and feelings expressed in writing. It was a space that enabled them to step out of their comfort zone and relate to others in new ways that the day-to-day dynamic of a school does not allow. Even among students who knew each other well outside of the project, the methodology enabled new discoveries.

- ***Space to learn and enjoy***: the writing programme also opened opportunities for creativity and imagination; a space to have fun and step out of the academic routine; and a space where they learnt new ways of relating to reading and writing, not as tools for academic production, but as tools for self-reflection.

Further evidence of how this program was perceived by the participants can be found in the comments they wrote inside my copy of the published book:

> *Thank you for this beautiful experience, for putting reading and writing in my heart* - Mark
>
> *I will never forget the experiences and feelings I found in myself thanks to you* - Andrés
>
> *Thank you for helping me discover something I didn't know I had in me. I am freer, I can express myself more. (...)* - Marian
>
> *Thank you for teaching us to enjoy reading and writing (...), you have given us unforgettable experiences and memories (...)* - Alejandra
>
> *Hey! Thank you for so much. Without you this would not have been possible <3. I am very proud and thankful with you and all my peers.* - Ariadna
>
> *Cami, first I want to thank you for transforming me and seeing in us what nobody else did, and for trusting our words (...)* - Isabel

7.2.3. I, You, We and the Dynamics of Trust

What aspects of adolescents' identity formation are portrayed through their creative writing? From the analysis of empirical data, two key themes emerged in relation to this research question:

- ***Self:*** Through the participants' creative writing, they show the self is constructed through a constant negotiation of inner thoughts and feelings (both as a result of relating to others), with outer expressions of the self. This complementary 'inner-

outer self' relationship balances difficult or more negative/darker experiences, with a brighter, resilient and hopeful self.

- ***Self-Other***: The youth participants' work also portrays the self as constructed in the exploration of trust bonds with others around them. Trust is explored across all pieces of writing and shows itself as key for building one's sense of identity during adolescence. Four kinds of trust are described: in-built trust, built trust, lost trust and unattainable trust.

7.3. Methodological Insights and Limitations

My research was conceived as a result of 'musings' that followed my language teaching practice back in Colombia, particularly regarding my work with literature and creative writing in the classroom and student engagement. I therefore set myself the task of designing a participatory programme based on project-based learning tenets, to explore the role of creative writing in the construction of adolescents' identity in school contexts. I wanted to create a methodology that would work inside a classroom environment, would be rigorous enough to gather creative data for analysis, and would place the student at the centre of the process. In order to achieve this, this research required a blended theoretical qualitative approach from three disciplines: psychology, education and arts. This mixed qualitative methods approach suited my constructionist theoretical framework, which supports the transformation of meaning through language: it gave me the ability to carry out an innovative project in an innovative way by blending the 'languages' of compatible disciplines.

Research in narrative identity formation in psychology has commonly used mixed quantitative-qualitative research, permeated by use of more traditional approaches like interviews, testimonies and written autobiographical accounts of key experiences (negative, or positive), and statistical analysis of narrative data (see McAdams, and McLean and colleagues' studies presented in Chapter 2 of this study). Narrative studies within Arts-based research use creative writing as a tool to report research and engage wider audiences with findings that were achieved through more traditional methodologies (Leavy, 2013). My mixed qualitative methodology aimed to gather information on identity

from the participants' creative writing narratives as the main source of data production, whilst supporting it with interviews. Similarly, I aimed to explore creative writing as an artistic expression of the self to inform research about identity, rather than doing more traditional research to then inform creative practice for research dissemination.

This study is one of few that research and analyse the effects of creative reading or writing inside the classroom to explore identity, and possibly the first to mix both through a multidisciplinary qualitative research methods approach. The creative writing workshops were all designed to explore the three important elements of the relational being proposed by Gergen (2009): the self; the other; and the interactions between them. These workshops were created in similar ways to a lesson plan, which included objectives, reading literary fiction short stories, materials, short spoken and written activities, and a creative writing central piece as a result of the process. The interview was semi-structured, and the focus groups at the beginning and end of the fieldwork, followed a structure as well. Therefore, this design provided a standardised approach to gathering data, important for the trustworthiness of the research.

However, this 'lesson plan' style of the workshops presented some practical challenges once I was in the field. The school's internal planning, changes of schedule and room availability issues, among others, resulted in workshops that had to be adapted in-situ according to the circumstances. Not all exercises were completed, not everyone could attend every workshop and the time allotted was not always enough. Implementing a short programme that is not part of the school's curriculum requires a researcher who is not only familiar with how a school works on a day-to-day basis, but who is flexible enough to adapt quickly to change without losing sight of the workshop's purpose. Some of the writings that were not published by the students, corresponded to limitations in time. It must be noted, though, that the workshops operated as the stage to establish trust in the relationship between the participants and myself, and among the participants themselves, which is what enabled them (us) to be able to engage effectively with their creative work.

The researcher's diary was fundamental for the development of the methodology. Given the novelty of the approach, monitoring my thoughts, my roles and my involvement with the fieldwork and the participants, allowed me to be able to truly facilitate the creative processes of the students, empowering them to make decisions on their own work, and fostering positive relationships among all of us in the group.

Carrying out this research design and developing a complex fieldwork like this one was not an easy task. I found myself constantly negotiating my own identities as teacher, facilitator, education expert, researcher, PhD student and being a co-researcher with my participants, all identities sometimes operating all at once. Doing research on identity cannot exclude the researcher from the process. Inviting students to explore their own identities with the researcher not being willing to do the same, cannot work. Not making use of a researcher's diary would limit the reach of this kind of exploratory study.

Regarding the participants and the ethical considerations that had, and have, to be taken with youth participants, I found myself challenged and limited by the policies regarding anonymity within participatory research. Despite the participants *choosing* to use some texts as autobiographical accounts and *choosing* to make them public for peers, parents, teachers and other people like yourself to read, and *choosing* to use their names or a pseudonym for publication, I was still not allowed to respect this decision and had to completely anonymize them from their own work. Protecting the identity of minors must be the priority in research, however I aimed to still respect their voices, by asking them to choose their own pseudonyms.

Regarding the data analysis process, narrative analysis allowed me to present creative narratives next to reflections and interview material that were rich enough to triangulate data to support my findings. Other methods would have led to attempts to fragment the language into discourse elements, or small categories of analysis, and would have not enabled the students' voices to come through as they did. Not only did the findings show that authenticity was valuable to them, but the narrative analysis process through McAdams' discovery approach (2012), also allowed me to show data in an authentic way, respecting the participants' words and thoughts in their narrative.

It is important to acknowledge the fact that this research was developed in Spanish and then translated into English by the researcher. Although this study does not aim to provide insights into research done in a foreign language, translation did pose a challenge when analysing the data. Choosing the right translation for certain expressions, understanding expressions that are not translatable, and using words that might challenge the meaning of a narrative as a whole, were aspects I was continuously considering when translating fragments. This was most challenging when it came to translating their creative writing pieces. Therefore, as fiction translation is not my field of expertise, some of my translations were accompanied by Professor Maggie Gee's advice. Even so, all work developed by the youth participants is hereby attached to this dissertation in its original language. I stayed as close as possible to their original Spanish words in the hope that my participants would feel authentically represented in them.

A final consideration regarding the data analysis is that this research aimed to inform and support my observations of the students' creative writing through the students' interviews where they discussed their work, their lives and their perceptions of the methodology. With this in mind, my process of analysis and findings were constantly shared with the participants, in order to ask for their feedback and make sure they did find themselves represented in what I was seeing in their work. This allowed me to report my findings with confidence, and to write them in such a manner that, hopefully, they find respectful and caring after trusting me with their stories.

I do feel that one of the most important limitations of my study lies in the process of data selection. All data gathered was necessary as part of a pedagogical model that required staging, developing, closing and debriefing. However, clear the criteria for selecting the raw data to analyse, this research only shows and analyses findings of a limited portion of it. If I had also analysed the audios for small group interactions, or the two focus groups carried out at the beginning and end of the project, it might have allowed some deeper analysis, or even a different point of view, with regard to the research questions this study set to answer. Therefore, the findings of this study reflect only one possibility of many that could have been taken. Further research that might look into replicating this

methodology, should carefully analyse the criteria for data selection, depending on the questions and aims posed. The next section will summarise the key implications that follow from my findings for the research questions I set out to answer.'

7.4. Implications for Practice

This study offers important insights for educational practice. Firstly, it is a call to action in terms of the need to transform the traditional classroom, which places the teacher as the 'holder and giver' of knowledge, and the students as the 'recipients' of it. It also presents a challenge to an exam-driven curriculum between Colombian 9th and 11th grades[46], promoted by current education policy in Colombia, that values 'qualification' over more open approaches to learning. Adolescents have an appetite for more spaces inside educational environments where they feel they can express their ideas without judgement. Wilhelm (2015) was right in pointing out adolescents classify the reading they do inside the school as the one they 'have to do', whilst they do the 'real' reading outside school. This research is a call for opening a conversation on how creative curriculum can be further integrated in schools to foster education for self-development through classrooms that:

- foster participatory methodologies
- place the student at the centre of his or her own development
- aid the transformation of relationships inside the classroom
- develop 'facilitator' as opposed to 'teacher' roles for adults in the classroom
- provide novel, challenging and inspiring opportunities for self-reflection
- value 'language' as a powerful creative medium.

This dissertation defined language as central for identity exploration. Throughout my findings and discussion, I have shown how creative reading and writing provide and promote the necessary language structures to aid empathy, Theory of Mind, and new ways for recreating the self and others in a context of mutual appreciation. I believe it is

[46] All Colombian students in further education (10th and 11th grades) are required to present State examinations to be able to pursue higher education. Students start being introduced and prepared for these tests from ninth grade.

necessary for Colombia, as one example of a politically divided society (also facing a post-conflict era), to find opportunities to foster creativity and language as tools for dialogue that encourage the recognition of others as different and valuable, if we are to build a cohesive society. If a short programme like the one I designed already allows for adolescents to create new ways of relating to and perceiving others, then more attention should be brought to creative language programmes across public education as spaces that motivate young people into participation and academic achievement, and not the other way around.

Today, mainstream schools continue to struggle with curriculum pressures, larger classes (my participants' classroom included 37 students). Replicating this research in today's schools by opening over 15 weeks of workshops within language classes might not be feasible. However, it is possible to integrate elements of the workshops that can foster the above criteria. Some practical ways to transfer this research into the mainstream classroom. These workshops were shared with a Spanish and Philosophy teacher in Armenia, the capital of Quindío's Department, an area that has been affected by armed conflict in the past. Between 2018 and 2019, she used and adapted reading and writing activities from workshops 1, 2 and 3 with her classrooms for 8th to 11th graders[47].

In 2018 she adapted workshop 3 (Writing the Other) to work 'Biographies' in her Spanish class. Students interviewed each other and created a biography of their peer. Comprehending the struggles and achievements of each other, significantly reduced conflicts inside the classroom and aided empathic behaviours between the students. That same year, she used creative writing prompts from workshop 1 (Writing is in all of us) to work 'short story' in her Spanish class. Using prompts like 'what would happen if…' opened a different space for students to step into other possibilities of being and becoming, strengthening family relationships as most writings dealt with loss of a loved one.

[47] These years within the Colombian education system, correspond to the last four years of high school, with students being between 14 and 18 years of age.

In 2019, she was appointed as the new theatre director for the school. The group received an award by the Secretariat of Education in the region for the creation and performance of an original script based on Dupeyron's short story used in workshop 1. The story challenged common stereotypes. The students in the theatre group collectively adapted the story adding characters and alternative storylines, and challenged themselves to interpret roles they wouldn't have otherwise. The theatre group continues to take ownership of their scripts to present issues they consider relevant for the current national situation and their communities.

Between 2019 and 2020 she has also adapted workshop 2 (Writing collaboratively), asking students to create a beginning, a middle or an end to a story. They have then negotiated in groups to fit their part together. Making literature an element of play and enjoyment in the classroom opens the possibility to collaborate, negotiate and share knowledge and experiences that contribute to their own personal development.

Using creative writing prompts and short stories of the material developed for this research, become a creative tool for the students to lead the changes they want to see and even transform others around them.

7.5. Contribution of the Research:

The significance of this thesis is the contribution made to a growing field of research on the construction of adolescent identities. The study makes an original contribution in four particular ways:

1) The thesis develops an under-utilised theoretical tool (socio-constructionism) as a *practical* framework. The study provides an *empirical example* of the application of socio-constructionist theory within a study of mid-adolescent identity, therefore contributing to a growing field of interest in this theoretical approach, particularly Gergen's (2009) concept of *relational being*.

2) The study provides a rich and reflexive account of a novel methodological approach. The research design combines social sciences (psychology), arts-based research and educational practice within a participatory research framework. This is useful for future

scholars wishing to adopt a multidisciplinary and mixed qualitative methodological approach to the study of adolescent identity.

3) This project is unique in that the creative writing project generated data through the production and co-production of fictional narratives alongside more established qualitative data collection techniques. Therefore, this research provides new insights on data collection, production and analysis in both the social sciences and arts-based research.

4) Significantly, contrary to past research (for example on redemptive narratives) that prescribe *how* adolescents *should* pursue the construction of positive identity, this research argues for the importance of spaces for adolescents to explore, in a non-judgemental and open environment, how to understand their authentic expressions of self. It is essential that young people are positioned as experts on their own experiences rather than as subjects of prescriptive interventions.

7.6. Final statement

I am hopeful that the findings of this study will actively inform future research and in particular creative writing interventions with young people. There is a lack of prior research around how creative reading and writing program outputs can provide insights on mid-adolescents' identity formation. This thesis has provided scope for new, creative and multidisciplinary qualitative research approaches that value the use of creative writing as data, and the voice of the participants. This thesis has drawn attention to building practical and participatory approaches to Gergen's socio-constructionist theory around Gergen's concept of the relational being.

From writing biographies, to theatre productions, to creating collaborative stories, to working with populations outside the public education system, this research is already showing transferability beyond the school classroom. I was invited in May 2019 by the Secretariat of Security and Justice in Bogotá to deliver one of my workshops (Workshop 3 - Writing the other) with a group of female young offenders within a young offenders' institution. During the same time - within one year of completing the fieldwork - I was

invited by the municipality's Secretary of Education to provide consultation to a meeting around the 10-year plan for public education in the region, this was as a result of them hearing about my research fieldwork in one of the municipality's public schools. In addition to this, the workshops were shared with a Spanish and Philosophy teacher in public education in Quindío's Department, as explained above in section 7.4.

Our shared experiences with the material, and the different contexts and students we worked with, have led us to conclusions about the need to provide more opportunities like this in countries like Colombia. Creative writing as a tool for identity formation is a novel and uncommon practice that impacts the classroom environment and the relationships within it. It is a project that highlights the ethics of care within the classroom by opening spaces for self-discovery, dialogue, negotiation and recognition of the 'other' as valuable. And last but not least, it is a project that presents literary language as something to be enjoyed inside the classroom.

I firmly believe that by opening opportunities for exploring our own identity through literature, we can open a different perspective both on oneself and on the other. With this in mind, together with the students I developed this project which today you hold in your hands. Their book and this dissertation are the final result of almost four months' fieldwork with 15 adolescents who, though not yet adult, reaffirmed week after week that it is possible to gain more clarity about the world in which we want to live through original, creative approaches to writing and reading. Those four months taught me once again how much I always learn from the reflections of my students. And for educators, to learn must be the way forward.

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