



THESIS DEFENCE

Transformative Professional Development:

Possibilities and Limitations of the Savvy Ally
Literature Circle for K-12 Educators Addressing
2SLGBTQI+ Inequities

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Master of Arts in Social Justice and Equity Studies

Brock University

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*An opening to circle * A ceremonial greeting * A recognition of relationship and responsibility*



Welcome

Call to Action # 63
(iv)



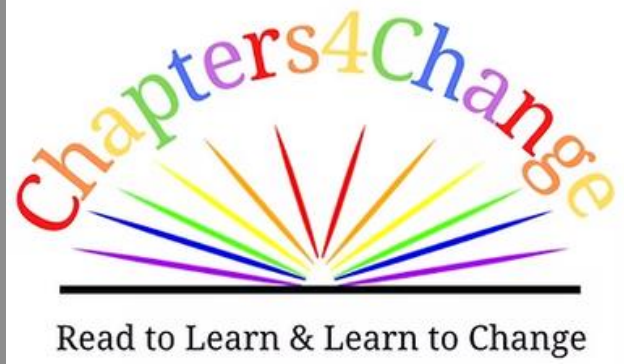
Brock
University



Jesse Wenthe

Unreconciled: Healing, Truth, and
Making Meaningful Change

June 10, 2025- Stouffville, ON



MY BACKGROUND

Outsider

Ally, Advocate, & Researcher



Contextual Insider

Close Relationships with Queer Communities

LC Facilitator



Studying
in K-12
system
in
Ontario

Mom



Insider - Outsider Positionality

Threatening
**POLITICAL
CLIMATE**

2SLGBTQI+ EQUITY ISSUES IN K-12 EDUCATION

Harmful
POLICIES

Unprepared
EDUCATORS

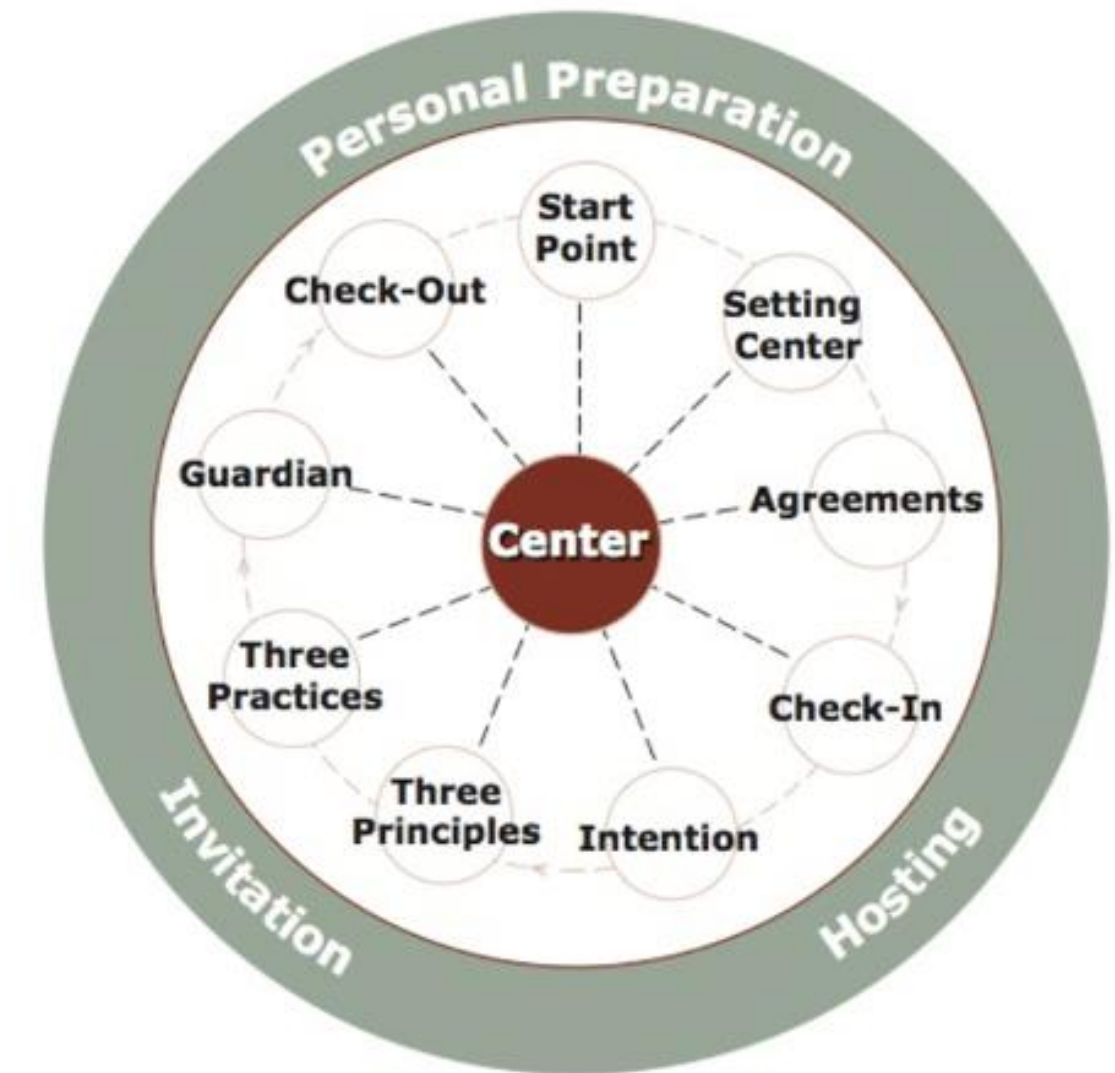


Inadequate
**PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT**

Literature Circle Format & The Components of Circle

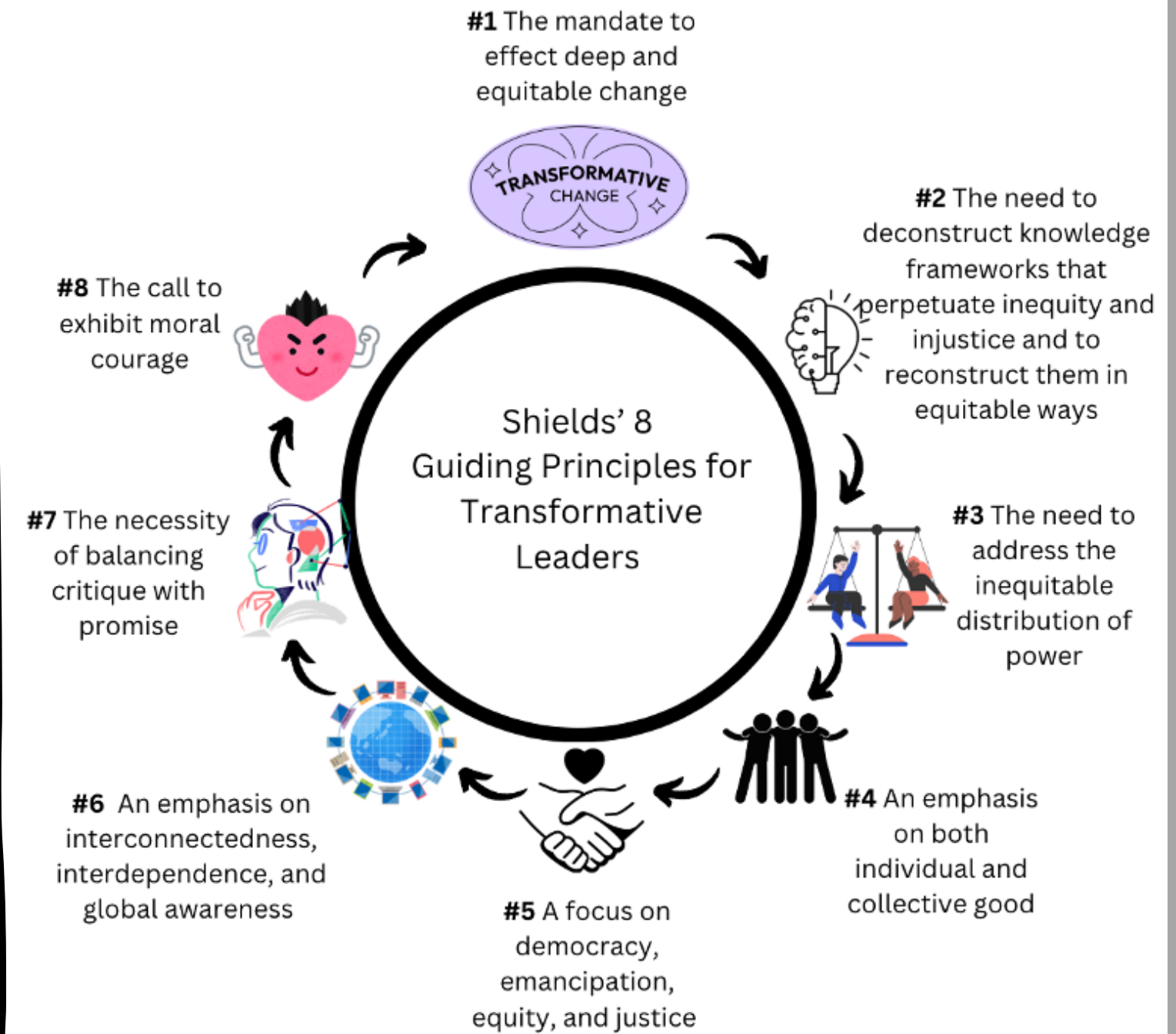
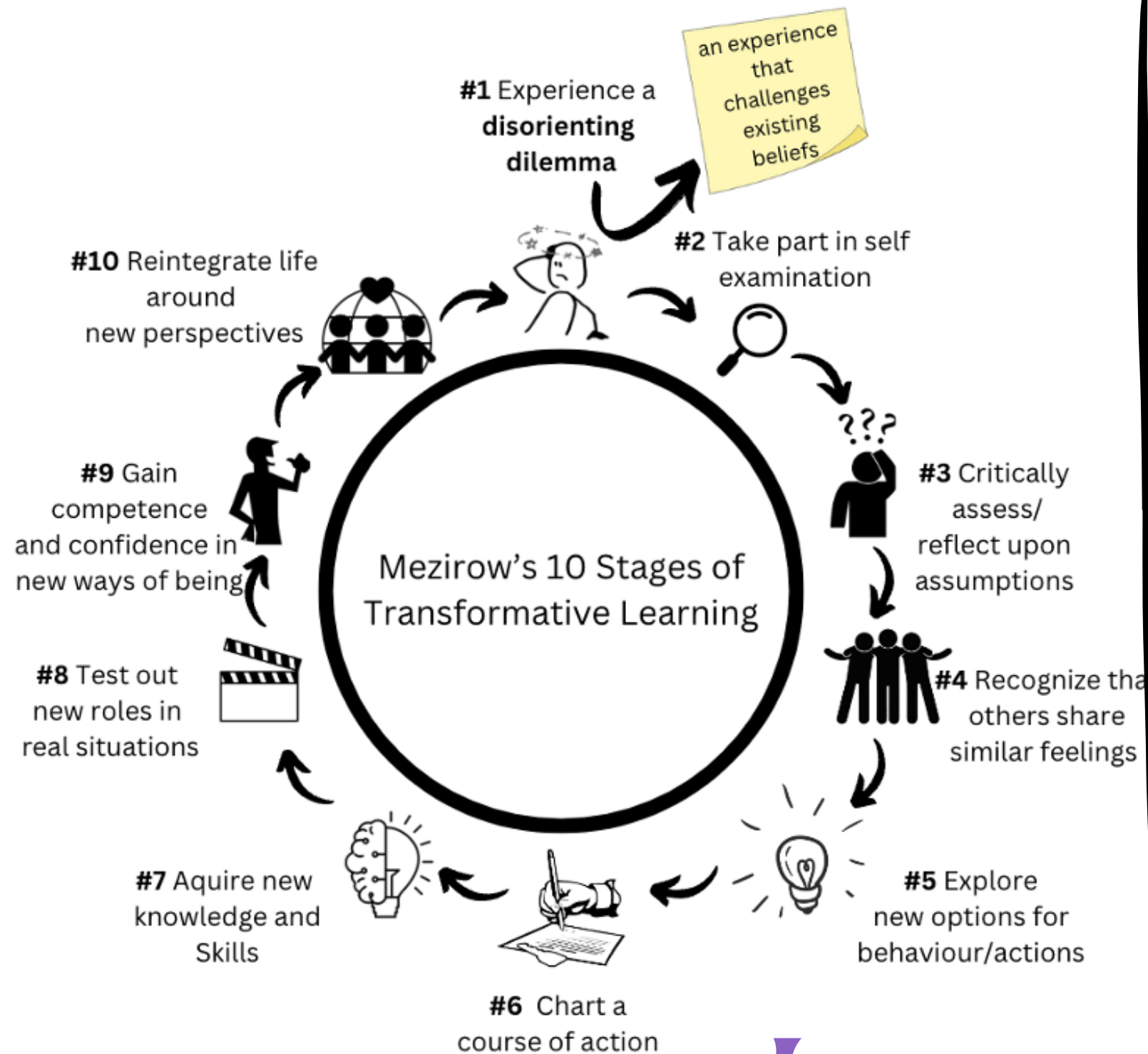


The Components of Circle



From *The circle way: a leader in every chair* (1st ed.) (p. 18), by C. Baldwin, & A. Linnea, 2010, Berrett-Koehler Publishers

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

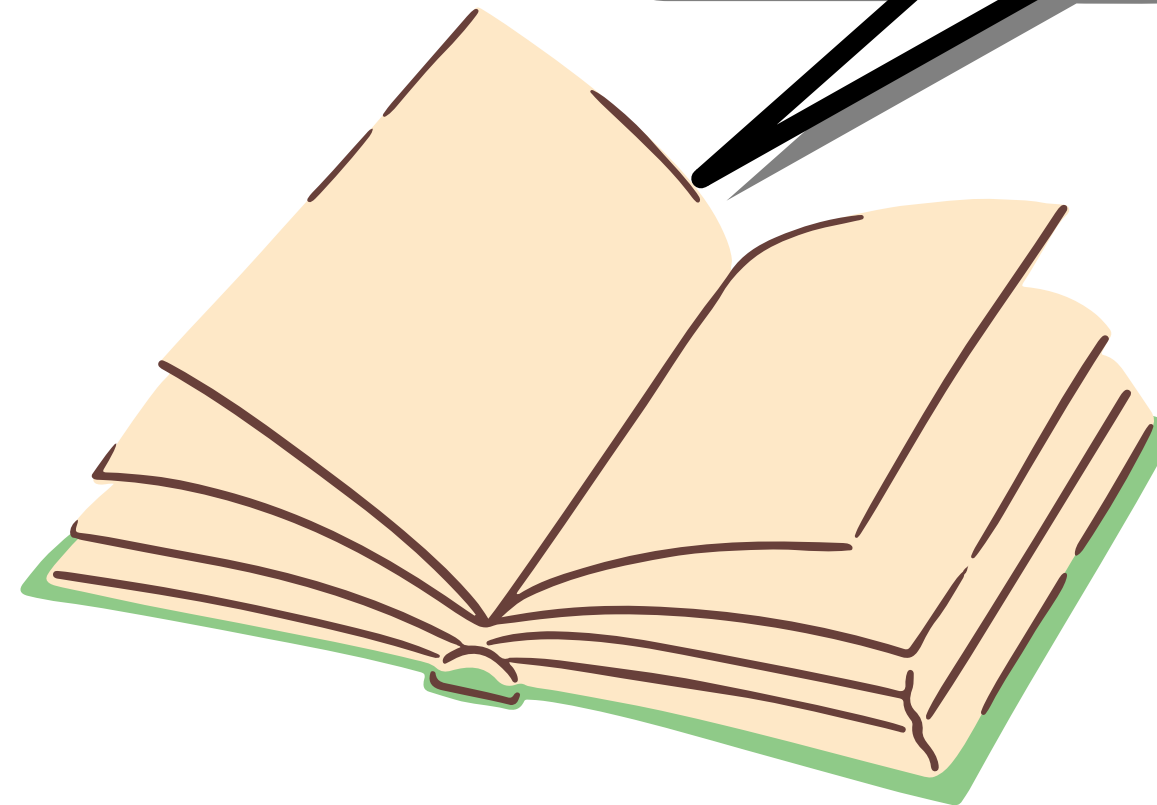


Integrated

LITERATURE REVIEW & RESEARCH GAP



Literature circles for transformative social justice professional development, (2SLGBTQI+ inclusion).



CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the possibilities and limitations of the Savvy Ally LC as a form of social justice education and an experiential transformative PD model for educators?

SUB-QUESTIONS

1

What are the possibilities and limitations of LCs in fostering **transformative learning** in educators?

2

What are the possibilities and limitations of LCs in informing **transformative leadership** in educators?

STUDY PURPOSE

- To contribute to the field of **Social Justice and Equity Studies**
- To explore how **literature circles** might serve as **transformative PD** platforms



METHODOLOGY

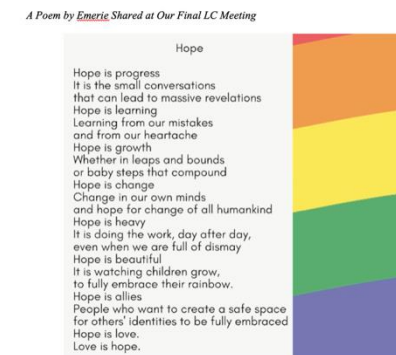
Collaborative Qualitative Design

4 Queer-
Identifying K-12
Educators

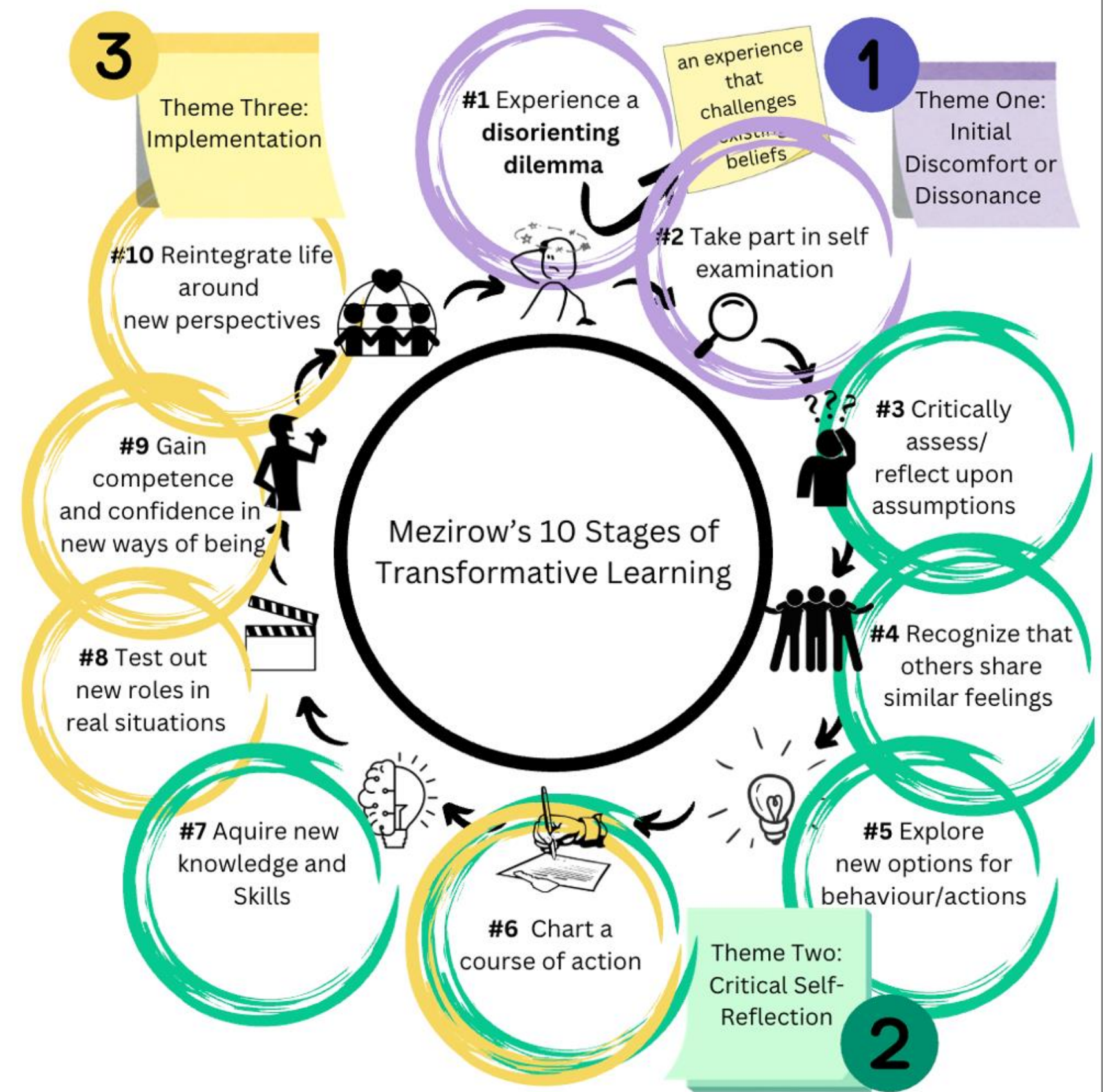
Semi-structured
interviews
(1-2 hours)

Microsoft Teams -
accessible format

Arts-based
analysis



VISUAL DATA ANALYSIS TO CREATE MAJOR THEMES



DATA ANALYSIS COLLAGE TO CHOOSE SUB- THEMES



KEY FINDINGS

THEME 1:
Initial Discomfort
or Dissonance -
The Starting
Point

Participant	Challenge	Response
Justine	Parent objections, colleague dismissiveness	Self-examination, sought LC support
Alex	Health crisis making in-person PD inaccessible + 2SLGBTQI+ inclusion gaps	Deepened ally knowledge through accessible format
Charley	Political climate pressures on queer community	Reflected on ally role (as queer person), critiqued traditional PD
Emerie	Isolation as only out 2SLGBTQI+ staff + pronoun/identity education gaps	Sought community, fostered change

Disorienting Dilemmas

KEY FINDINGS

Possibilities

- Created space for reflection, empathy, cross-context connection.
- Led to reassessment of assumptions, emotional engagement, expanded perspectives.
- Tangible leadership actions (EDI team, GSA, advocacy, culturally responsive lit).

Limitations

- Short duration
- Limited carryover
- Systemic barriers
- Representation gaps.

Takeaway: Powerful catalyst — lasting change needs sustained, systemic, inclusive PD.

Theme Two:
Critical Self-
Reflection -
The Learning
Process

Theme Three:
Implementation -
Learning to
Action

Collaborative Discourse

KEY FINDINGS

Possibilities

- Fostered empathy, inclusive action; disrupted power structures; centred intersectionality.
- Outcomes: inclusive report cards, poetry activism.

Limitations

- Hybrid preferred by some
- Workload/curriculum constraints
- Inconsistent school integration.

Theme Two:
Critical Self-
Reflection -
The Learning
Process

Theme Three:
Implementation -
Learning to
Action

Takeaway: Inspired equity actions — stronger with hybrid delivery, consistent arts use, follow-up.

Creative and Inclusive Practices

KEY FINDINGS

Possibilities

- Built confidence, solidarity, advocacy; safe peer network.
- Leadership growth examples across contexts.

Limitations

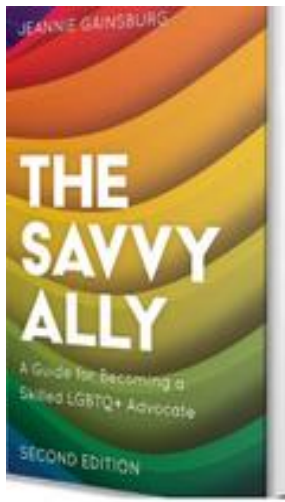
- Support faded
- Limited ongoing PD/policy integration
- Resistance from colleagues.

Theme Two:
Critical Self-
Reflection -
The Learning
Process

Theme Three:
Implementation -
Learning to
Action

Takeaway: Community support sparks leadership — needs sustained networks & policy backing.

Community Support



KEY FINDINGS

Possibilities

Theme Two:
Critical Self-
Reflection -
The Learning
Process

- Catalyst for change; reassessed assumptions; built advocacy skills; inclusive practices.
- Best used with LC discussions for deeper transformation.

Theme Three:
Implementation -
Learning to
Action

Limitations

- Lacked some lived experience depth
- Intro-level
- Theory-heavy parts disengaged some.

Takeaway: Works best when text learning is blended with shared stories, reflection, and action planning.

The Book

IMPLICATIONS FOR MY PRACTICE

POST DATA ANALYSIS ACTION PLAN COLLAGE



“Thank you for... helping
make the world a better
place.”
~Gainsburg (2023)





KEY CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY STUDIES

Theoretical

Personal Transformation → potential for
systematic change

Methodological

Demonstrates arts-based, anti-oppressive
research= centres marginalized voices

Practical

Models transformative PD

Policy & Praxis

Supports mandatory 2SLGBTQI+ PD in
Ontario's PPM 151 + institutional backing

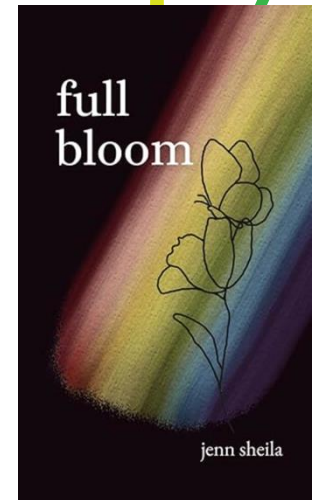


A Poem by Emerie Shared at Our Final LC Meeting

Hope

Hope is progress
It is the small conversations
that can lead to massive revelations
Hope is learning
Learning from our mistakes
and from our heartache
Hope is growth
Whether in leaps and bounds
or baby steps that compound
Hope is change
Change in our own minds
and hope for change of all humankind
Hope is heavy
It is doing the work, day after day,
even when we are full of dismay
Hope is beautiful
It is watching children grow,
to fully embrace their rainbow.
Hope is allies
People who want to create a safe space
for others' identities to be fully embraced
Hope is love.
Love is hope.





“For anyone who has ever held their truth too fragile to speak, for those still waiting for their wings, and for those who have already taken flight. May these words remind you that *growth is inevitable, beauty emerges from struggle, and your voice and truth is worth sharing*. I see you, I understand you, and I love you exactly as you are...in *Full Bloom*.

~Jennifer Looney (she/they),
from her book *Full Bloom* (2025)

Thank
you!

Q

A