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Jessica L. Klassen

Wilfrid Laurier University, jesslynneklassen@gmail.com

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Taking Up Space:  
A Case Study Exploration of the Relationship Between Citizenship and Free Humanities  
Programs in Canada

By Jessica Klassen, BA, BSW

THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Social Work  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
Master of Social Work  
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2013

### **Abstract**

Citizenship is increasingly being utilized as the discourse to discuss inclusive and exclusive realities within a polity. This case study examines free humanities programs in Canada, which offer free university-level courses in the humanities to people experiencing marginalization in society. The stated intention of the programs is that, through education in the humanities, critical reflection, and access to the university space, students will increasingly engage in active citizenship and participate in the public sphere. This thesis explores the extent to which this intention has been realized. Primary data was collected from sixteen students, professors, and program coordinators of free humanities programs. Secondary data was also collected in order to triangulate the primary data. The findings outlined that students experienced an increase in citizenship at multiple levels. Students experienced an increase in sense of self, strengthened societal connections, and more frequent and meaningful access to public space. These findings highlight the mutually reinforcing nature of social inclusion.

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## **1. Introduction**

### *1.1 Research Intentions and Questions*

The participation of citizens in the public sphere is an inherently spatial activity. Social work literature utilizes participatory language that, often unintentionally, describes citizenship. 'Empowered', 'included', and 'engaged', or alternately 'marginalized', 'displaced', and 'excluded', are spatial terms that discuss inclusive or exclusive citizenship. Democracies have traditionally sought an inclusive citizenry through the provision of political and civil rights (George, Lee, McGrath & Moffatt, 2003), with the responsibility of participation then passed to the citizen regardless of resources, power dynamics, or particular identities (Sassoon, 1991). This narrow notion of participation has increasingly widened, as approaches to deepened democracy have gained interest both in Canada and abroad (Shankland, 2006). Spaces of participation are created to increase democracy, promote civic engagement, foster active citizenship, and ultimately bring citizens who are marginalized into the public sphere. In a discussion on the importance of facilitating spaces of participation, Cornwall (2002) contended:

Efforts to engage participation can be thought of as creating spaces where there were previously none, about making room for different opinions to be heard where previously there were very limited opportunities for public involvement, and about enabling people to occupy spaces that were previously denied to them. (p. 2)

With increasing frequency, citizenship is the vocabulary being used by governments, social scientists, and political theorists to discuss inclusion within a polity (Jenson & Papillon, 2000). Beyond the confines of national membership, discussions of citizenship have broadened to refer to the multitude of ties that bind, such as gender, culture, sexual orientation, or the neighbourhood one lives in. Social exclusion and

marginalization refer to weakened ties that are a reality for many in society. These exclusions negatively affect people's citizenship and participation in the public sphere.

This case study seeks to examine the relationship between citizenship and a specific space of participation; free humanities programs in Canada. Free humanities programs provide cost-free university-level courses on the humanities to people experiencing poverty and marginalization. Free humanities programs were developed based on the theory that, through education in the humanities, critical reflection, and access to the university space, students will increasingly engage in active citizenship and participate in the public sphere (Gervasoni, Smith & Howard, 2010; Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2007 & 2010a; Radical Humanities, n.d.; Shorris, 2000). The purpose of this case study is to explore this theory through an examination of the relationship between citizenship and free humanities programs in Canada. This exploration features the voices of students, professors, and program coordinators of free humanities programs in Canada as collected from primary and secondary data sources. The main research questions that guided this study were:

- 1) What are students' experiences with citizenship in relation to free humanities programs in Canada?
- 2) Does participation in a free humanities program alter students' experiences of citizenship?
- 3) Does participation in a free humanities program facilitate greater access to the public sphere?

## 1.2 *Role and Motivations of the Researcher*

The research process of conceptualizing a study, collecting data, and making meaning of the findings is a subjective one. While this study aimed to feature the voices of people involved with free humanities programs, it must be recognized that the research is a co-construction of knowledge between the participants and myself as the researcher. This study is motivated by my curiosity regarding spatial notions of participation in society, with a desire to examine a program that has the stated intention of assisting people in poverty in joining the "*vita activa* (the active life)" (Shorris, 1997, as cited in Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2007, p. 2).

Through my work at a women's resource centre, I have witnessed this transformation in women when they moved through an empowerment framework from isolation to networking to awareness to action. They engaged in more active citizenship at the micro, meso, and macro levels. In part, this was due to the philosophy of the women's resource centre and its commitment to working from a multi-level systems approach. More importantly, though, it was an internal process that occurred within a woman when she discovered that she had the personal agency to move through this empowerment framework towards action.

In my role at the women's resource centre, I was privileged to see women mentally, emotionally, and physically move themselves towards more active citizenship, from isolation towards engagement in public space. Their experiences of gender-based violence, poverty, racism, colonialism, and shame had previously isolated them. With the help of the women's resource centre acting as a mediating structure, the women moved towards engaging in public space. The effect of this was that they now saw their 'private'

matters within a wider societal context and, more importantly, that they had the agency to work toward systemic change. These women were my motivation for giving voice both to people who are being unjustly relegated to partial citizenship and to the mediating structures that work to include all citizens in the public sphere.

### *1.3 Reader's Guide*

Chapter 2 of this thesis contains a literature review that aims to contextualize the primary and secondary data collected for on free humanities programs in Canada. The literature reviewed is on the origins and current iterations of free humanities programs in Canada, various conceptions of citizenship, participation in the public sphere, and the relationship between education and participation in public space.

Chapter 3 describes the research methods and methodology that frame this study. This chapter discusses the research paradigm, methodology, primary and secondary data collection processes, data analysis procedures. It concludes with a discussion of the trustworthiness of the study, as well as limitations in this regard.

Chapter 4 outlines the findings collected from the primary and secondary data. It first provides contextual information regarding the students of free humanities programs in Canada. It then reviews the micro level findings of students' increased senses of self, the meso level findings of strengthened social connections, and the macro level findings of students' increased participation in public space.

Chapter 5 functions as a conversation between the findings from chapter 4 and the contextual literature reviewed in chapter 2. The linkages between the micro, meso, and macro level findings are discussed.

Chapter 6 concludes the study by reviewing this thesis' contributions to the literature, limitations of the project at hand, and the implications this thesis has on research and action.

## **2. Literature Review**

This thesis project exists within the context of various literature bodies that will be explored in this chapter. The intention of the literature review is to paint the bigger picture within which this particular thesis is situated. A detailed description of the origins and current iterations of free humanities programs in Canada are first described. Themes within the citizenship literature are then outlined, discussing citizenship as comprised of rights and responsibilities, access, and belonging. Literature discussing the public sphere and participation within this space is reviewed, featuring social networks as prominent gateways into the public sphere. Lastly, literature on the relationship between education and spatial understandings of participation in public spaces is outlined.

### *2.1 Free Humanities Programs*

#### *2.1.1 Origins*

Free humanities programs originated from The Clemente Course in the Humanities, a free university-level humanities course for people living in poverty. This founding program was created in 1995 by Earl Shorris, a New York journalist and social critic, and was housed at the Roberto Clemente Family Guidance Center in New York City. Free humanities programs have since gained popularity and expanded internationally (Shorris, 2000).

Shorris (2000) found inspiration for The Clemente Course in the Humanities from Viniece Walker, an inmate in a maximum-security prison. Shorris was completing

extensive research into the perceptions of people in poverty on why they are poor. In conversation with Shorris, Walker expressed that people who are poor would benefit from access to another view of the world. Rather than citing jobs, vocational training, or money as the primary path out of poverty, Walker pointed to an entrance to the political life, with the first step being reflection. Drawing from his own experience in a classically based liberal arts program (Connell, 2006), Shorris turned to university-level humanities education as the method for providing a space for critical reflection and greater access to a political life.

Shorris (2000) was clear about the spatial nature of poverty, describing it as an all-consuming force that excludes people from the democratic public sphere: "to live in poverty, then is to live according to the rules of the force, which push people out of the free space of public life into the private concerns of mere survival" (p. 32). Shorris goes on to state that "power results from the *vita activa*[...]. Politics for the poor is difficult. Citizenship, the *vita activa*, is virtually impossible" (p. 73).

Citing Socrates as "the first to exemplify the connection between the political world and the humanities" (Shorris, 2000, p. 5), Shorris organized the Clemente Course using the Socratic method with the intention of providing a space for people in poverty to reflect and live an engaged life of active citizenship. Shorris referred to the humanities as 'riches' that had historically been reserved for the affluent in society, while people living on low incomes exclusively received vocational and technical training. The result, posits Shorris (2000), is that "the uneducated poor have neither the economic nor the intellectual resources to take and hold their fair share of power in a democratic society" (p. 9).

### 2.1.2 *Canadian Free Humanities Programs*

*Harper's Magazine* featured an article by Shorris in 1997 that discussed the Clemente Course and the philosophy behind it. Many Canadian programs cite direct inspiration from this article, such as Canada's first program at the University of British Columbia (University of British Columbia Humanities 101, n.d.). Currently, at least eleven free humanities programs exist in Canada, most of which are hosted within university bodies. Host sites across Canada have adopted unique monikers, with the variety evident in Ontario's programs alone; 'Humanities 101' at Lakehead University and University of Waterloo, 'Liberal Arts 101' at Western University, 'The Discovery Program' at McMaster University, 'University in the Community' in Toronto, and 'Discovery University' jointly delivered through the University of Ottawa and Saint Paul University. For the purpose of this study, the term 'free humanities programs' (Meredith, 2011) will be used.

Free humanities programs provide humanities and liberal arts-based education for people who have experienced barriers to post-secondary education. While each program has unique admissions criteria, programs are generally intended for students experiencing poverty and marginalization. Students gather at either a university campus or an off-site location, usually once per week, where a university professor facilitates the class. While most programs utilize various volunteer professors that rotate each week, some programs have been further integrated into the university and have one professor for the duration of the term who receives teaching credits for his or her work. Some classes involve guided trips to educational sites, such as museums or art galleries. Material barriers to education are reduced through the provision of transportation and child care, with some programs

providing hot meals. Many programs utilize tutors, generally university students, that offer assistance or group facilitation throughout the course. Canadian programs vary in whether they qualify as credit or non-credit courses by the university with which they are affiliated.

As mentioned, there are currently many interpretations of Shorris' model in Canada. Although Shorris' model may have inspired the creation of the programs, many of the Canadian free humanities programs identify with what Margot Butler, program coordinator from Vancouver's free humanities program, describes as an, "uneasy relationship with the Clemente model" (Meredith, 2011, p. 61).

In Laurie Meredith's dissertation (2011), she documented a 2008 pan-Canadian gathering of free humanities program coordinators (of which she was one), an event at which Shorris was the keynote speaker. This excerpt from Meredith's dissertation describes some aspects of the ruptures that Canadian free humanities programs have experienced from the original Clemente model:

[...] while there was much appreciation for Earl Shorris' Clemente Course and the momentum of the community programs springing up, participants identified a number of historical sources of inspiration. While giving his keynote address, Shorris suggested the need to adhere to the Bard Course in the Humanities curriculum and program (which was gaining trademark status around that time); however, the Canadian programs resisted the push to be formally aligned with Shorris' program (RH symposium summary notes\_think tank and next steps, 2008). Participants argued the value of incorporating feminist, indigenous and generally more post-modern perspectives into the curriculum. Some pointed out the importance of resisting the patriarchal history of the "Canon." Discussions also arose about the use of the Socratic Method and the trend to steer away from the traditional didactic tool towards community learning methods from critical pedagogy. (p. 9)



This quote outlines some of the differences that Canadian programs exhibit from Shorris' original model. Despite their differences, the programs all note indirect or direct inspiration from Shorris' Clemente Course model (Meredith, 2011). Additionally, facilitating increased citizenship in society is at the root of the programs. Groen & Hyland-Russell were directors of Calgary's former program and have published a variety of articles and papers on free humanities programs, or as they call them, 'radical humanities programs', in Canada. They state, "a fundamental assumption of radical humanities programs is that the movement from poverty into citizenship is born through Socratic dialogue among students and instructors." (Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2010a, p. 20).

## 2.2 *Social Exclusion*

Social exclusion will be utilized as the discourse to discuss dynamics that are at play in a majority of the lives of the students in free humanities programs. Social exclusion can generally be understood as the result of "multidimensional disadvantage that severs individuals and groups from the major social processes and opportunities in society" (Cummings & Caragata, 2011, p. 6). While the students of free humanities programs are diverse individuals with their own strengths, histories, and journeys, a common thread that weaves its way through their stories is often one of structural marginalization and social exclusion. This can take form in living on a low income, experiencing unemployment, living with a disability, being a newcomer to Canada, or living in unsafe housing conditions. The primary and secondary data collected for this study confirmed that students of free humanities programs experience high levels of social exclusion. In fact, for many programs, one of the few admissions requirements is

that the students are living on low incomes. Of the nine students that I interviewed for this thesis, seven indicated that they considered themselves as living on a low income.

Social exclusion is a relatively new theoretical construct, with the term originating in France with Rene Lenoir's 1974 government publication, *Les Exclus: Un Francais sur Dix* (as cited in de Haan, 1998). According to Lenoir, the 'exclus' were the ten percent of the French population who were excluded from employment-based social security systems. The term grew in popularity and definition, with social exclusion becoming normative discourse when it was increasingly used by the European Union and when a Social Exclusion Unit was implemented in the United Kingdom by Tony Blair's government in order to further study this burgeoning concept (Cummings & Caragata, 2011). In Canada, the social exclusion lens has not been utilized by the federal government. It has, however, been adopted by some provincial governments, such as Quebec's, who in 2004 passed the *Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*, which led to an action plan with targets and timelines (McKinnon, 2008).

Inequality is often framed within a poverty discourse, using income as the narrow space in which to discuss these realities (Sen, 2006). This framework has been adopted, perhaps too exuberantly, in Canada. The Canadian government alone has developed five different measures for defining and measuring poverty, while other institutions such as social planning councils and research groups have developed their own unique measures (deGroot Maggetti, 2002). While I wish for the focus to remain on a social exclusionary understanding of inequality, it is necessary to briefly review traditional understandings of poverty, as they remain very much alive within perceptions and policies in Canada.

A conservative understanding of inequality is present in the absolute poverty discourse, which is based on the belief that poverty can be measured through access to the essentials necessary for physical survival (Ross & Schillington, 1994). The goal of poverty reduction within this framework is to meet people's basic physical needs. Poverty reduction efforts within this poverty discourse are interventions such as food banks, homeless shelters, and emergency health care clinics. Within the absolute poverty framework, the cause of poverty is largely understood as one of individual deficiency, where the location of the problem is the individual person who is deficient in some way (Loewen, 2009).

Further towards the middle of the continuum of poverty definitions is the discourse of relative poverty. This is a broader understanding of poverty, as it recognizes that people need more than their basic physical needs to be met. Relative poverty understands that poverty interventions must account for both people's physical and social well-being (Ross & Schillington, 1994). Central to this definition of poverty is the ability to live a life that is seen as normative by a person's society. The goal of poverty reduction is achieving equity with others (Loewen, 2009). While this understanding of poverty goes beyond the basic needs approach of absolute poverty and does understand the relational aspect of poverty to an extent, it still frames the discourse of poverty within the limitations of income.

The social exclusion discourse builds on this relative understanding of poverty, but differs because it does conceptualize inequality beyond economic terms. Just as poverty in general holds varying definitions, so too does social exclusion (Silver, 1994).

For the purposes of this project, I will point towards Amartya Sen's (2000) understanding of social exclusion as a helpful starting place:

Ultimately poverty must be seen in terms of poor living, rather than just as lowness of incomes (and "nothing else"). Income may be the most prominent means for a good life without deprivation, but it is not the only influence on the lives we can lead. If our paramount interest is in the lives that people can lead - the freedom they have to lead minimally decent lives - then it cannot but be a mistake to concentrate exclusively on one or other of the *means* to such freedom. We must look at impoverished lives, and not just at depleted wallets (p. 3).

Social exclusion understands the goal of intervention efforts to be inclusion in society and holistic human development (Loewen, 2009).

Sen (2000, 2006) has discussed social inclusion (the ultimate goal) as the development of freedoms and capabilities to live a decent life. Within this context, poverty is seen as capability failure, or as the lack of freedom to do certain things that are deemed valuable within society. Interestingly, social exclusion can take form both as a cause and an effect of poverty, with the combination of the two deepening capability deprivation. Sen uses the language of constitutive deprivation (social exclusion as deprivation in itself) and instrumental deprivation (social exclusion as leading to other deprivations). Connecting the concept of social exclusion to this project, having restricted access to public space may directly impoverish a person's life (feelings of isolation, loneliness, lack of self-worth), as well as reduce economic, social, and political opportunities that result from participation in public space (networking to find employment, voting, not accessing educational institutions, not participating in cultural events). It follows, then, that multiple deprivations are mutually reinforcing, meaning that there is a cumulative effect, contributing to greater exclusion (Cummings & Caragata, 2011).

Social exclusion is being utilized as a framing concept within this thesis because it, “is more than a synonym for poverty or inequality and must include a concern with relational issues such as inadequate social participation, lack of social integration and lack of power” (Cummings & Caragata, 2011, p. 14). The impacts of marginalization on the lives of free humanities program students go beyond poverty and inequality. It is precisely on the mutually reinforcing relational issues mentioned in the quotation above that this thesis intends to explore.

### 2.3 *Citizenship*

Social exclusion has a range of impacts on people and their communities. Broadly understood, social exclusion hinders people’s full citizenship in society (Jenson & Papillon, 2000). The literature has demonstrated that there are various definitions and understandings of citizenship dependant on time, place, and social location. Mouffe (1992) aptly stated that "the way we define citizenship is intimately linked to the kind of social and political community we want" (as cited in Lister, 1998, p. 227), inferring that understandings of citizenship are shaped by ideologies, intentions, and social locations. Citizenship is a contested concept (Lister, 1997) that evades a universal definition, as pinning down a universally definitive meaning of citizenship is a limitless venture (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994).

This thesis, then, will discuss citizenship in relationship with a specific place; free humanities programs in Canada. Citizenship will be framed as a composition of three elements: rights and responsibilities, access, and belonging (Jenson & Papillon, 2000). Jenson & Papillon (2000) discuss this triangular relationship, emphasizing its mutually reinforcing nature: “Rights and responsibilities mean little without proper access and

without proper recognition of membership. A real attachment to the community, essential for the exercise of democratic participation, is difficult without proper recognition of rights and access to political power” (p. 12). In this conception of citizenship, access and belonging hold equal importance alongside rights and responsibilities.

I assert that the citizenship literature has traditionally favoured discussions around the rights and responsibilities of citizenship without adequately addressing the equally important dimensions of belonging and access. There has been an implicit assumption in much of the citizenship literature that access and belonging were present, when this has not been the case for many communities and people with experiences ‘outside of the centre’. In my review of the citizenship literature, I will include a discussion on rights and responsibilities. It is, however, the focus of this thesis, both within the literature review and the discussion, to pay due attention to the access and belonging dimensions of citizenship in relation to free humanities programs in Canada.

### *2.3.1 Traditional Theories of Citizenship – Rights and Responsibilities*

Nation-based citizenship has largely dominated the literature, using the state as the main arena of citizenship (Sassen, 2002; Isin & Turner, 2007). Either implicitly or explicitly, literature on modern citizenship has focused on how the citizen relates to his or her government and vice versa. The primary contestations that surround citizenship within this framework are whether citizenship is primarily a status and a right that is provided for citizens by the government, or whether it is a practice and an obligation that is expected of citizens (Lister, 1997; Isin & Turner, 2007).

The tradition that advocates citizenship as a status was largely born from T.H. Marshall's (1950) widely recognized (as cited in Gaventa, 2002; George, Lee, McGrath &

Moffatt, 2003; Higgins, 1999; Lister, 1998) definition of citizenship rights as inclusive of political, civic, and social rights. Marshall saw citizenship as the means to ensure the full membership of all people in society. This sense of membership could be attained through citizenship rights (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). Political rights concern the right to participate in political processes such as voting. Civil rights refer to a person's individual freedom, including freedom of speech, thought, and faith. Social rights, notably included by Marshall, afforded the modern citizen with the right to hold equal social worth and to participate in the economic and social well being of society (Higgins, 1999).

The inclusion of social rights in citizenship literature had significant influence that contributed to the formation of the welfare state in Europe and North America (George, Lee, McGrath & Moffatt, 2003). Marshall saw the welfare state as the "fullest expression of citizenship" (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994, p. 354). He argued that civil and political rights are primarily theoretical if the rights guaranteed by the welfare state, namely a safety net that ensures basic needs are met and that individuals can enter into mainstream society, are not also considered (Higgins, 1999). Marshall's inclusion of social rights hints at notions of access and belonging in society as important to citizenship, but largely remains within the traditional rights framework.

Citizenship as the provision of rights is termed in the literature as the liberal understanding of citizenship, one that promotes individual rights and liberties as paramount (George, Lee, McGrath & Moffatt, 2003). The role of the state is the protector of citizens in their exercise of rights (Gaventa, 2002). The liberal view does not require active participation in society by all members as a necessary right (Caragata, 1999), but as a responsibility afforded to the individual citizen.

While post-war citizenship thought was dominated by discourses of individual rights and status, late twentieth century literature focused increasingly on obligations, responsibilities, and practices of citizenship. Contributions to the wider society were prioritized over individual rights (Lister, 1997). This thought tradition questioned the welfare state's promotion of citizenship, seeing it as a producer of a culture of dependency and passivity. They viewed active citizenship and full membership in society as achieved through the meeting of responsibilities and fulfillment of obligations; programs such as workfare stem from this citizenship tradition (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994).

Civic republicanism gained a wider audience with the increased interest in the responsibilities of citizenship. The distinguishing feature of civic republicanism is the focus on political participation as the highest form of societal membership (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994); citizenship is achieved through participation in public discourse, debate, and decision-making (Lister, 1998). This notion, notably held by Arendt and Habermas (as cited in Caragata, 1999), places importance on community, but goes further by espousing that individuals become a part of a wider community only through public processes of deliberation and debate, with the result being active citizenship (Cornwall, 2002).

### *2.3.2 Differentiated Citizenship*

An inherent tension in citizenship studies is its concurrent inclusionary and exclusionary potential. While the rights and responsibilities citizenship dichotomy has served as an exclusionary tool, more recent citizenship conversations are moving beyond this discussion to focus on its potential as an inclusionary concept (Lister, 2007). The



dyadic rights and responsibilities understanding of citizenship has received criticism primarily from post-structuralist writers (as cited in Caragata, 1999), who promote caution when discussing universality. It has been noted that particular identities, social and physical locations, experiences, and inequities of resources and power are present in a citizenry even when equal rights are afforded and equal responsibilities are expected (Gaventa, 2002, Kymlicka & Norman, 1994). This will inevitably lead to differential outcomes, with the most marginalized being further excluded (Cornwall, 2002). Young (1989, as cited in Higgins, 1999) contends that 'differentiated citizenship' be the priority, as equality and inclusion can only result from affirming differences rather than glossing over particular identities in favour of universality.

The early twenty-first century saw citizenship literature moving in this direction of differentiated citizenship through discussions of identity politics and politics of recognition. Citizenship was being discussed by some as "more than rights and responsibilities. It is also about experiences of belonging and recognition" (Nordberg, 2006, p. 525). Experiences of belonging and recognition in a community have been presented as potentially stronger than relationships to the nation state, as people often hold stronger bonds with particular identity groups, such as cultural or social groups (Sassen, 2002). While it is recognized that the nation state surely impact peoples' identity, it is seen as only one form of group identity. People may hold multiple citizenships (Jones & Gaventa, 2002), including ethnic, gendered, and faith-based citizenships.

This move toward a more inclusive understanding of citizenship has discussed that nurturing a politics of recognition holds equal importance to the access of formal rights (Lister, 2007). A politics of recognition is based on the thesis that identity is

shaped by both the public recognition of its presence and its absence, with a lack of recognition having the potential to inflict harm and oppression (Taylor, 1994). For example, the lack of recognition of indigenous treaties in Canada translates to a lack of recognition of the identities of indigenous people. This lack of recognition also inflicts harm and oppression by jeopardizing the economic, physical, and social well being of indigenous communities. The connection to citizenship is that the recognition and accommodation of particular identities and differences is necessary in ensuring inclusion into society (Higgins, 1999). Differentiated citizenship is seen as the way to facilitate inclusive citizenship through the appreciation and public recognition of particular identities and the potentially different needs that these identities represent.

### *2.3.3 Agency and Empowerment in Relation to Citizenship*

An area of citizenship studies that deserves further attention in the literature is the interaction between people's sense of self and their capacity to engage in society. The concepts of human agency and empowerment have helpfully contributed to citizenship literature in this way. It has been argued that traditional conceptions of citizenship problematically assume that people have an equally strong sense of self, which in turn enables them to have the confidence to speak, act, belong, and participate as active citizens in the public realm. Self-esteem is needed to actively engage in the polity. Susan James (as cited in Lister, 1997) defined self-esteem in relation to citizenship as, "a stable sense of one's own separate identity and a confidence that one is worthy to participate in political life" (p. 39). In other words, people need to first have a sense of human agency before engaging in public space. Ruth Lister (1997) also discussed the necessary relationship between agency and citizenship:

"To act as a citizen requires first a sense of agency, the belief that one *can* act; acting as a citizen, especially collectively, in turn fosters that sense of agency. Thus, agency is not simply about the capacity to choose and act but it is also about *conscious* capacity which is important to the individual's self-identity (p. 38).

Beyond rights and responsibilities, citizenship requires the cultivation of a strong sense of self in order for a sense of agency and participation in society to occur.

Another way to conceptualize this process is through the language of empowerment. While not a theory of citizenship per se, the concept of empowerment has been featured in the literature as a result of full citizenship (Higgins, 1999).

Empowerment can be understood as a process through which people or groups gain greater control over their lives. Zimmerman (1995, as cited in Brown, 2009) outlined a framework of three components that may result from a process of empowerment. First, an individual attains the belief that they are capable and influential within their environment. Second, a person gains knowledge regarding how society works and how to influence and access the systems within it. Third, a person engages in behaviours and actions to alter their environment.

Empowerment has historically been tied to processes that enable people experiencing oppression to recognize and assert their agency (Cornwall, 2002). Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) served as a touchstone work in this regard, as it discussed the conscientization process that popular education models initiate in people's journeys of connecting their personal situations and experiences of marginalization to broader social realities and histories, empowering them to critically reflect and act. Empowerment can be seen as a spatial concept of expansion, as it is "about moving out of constrained places and isolates spaces, widening the scope for action and multiplying

potential sites for engagement, and about growing in an organic, self-realising, way – in confidence, in capacity, in wellbeing” (Cornwall, 2002, p. 2). In sum, personal self-worth, agency, and empowerment all serve as critical precursors in facilitating a sense of belonging and participation as an active citizen in society.

#### *2.3.4 Contested Boundaries of Citizenship*

As was reviewed above, there has been a significant shift in how citizenship is understood. The traditional dichotomous relationship between right and responsibilities has been nuanced by due attention paid to particular identities, experiences of agency, belonging, and empowerment. Not only has this shift created a more inclusive discussion of citizenship, but it has questioned its very boundaries (Jenson & Papillon, 2000).

Both liberal and civic republican traditions have framed the nation state as the only location where citizenship is present. In the current reality of a globalized world, differentiated citizenship has broadened this location, recognizing that people experience group belonging and participation in the public sphere in ways that are not necessarily directly nation related. This has earned this thought tradition terms such as post-national, denationalized, (Sassen, 2002), and transnational citizenship.

Some writers attribute globalization as a major force in the weakening of national ties, initiating local communities and groups as the sites for democratic expression (Jenson & Papillon, 2000). The neo-liberal agenda of privatization and decentralization has also been pointed to as an impetus for society’s gaze to have strayed from the nation state as the ultimate location of citizenship:

“...structures associated with the welfare state and other public services have been ‘trimmed-down’.[...] Municipalities, local governments and non-profit organizations are becoming central actors not simply in service delivery but also

in the definition of access to those services. In this way, they are taking on some of the responsibilities that previously belonged to state actors, such as public servants, and to democratically determined forms, such as rules and regulations” (Jenson & Papillon, 2000, p. 33).

Not only is citizenship escaping from the boundaries of the nation state, but so too are the responsibilities once given to the nation state. The result is an increasing loss of relevancy of the national polity as the central citizenship arena.

A helpful framing of these shifting citizenship boundaries can be seen in the discussion of ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ citizenship. Vertical citizenship refers to the citizen-governance relationship whereas horizontal citizenship refers to the citizen-citizen relationship. A qualitative research study was conducted in the United Kingdom to address low levels of democratic engagement. One poignant finding was that the public did not consider ‘good’ citizenship as primarily equated with the state, but rather around ‘horizontal’ relationships with other citizens (UK Department for Constitutional Affairs, 2007). Jones and Gaventa (2002) state that, “such ‘horizontal’ accountabilities and responsibilities are essential not only for effective representation and collective action, but also for generating a sense of community and thus citizenship *per se*” (p. 26). Again, citizenship is reiterated as representative not only of rights and responsibilities, but also as belonging and participation in a community.

### 2.3.5 *Free Humanities Programs in Canada and Citizenship*

While the citizenship literature is continually growing, a gap that has been widely noted is the lack of literature focusing on people’s lived citizenship experiences (Jones & Gaventa, 2002; Thorson, 2012; Lister, 2007). Theoretical debates about the meaning of citizenship abound, but in what ways do these theories marry with how citizenship rights

and accountabilities, as well as peoples' access and belonging in society, are played out in practice? This thesis attempts to assist in filling this void through a discussion of Canadian free humanities programs in relation to citizenship, and gives a voice to the students, professors, and program coordinators involved in the programs.

This study will restrict its focus to the aspects of citizenship that I believe are most overlooked within the literature; access and belonging. Rights and responsibilities remain critically important and deserving of attention. Many social movements have fought hard for the rights currently afforded to Canadian citizens, and our responsibilities to one another are part of what makes us a society. Yet, my primary interest remains in the access and belonging aspects of citizenship. In my community work, I have worked with people who are privy to the same rights and responsibilities as me, yet continually experience marginalization and social exclusion. I intend to use this space to explore this observation further through a discussion of citizenship within the broader boundaries of agency, empowerment, belonging, and access.

#### *2.4 Participation in Public Space*

Citizenship is a decidedly social, interactive, and public activity. In order to understand citizenship more fully, as well as to locate the space in which free humanities programs operate and, more critically, claim to promote access to, it is necessary to examine "the natural arena of citizenship" (Di Masso, 2012, p. 123), that of public space and the public sphere. This section will include a brief discussion of traditional public sphere theories, as well as the movement towards more differentiated understandings of public space. The power dynamics of space and participation will be highlighted. Lastly, the role social capital and social networks will be discussed.

### *2.4.1 Traditional Public Sphere Theories*

Public sphere theories have made essential contributions to theories of democracy and political participation. Much like traditional conceptions of citizenship, the nation state has been the primary space in which public sphere theories have been conceptualized (Fiig, 2011). This section will briefly discuss the contributions of Hannah Arendt (1958) and Jurgen Habermas (1964) as notable public sphere theorists.

The public sphere finds its origins in the eighteenth century rupture from people being the subjects of monarchs or other unelected rulers. Due to a rising capitalist economy and pressure from a new bourgeoisie class of factory owners and businessmen, it was demanded that people be afforded the right to participate in decisions regarding laws and people who would govern society. The French revolution widened this movement to encompass more of the general public, and effectively created the citizen. The newly formed political public sphere was the space in which public deliberations would occur and public opinion would be formed (Gripsrud, Moe, Molander & Murdock, 2010).

Habermas has remained a central writer on the public sphere. His earlier writings discussed the public sphere in its classical sense, “as an arena of public discussion, open to all, enabling the individual to engage in informed debate about issues of the ‘common good’” (Fiig, 2011, p. 294). The public sphere for Habermas (1964) was not simply a gathering of people. It was a politicized forming of people deliberating in an open forum for the purposes of forming public opinion and living out rights to deliberative democracy.

Arendt (1958; Passerin d'Entreves, 1992) discussed citizenship in terms of 'spaces of appearance', referring to the public sphere as the location that unites citizens. Arendt's spatial understanding of politics and citizenship points to the importance of the public sphere as a location where citizens can assert their human agency, develop their capacities for judgment through discourse with others, and collectively engage in political discussion and action. Similar to what Taylor (1994) later termed 'politics of recognition', Arendt (1958) posited that reality is constituted through public appearance, through being seen and heard by others in society.

#### *2.4.2 Critiques of Traditional Public Sphere Theories*

Just as the public sphere literature has moved in similar directions as the citizenship literature, so too have their critics. A main area of discussion has focused on the exclusive nature of theorizing the importance of one overarching public sphere, which Habermas was a proponent of. This bourgeois public sphere model has been widely critiqued (Cornwall, 2002; Fraser, 1990; Sassoon, 1991), with authors citing that it will inevitably favour dominant societal groups, leaving subordinate groups with no space to deliberate amongst themselves or identify their particular needs. Where inequities exist, alternative publics have been identified as necessary arenas where members of subordinate social groups can create counter-discourses according to their specific identities and needs. Communication across various publics is necessary, requiring multi-cultural literacy, an acknowledgment of the complexity of various identities, and at least one public in which people of differing publics can engage (Fraser, 1990).

Inclusion has been discussed as a criterion for participation in public spaces. Young (as cited in Fiig, 2011) referred to two types of exclusion that limit people's



access to political discussions and decision-making. First, external exclusion refers to the structures and societal norms that leave people and groups out of decision-making, such as economic factors. Second, internal exclusion refers to a personal understanding of inferiority that individuals may have regarding themselves in relation to society. Internal exclusion stems, “from an internalized sense of the right of an actor to speak or not to speak, and from the devaluation of some people’s style of speech and the elevation of others” (Fiig, 2011, p. 299). This echoes the citizenship discussion above, which indicated that citizenship is more than rights and responsibilities; it also requires access to structures and a sense of belonging and worth in society.

#### *2.4.3 Social Capital and Community Membership*

Accessing and engaging in public space often occurs in the forming of relationships with other citizens. This forming of and participating in social networks has concrete benefits for people. Group recognition has been discussed as a form of liberty (Jones & Gaventa, 2002); as freedom to association with people on level terms. It has also been recognized that group belonging and membership are a type of currency in our society. As mentioned earlier, vertical citizenship refers to the nation-citizen relationship, while horizontal citizenship refers to the citizen-citizen relationship. Another term for this citizen-citizen relationship is social capital.

Robert Putnam’s book entitled “Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community” (2000) discussed the effects of disintegrating community bonds and social networks that he found through his data on communal behaviour in the United States. Putnam (2000) discussed the decline of social capital, which, “refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and

trustworthiness that arise from them” (p. 19). Social capital exists on a continuum comprised of varying forms. Putnam refers to bridging social capital, which is outward looking and includes people from diverse backgrounds, and bonding social capital, which is inward looking and tends to reinforce exclusive identities. While both can be beneficial, bridging social capital has the potential to produce broader identities and acts of reciprocity.

Putnam (2000) compiled his data into a social capital index, which depicts the range of concrete and positive impacts that increased social capital has on individuals, groups, and general society. He was clear that participation in society, as conceptualized through increased social capital, facilitates a stronger public sphere:

Community connectedness is not just about warm fuzzy tales of civic triumph. In measurable and well-documented ways, social capital makes an enormous difference in our lives.[...] I present evidence that social capital makes us smarter, healthier, safer, richer, and better able to govern a just and stable democracy (p. 290).

Belonging and social inclusion have positive tangible impacts on a polity and strengthen wider society.

## 2.5 *Education and Public Space*

Citizenship and access to public space are often highly theorized discussions. It is critical to root these concepts in particular spaces as, “space is fundamental in any exercise of power” (Foucault, as cited in Cornwall, 2002, p. 8). Free humanities programs locate themselves in the space of higher education. Humanities education and transformational learning are also discussed.

### 2.5.1 *Higher Education*

The interconnections between education, critical thinking, increased personal agency and engagement in public life (Freire, 1970), and the creation of stronger democracies have been widely documented (Giroux, 2003, 2010; Harkavy, 2006; Nussbaum, 2010; Shorris, 2000). Federico Mayor (1996), the former director general of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, stated, "you cannot expect anything from uneducated citizens except unstable democracy" (as cited in Giroux, 2010, p. 188), pointing to the importance of education for a strong public sphere. Current obstacles to the democratic mission of the institutes of higher education abound (Harkavy, 2006), namely that society is increasingly being organized around market-based values and ideals that promote a neo-liberal ideology (Giroux, 2003, 2010; Nussbaum, 2010, McMurty, 2010). Through the professionalization of higher educational programs, universities have moved further from spaces that encourage dialogical discourse and critical thinking, and closer toward training-grounds for up and coming actors in the marketplace.

Despite this reality, institutes of higher education remain spaces where people come together to share opinions, deliberate together, and think critically about society, even if to a lesser extent than was previously the case (McMurtry, 2010). In the current neo-liberal context, the importance of higher education and critical pedagogy finds a new importance. Freire (1970) described critical thinking and critical pedagogy as tools for reflection, self-determination, human agency, and civic engagement. Giroux (2010) expands that critical pedagogy offers "a sphere where the unconditional freedom to question and assert is central to the purpose of higher education, if not democracy itself" (p. 193).

Institutes of higher education are spaces that provide significant benefits to their user, benefits that have historically excluded non-traditional adult learners, such as students of free humanities programs. Non-traditional adult learners can be understood as students that are socially, economically, or educationally disadvantaged that also demonstrate a history of unconventional or interrupted educational backgrounds (Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2010). A multitude of barriers to higher education exist for non-traditional adult learners, including, but not limited to, inaccessibility, high costs, and policies and modes of study that favour 'traditional' university students (Hansman, 2010; Schuetze & Slowey, 2002).

### *2.5.2 Humanities Education and Transformational Learning*

As was referred to earlier, higher education is increasingly being conducted within a market-based model that sets economic growth as the goal (Giroux, 2010). Technical disciplines, such as business, math, and science, are lauded as sensible and economically supported post-secondary educational choices. Beyond the post-secondary environment, short-term basic vocational training programs are increasingly being offered to people living in poverty, such as those on social assistance, as a pathway out of poverty and into jobs. These 'up-skilling' programs are often inaccessible for non-traditional adult learners (Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2009) and, if accessed, prove to have limited long-term impacts on people's economic well-being.

In contrast to technical, vocationally-focused education, humanities and liberal arts based education is increasingly being choked out of educational space through sweeping budgetary cuts (Nussbaum, 2010) and changing labour market credentialing requirements. This has been discussed by some as a crisis for democracy, as education in

the humanities cultivates the abilities of citizens to think critically and independently, and to empathize with others (Shorris, 2000; Nussbaum, 2010). These qualities can be dangerous for proponents of economic growth, as citizens educated in the liberal arts “are not the reliable servants of any ideology, even a basically good one – they always ask the imagination to move beyond its usual confines, to see the world in new ways” (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 24). Humanities and liberal arts education foster abilities in people to challenge the status quo and see new possibilities.

Humanities education is one way that transformational learning can occur. Transformational learning theory has long underpinned adult education principles (Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2010a). In practice, transformative learning is a spatial activity, as it represents “a deep shift in the way people see themselves in relation to the world around them” (Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2010b, p. 38). Fostering a space where critical thinking is encouraged is key to transformational learning, with the learner critically reflecting on their worldview, values, beliefs, and potential stereotypes about the people and world around them.

Freire (1970) contributed greatly to the discussion on the emancipatory effects that critical thinking and reflection can have on individuals, as well as society and the structures around them. Freire pointed to the oppression that people can experience through banking education, which occurs through didactic learning that reaffirms the power differentials between the learner and the teacher. Rather, he posited that problem-posing education, which cultivates critical reflections that produce ‘conscious beings’, liberates people and has the potential to transform societal structures. Freire (1970) discussed the change that this consciousness-raising process brings:

[...] people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation (original italics, p. 83).

In other words, transformational learning and critical thinking work to change people's sense of place in the world.

## 2.6 Chapter Summary

This literature review has journeyed the reader through various intersection discussions in the literature in order to provide a context for the primary and secondary data collected on free humanities programs in Canada. The review began by outlining the origins and current iterations of free humanities programs in Canada. Social exclusion literature was then discussed in order to provide theoretical background to the societal experience of many students in free humanities programs. Citizenship literature was then reviewed, with particular attention paid to the post-national citizenship literature focusing on access and belonging. Public space and public sphere theories were then outlined as a means to discuss the location of citizenship discussions. Social networks and social capital were used as theoretical concepts to describe how many people concretely engage in public space through relationships with other citizens. Lastly, the learning and educational space was discussed, with a particular focus on humanities education and transformational learning.

It is clear that free humanities programs have the intention of facilitating greater access of public space for their students. As was stated by Groen & Hyland-Russell (2010a), "the programs are designed to be deeply transformative, moving beyond the traditional vocational training that is the usual fare for low-income people *and* opening a

learning space for critical, reflective thinking and a more engaged citizenship" (p. 31). It is the task of this study to explore the extent to which this intention has been realized, as described by students, program coordinators, and professors within free humanities programs in Canada.

### **3. Research Methods and Methodology**

This chapter will outline the procedures that were undertaken to complete this study. A description of the research paradigm and methodology will begin the chapter. The data collection processes will then be described, focusing on primary data, secondary data, and participant and contextual observation. The chapter moves to a discussion on the data analysis process. This section then concludes by reviewing the processes employed to increase the trustworthiness of the study, as well as the limitations.

#### *3.1 Research Paradigm*

A constructivist paradigm grounds and frames this study. This paradigm has been described as an examination of the subjective meanings that people construct from their personal situation (Creswell, 2009). I was drawn to this paradigm because it is congruent with my personal understandings of knowledge and the relationship between knowledge and the knower. I understand knowledge to be constantly evolving based on time and place, rather than an outcome that is static and objectively quantifiable.

The application of a constructivist paradigm allows for the recognition of the construction of knowledge by both the participants and the researcher. Constructivism aims to understand how research participants construct their individual interpretations of a specific phenomenon. Crucially, it also allows space for the inclusion of the researcher's construction of the knowledge, recognizing that the analysis of the data will ultimately be

a co-construction of the researchers' and participants' understanding of the topic being explored (Lauckner, Paterson & Krupa, 2012).

In addition to being in line with my personal understanding of knowledge, constructivism is appropriate for the research at hand. This study seeks to understand the multiple realities of people's experiences with citizenship in relation to free humanities programs. In order to give voice to the variety of research participants, it is imperative that their understandings of societal inclusion and participation be presented. It is likely that students, professors, and program coordinators of free humanities programs will demonstrate unique constructions of knowledge. The secondary data on free humanities programs will present another reality about the relationship between citizenship and the program. This study seeks to embrace these multiple realities, as they create a richer description of the case.

### *3.2 Case Study Methodology*

Flowing from the constructivist paradigm, I have chosen a qualitative case study methodology for this study. It is natural that this study employs a qualitative design, as I am seeking people's personal reflections and experiences regarding the interplay between free humanities programs and participation in society, citizenship, and the public sphere. Through examining various voices and data sources, multiple realities and understandings will emerge. Creswell (2009) notes characteristics of qualitative research that are in line with this study, such as employing an inductive reasoning style, focusing on people's individual meanings of a situation, and the commitment to exploring the complexity of a situation.



Baxter and Jack (2008) define a qualitative case study as "an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources. This ensures that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses [...]" (p. 544). This study will employ an instrumental case study approach, which uses a case to promote further understanding of an issue (Creswell, 2009). The issue at hand in this study will be the lived experiences of citizenship by students of free humanities programs, as described in the primary and secondary data.

The application of this methodology supports the assumption to which I subscribe that knowledge is a construction of multiple realities, as was discussed above in my use of the constructivist paradigm. Exploring multiple lenses in this study will ensure that the voices of free humanities program students, professors, and program coordinators, as well as my voice as the researcher, are all recognized in the findings and discussion sections of this study. Utilizing a case study design also allows for the voices of multiple data sources to be present and to contribute to the discussion. Essentially, these data sources will serve to put the voices of the interview participants into a richer context (Yin, 2003), thus deepening the readers' understanding of the free humanities programs in general, and the programs' relationship to citizenship in particular.

### 3.3 *Data Collection*

As is customary for case studies, multiple data sources were collected and analyzed to gain a deeper picture of the relationship between citizenship and free humanities programs. There were three main data collection sources utilized for this study. Primary data was collected with sixteen individuals through two focus groups with students and program coordinators, and seven individual interviews with students,

professors, and program coordinators. Secondary data was collected through multiple written sources on free humanities programs. Lastly, participant and contextual observation were used to gain a broader understanding of the free humanities programs.

### *3.3.1 Primary Data*

I conducted primary data collection with sixteen individuals involved in three distinct free humanities programs. The data collection occurred in February and March of 2013. Purposive sampling was used in selecting interview participants, which is a method that selects research participants that meet specific criteria or serve select purposes (Engel & Shutt, 2009). For the students, I looked for participants that met the criteria of prolonged involvement in a free humanities program, as well as a willingness to participate in an interview. Prolonged involvement simply required that the students could not be presently attending their first free humanities program. The intention behind this sampling requirement was that they would have experienced an adequate amount of time to reflect on their involvement with the free humanities program, as well as the potential effects that it had had on their lives.

I initiated contact with participants by emailing the program coordinators, asking for their participation as well as their assistance in contacting professors and students. The primary data was mostly collected in person, although two interviews were conducted by telephone. The interviews and focus groups were arranged in locations that were accessible and comfortable for the participants. All people interviewed were given the option of providing their contact information in order to receive an executive summary of my final thesis. The program coordinators will all electronically receive the study in full. The table below indicates the overall structure of the primary data

collection, outlining the role of the participant, the data collection method, the duration of the interview, and the location. To ensure confidentiality for the participants, program names and locations are not described. In the table below I have indicated which of the three programs the interview participants were a part of through a capitalized A, B, or C. This demonstrates the number and distribution of interviews conducted.

Table 1: Primary Data Collection Details

<b>Role</b>	<b>Data Collection Method</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Location</b>
3 Program Coordinators (A)	Focus group	2 hours	Coordinator's home
1 Program Coordinator (B)	Individual interview	1.5 hours	Public cafe
1 Program Coordinator (C)	Individual interview	1 hour	Telephone
7 Students (A)	Focus group	2 hours	Public library
1 Student (A)	Individual interview – follow up from focus group	1 hour	Public library
1 Student (A)	Individual interview	1 hour	Public library
1 Student (B)	Individual interview	1.5 hours	Public cafe
1 Professor (B)	Individual interview	1.5 hours	Personal office
1 Professor (C)	Individual Interview	1 hour	Telephone

*i) Student Demographics*

It is with hesitation that I divide the students' lives into demographic categories based on extracted particulars, such as income level and education level. I understand that these compartmentalized and extracted pieces of information are only part of the identities and realities of the students. The population of students who attend free humanities programs represents a wide cross section of people, with many layers of identity and varying strengths. I remain aware that students may disagree with the categories that I place upon them. For example, it is an assumption on my part that when

a student indicates ‘yes’ to the question “do you consider yourself to be living on a low income?”, that they would also consider themselves to be experiencing marginalization or social exclusion. This is a tension with which I remain uncomfortable, and will proceed with caution. In the “Findings” section in chapter 4, I provide quotations wherever possible in an attempt to let the voices of the students describe their own realities.

The table below represents particular demographic information from the primary data that I collected before my interviews and focus groups with students of free humanities programs. This table is referred to again in chapter 4.

Table 2: Primary Data Student Demographics

<b>Gender Identity</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Country of origin</b>	<b>Visible Minority</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Low income</b>	<b>Date began program</b>
F	65	Canada	Yes	Did not complete high school	Yes	2012
M	74	Indonesia	No	Bachelor of Arts	Yes	2012
M	63	Canada	No	Grade 12	Yes	2007
F	73	Chile	Yes	University	Yes	2006
F	70	Philippines	Yes	University	No	2009
M	81	Italy	Yes	University courses	No	2004
F	54	Canada	No	Grade 12, University courses	Yes	2005
M	44	Canada	No	Bachelor of Arts	Yes	2010
F	56	Canada	No	Grade 12	Yes	2010

Nine students within two free humanities programs were interviewed; eight students from one program and one student from another program. Out of the nine participants, five indicated their gender identity as female and four indicated their gender identity as male. Five students indicated that they were born in Canada. Four students indicated that they were born in countries other than Canada, including Italy, Philippines, Chile, and Indonesia. Four students identified as visible minorities, and five indicated that

they were not visible minorities. The ages of the students in the primary data tended toward the older end of the spectrum, with the average being 64 years of age. Professors and program coordinators were also interviewed, but demographic information was not collected for these participants.

*ii) Individual Interviews*

A total of seven individual interviews were conducted. Three of these were with students, two with program coordinators, and two with professors. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data from research participants, as this style of interview allowed for both structure and fluidity. The questions varied depending on the person's role as a student, professor, or program coordinator (see Appendix 3 and 4). All people interviewed read and signed the consent form. The two people who were interviewed by telephone submitted their signed consent forms electronically prior to the interview. The interviews were audio recorded.

*iii) Focus Groups*

In consultation with my thesis advisor and the program coordinators of a Free Humanities program, I decided to hold two focus groups. First, a focus group was held with students of a free humanities program. Through conversation with the program coordinator, I attended a free humanities program class to recruit student participants. Those interested in participating provided me with their contact information. I contacted them through telephone or email and arranged a date, time, and location that worked well for the students. The focus group was on a Saturday to accommodate students who worked during the week. The location that was decided upon was a public library

meeting room in a neighbourhood where many of the students lived, as advised by the program coordinators.

A colleague of mine was present for the student focus group and assisted me by taking notes throughout the focus group and helping with logistics. I received permission from the students participating in the focus group to audio record our discussion. The consent form (see Appendix 1) was circulated and each point was discussed individually and in detail. I particularly drew their attention to the fact that confidentiality could not be guaranteed because it was a focus group, but encouraged each person to do their utmost in maintaining confidentiality of what was shared. To assist with clarity and accessibility, I also circulated a plain-language condensed version of the consent form that they could keep, along with the official consent form. All participants were willing to provide their signatures on the official consent form. The focus group was two hours in length.

I also conducted a focus group with three program coordinators from the same free humanities program, as this made sense logistically for all parties. We followed the same protocol as listed above, although I did not have a colleague assisting me due to the smaller size of the group. This focus group was also two hours in length.

### *3.3.2 Secondary Data*

Secondary data was heavily utilized in this study. This data was collected primarily through sources such as websites, conference proceedings, newspaper articles, peer-reviewed journal articles, student testimonials, course outlines, and thesis and dissertation documents on free humanities programs in Canada.

While many documents were reviewed on free humanities programs in Canada, three main secondary sources are utilized in the findings section found in chapter 4. Janet

Groen and Tara Hyland-Russell are professors from the University of Calgary's Education department that were involved in Calgary's free humanities program. They have published many documents on free humanities programs in Canada. I particularly utilized their document entitled, "Radical Humanities: A Pathway Toward Transformational Learning for Marginalized Non-traditional Adult Learners" (Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2010a), which featured the voices of students of free humanities programs from Calgary, Ottawa, and Thunder Bay. A second prominent secondary source was a thesis prepared by Tracy Lorraine Urban entitled "The Lived Experience of Disadvantaged Students in a Liberal Arts Program: A Heuristic Inquiry" (2005), which featured the voices of fourteen students of a free humanities program. Lastly, Laurie Meredith's dissertation was used as a secondary source. It is entitled "Creating Spaces for Dialogue: Participatory Action Research in Free Humanities Programs in Canada" (2011). It features the reflections of program coordinators from free humanities programs across Canada.

### *3.3.3 Participant and Contextual Observation*

In addition to primary and secondary data, participant observation was used in this study. Participant observation is a means of deepening the researcher's understanding of the research participants' world through observing them in the research context (Engel & Schutt, 2009). While the opportunity for this was limited due to time and geographical constraints, I did have personal contact with three distinct free humanities programs. First, I was originally exposed to the existence of free humanities programs through the University of Waterloo program, which was planning for its spring 2013 pilot while I was in the early stages of formulating my thesis topic. Through a university field placement, I

was given the opportunity to briefly engage with the University of Waterloo's program. My role was to increase the community engagement and ownership of the upcoming community-university partnership. I met with various staff at community agencies and discussed the program with them, working to garner support and resources. My involvement in this process culminated in a meeting with the community partners that were interested in assisting this new program in its success, and we worked at strategizing a plan to do this. It was at this time that my field placement ended, and my involvement with this program was complete.

My second opportunity for personal involvement and participant observation was to attend a class of one of the free humanities programs in Ontario. At the beginning of the class, I introduced myself, discussed my thesis project, circulated an information letter (see Appendix 2), and requested the participation of class members in a focus group. I circulated a sign-up sheet and received the contact information of many interested interview participants. I then had the opportunity to observe the class and listen to that week's lecture. I met many program participants during this time and discussed their involvement in the program with them.

My third opportunity for personal exposure to the program was to attend an exhibit where a free humanities program class was presenting their final projects to the public. The theme for the duration of this year's class was on their city, focusing on literature, geography, and general discussions regarding the city and their place in it. Many of the final projects at this exhibit utilized this theme and provided me with a rich understanding of the depth of the diversity and learning of the students. I mingled with students at the exhibit and discussed their projects with them. I introduced myself, my



thesis project, handed an information letter to some of the students (see Appendix 2), and discussed the possibility of an interview with some of the students.

### *3.4 Data Analysis*

The data analysis process proved to be a truly iterative process. Analysis for this project did not have a formal beginning and end, but occurred throughout the entire process. During the collection of the primary and secondary data, I analyzed the data as I encountered it. Transcription was a key part of the analysis process, as I was immersed in the primary data for a condensed period of time. I manually transcribed the focus groups and individual interviews soon after they occurred. This was indeed helpful in the data analysis process, as general themes and trends began to emerge. I chose to engage in somewhat of a selective transcription process. While I transcribed the majority of the audio recordings verbatim, some sections were not transcribed for the purpose of time management and relevancy to the subject matter.

The themes that were illuminated in the transcription of the primary data were meaningfully connected to the secondary data when both sets of data were coded using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. I began by performing open coding on the primary and secondary data sets. I focused first on finding descriptive codes, such as “references to critical thinking” and “increased confidence”. I then reviewed the descriptive codes and grouped them using the sensitizing (Quinn Patton, 2002) concepts of micro, meso, and macro level interactions. This process has been described as moving from coding (seeing) towards encoding (seeing as) (Quinn Patton, 2002), which highlights the process of moving from descriptive to analytical coding.

### 3.5 *Trustworthiness*

Trustworthiness refers to processes used in qualitative research to ensure the rigour of a study, with credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as the main areas of assessment (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Remaining transparent in the research process finds particular importance in the constructivist understanding of research as a co-construction of knowledge between the participants and the researcher. It requires the researcher to engage in strategies to mitigate bias. Thus, I will outline the main methods that I used to enhance the trustworthiness of this qualitative study, as well as the limitations.

As the researcher, I engaged in reflexivity throughout the process of this research study. Through keeping a research journal and engaging in constant reflection, I worked to account for how I interacted with research participants in the field, how I interpreted data sources, how I developed themes within the data, what biases I became aware of throughout the research process, and how I mitigated those biases. This use of reflection acknowledged that, as the researcher, I processed information from my particular background, values, and perspective (Engel & Shutt, 2009).

Triangulation was employed as the main method to increase the trustworthiness of this study. Inherent in a case study design is the triangulation of data sources, which enhances the credibility of a study due to the multiple perspectives being explored through the variety of data sources being analyzed (Baxter & Jack, 2008). As outlined above, I utilized various primary and secondary data sources. The findings were also triangulated because of the variety of voices in these data sets. While the study focused

on the experiences of the students, the perceptions of the professors and program coordinators were also gathered to provide additional perspectives.

Due to the strict time limitations in which I prepared this thesis, there were processes that I was not able to employ to enhance the rigour of this study. I would have preferred to engage in member checking, which invites the research participants to discuss or clarify the researcher's interpretations and ensure that their voices are adequately represented (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Prolonged engagement with the research context and the data sets also would have assisted in my research project, as this would have provided me with more time to reflect and analyze the data. Despite these limitations, researcher reflexivity and the triangulation of multiple data sources have worked to ensure the rigour of this thesis project.

### *3.6 Chapter Summary*

This chapter reviewed the research processes that were undertaken to complete this study. The research paradigm, methodology, data collection procedures, and data analysis process were described. The chapter concluded by reviewing efforts to increase the trustworthiness of the study, as well as the limitations.

## **4. Findings**

This chapter will outline the case study findings that resulted from the primary and secondary data collected on free humanities programs in Canada. To provide further background information, demographic and contextual information on students of free humanities programs will be presented and discussed. The relationship between citizenship and free humanities programs, as resulted in the primary and secondary data, will then be outlined at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

#### 4.1 *Contextual Information on Students of Free Humanities Programs in Canada*

Section 3.4.1 contains a table with the demographic information collected in interviews with students of the free humanities programs. This section will discuss those results, as well as other contextual information provided in the primary and secondary data.

Through my research, it became apparent that the majority of students in free humanities program were experiencing poverty. When collecting the primary data, I asked students to indicate if they identified as living on a low income. Seven participants indicated ‘yes’ and two participants indicated ‘no’, indicating that the majority of the students I interviewed identifying as living on a low income. This student demographic is consistent with the secondary data consulted for this study, as many students across other free humanities programs also experienced poverty. In Groen & Hyland-Russell’s (2010a) questionnaire results from students in three Canadian free humanities programs, it was apparent that students:

showed considerable material barriers or socio-economic challenges.[...] Annual incomes that fell far below the poverty line, high levels of unemployment, and inconsistent and/or poor housing situations illuminated the profound material barriers students faced. Indeed, many of the students highlighted poverty and homelessness as consistent challenges. (p. 47)

In addition to income levels, there were a variety of other factors indicated in the primary and secondary data that discussed the marginalization of many of the students attending free humanities programs in Canada. Professor Stuart, a professor with a free humanities program, said that, “our population was low income individuals, people with mental health issues, newcomers to Canada, people who had been denied access to university because of income or other structural barriers”. Again, Groen and Hyland-

Russel's (2010a) study corroborated this marginalization by stating that, "non-material barriers of drug/alcohol addiction, the effects of violence and war, as well as the challenges of living with chronic illness and disability, permeated the lives of many of the programs' students" (p. 47). While not all students experienced these issues, it was apparent that many students in the free humanities programs were people who experienced multiple dimensions of marginalization in society.

The students that I interviewed indicated a variety of formal educational attainments, ranging from not completing high school to attending university and receiving a Bachelor of Arts. In discussing past educational experiences, students in both the primary and secondary data indicated both personal understandings and experiences of education, as well as listed particular barriers to education in the past.

Many of the students discussed previous negative experiences with the education system before enrolling in free humanities programs. Maria reflected on her difficulties in school while growing up and cited, "school is like a competition". She discussed how school made her feel boxed in and inadequate:

I thought there was something wrong with me. Because I couldn't do it the way we were doing it in school, and that's what messes you up. You have to do it 'the way you do it in school'. It's gotta be done the way they do it in school.

Janet also reflected on feeling inadequate in her school setting while growing up. She shared:

I was a poor student. I failed a couple of times and stuff. They said I had (laughs), I love this stuff, they said I had a mental block against learning, they told my parents. What does that mean? God knows. Today they'd be putting me on Ritalin or something.

Serge reflected: “I hated school. I detested it tremendously. Only went because my parents forced me to go.”

Students in the secondary data also reflected on their negative schooling experiences. Urban’s (2005) thesis described students’ previous experiences with education. A student said, “I had attended university before and because I have brain damage and a learning disability, at that time, it had been a real horror show because I wasn’t able to deal with the logistics of it” (Urban, 2005, p. 91). Another student also cited learning and physical disabilities as impacting his previous education experiences, describing high school as “nightmarish” and sharing that “high school was like being put into a psychiatric prison when you’re just perfectly normal” (Urban, 2005, p. 114).

Due to the high levels of poverty experienced by free humanities students, material barriers to post-secondary education were prevalent. Groen and Hyland-Russell (2010a) discussed that a lack of child care, tuition, books, computers, bus tickets, inadequate housing, lack of medical care, and unemployment all represented barriers to post-secondary education.

Structural barriers were frequently listed as inhibitors to education, particularly in reference to post-secondary education. Professor Stuart discussed the exclusive nature of the university as he said, “universities, say what we want to, they’re still seen as an echelon, a top level of achievement. There are people whose backgrounds, neighbourhood situations, that’s not part of the dialogue”. Lisa discussed a different type of structural barrier when she discussed her immigration journey and her attempt to have her university degree from her home country accredited in Canada. She said, “So here in Canada you have a very long system of education, but in [my country] we cannot afford

that. So my education, even if I was a university graduate, I was given grade 12 equivalent”.

Students of free humanities programs discussed themes of poverty, previous negative experiences with school, and material and structural barriers to post-secondary education. Reviewing these experiences has provided a contextual background on free humanities program students, who are the focus of this study.

#### *4.2 Citizenship and Free Humanities Programs*

Both in the primary and secondary data, common themes appeared that suggested varying levels of connections between students’ citizenship and participation in a free humanities program. For the purposes of clarity and organization, I have divided these findings into the three categories of micro, meso, and macro levels of interaction within society. This framework is often utilized within social work theory and practice (Rogers, 2013). First, I will explore this relationship at the micro level and discuss how the program affected students’ senses of self. Second, the meso level will be explored and the findings will indicate how the programs affected the social connections of students. Third, the macro level findings will be discussed, focusing on how students’ relationships to and understandings of society were affected.

These three categories must be viewed as constructions - meanings and boundaries as assigned by me for the purpose of organizing the data. Quinn Patton (2002) referred to organizational categories as ‘sensitizing’ or ‘etic’ concepts. He also provided a caution that I will heed, namely that:

Concepts are never a substitute for direct experience with the descriptive data. What people actually say and the description of events observed remain the

essence of qualitative inquiry. The analytical process is meant to organize and elucidate telling the story of the data (Quinn Patton, 2002, p. 457).

Within these designations of micro, meso, and macro levels, I rooted the findings section in the voices of the participants both from the primary and secondary data.

#### *4.2.1 Micro Level Findings – Sense of Self*

Students, professors, and program coordinators discussed how the students' sense of self was affected by involvement in a free humanities program. Particular themes that emerged from the primary and secondary data were increased self-worth, recognition of the ability to handle a challenge, empowerment, and confidence in personal abilities.

Andrea, a program coordinator, summed these themes up well when she discussed a student that felt that the program helped her to feel that she was able to take up space in society:

One student in particular talked about, 'I have space, I have a voice that actually matters'. She had been told so many times, or thought that it wasn't worth anything and that she just needs to not take up any space. She always used that concept of taking up space. And that resonated with our class a lot.

Students shared various ways in which the program increased their positive sense of self and their feelings that they deserved to 'take up space'.

##### *i) Self-Worth*

A common theme outlined by students, professors, and program coordinators was that students experienced an increase in self-worth and self-esteem through participation in a free humanities program. A secondary study said of a student, "he feels he is a better person for having taken the program, saying 'I like myself better now than before [the program]'" (Urban, 2005, p. 99). Another student indicated that, "being involved in the course helped me realize that I am worthwhile" (Lakehead University Student



Testimonials, n.d.). These sentiments indicate that the program spurred the students to engage in intrapersonal reflection, with many students reporting that they had feelings of increased worth.

*ii) Ability to Handle a Challenge*

Students indicated that their sense of self was increased through the recognition that they were able to handle a challenge, which they realized through participation in a free humanities program. The programs often use philosophical and literary texts that the students had not had previous access to, as well as speakers that discussed potentially new topics. A student stated on behalf of his colleagues that:

Most of [the students] had been told, one way or another that thinking was not their job...but for a number of people, finding they could keep up intellectually and defend their position... that they're intellectually capable, it's not something everyone knew (Urban, 2005, p. 117).

Some students indicated that they were initially attracted to the program because it looked challenging, and they wanted to see if they were capable. Janet said of her decision to attend a free humanities program, "I thought, if I do this I'll at least know if I can handle something at that level". Lisa, whose university degree from her home country was not recognized in Canada said, "it has remained in my mind that I am just a grade twelve equivalent, so I wanted to test what university is like here". Other students reflected on their experience with a free humanities program, indicating pride in achieving a challenging goal. In Groen and Hyland-Russell's (2010a) study, they recalled:

Several of the students, while speaking about being pushed out of their comfort zone, tinged their responses with some pride at having met the bar. A student reflected on his first essay. While the process was anxiety-ridden, he was proud of completing it: 'It's mine and I've created it' (p. 58).

It was clear that the creation of a challenging course was a purposeful intention for the program coordinators and professors. Safia, a program coordinator, said it was important for students “to feel that they could understand the university level lecture. That they could participate in something that was maybe a little beyond a limit that they had put in place for themselves”. Professor McDonald indicated that:

The class should be a challenge. You should feel you’ve accomplished something when you’re done. We had readings, they had to write responsive papers every week. It’s kind of demanding and people complained because it was too much reading or that kind of thing. It did demand, but then there’s the confidence that grows out of saying, ‘yeah, I can meet challenges like that and organize myself to do it’.

Students expressed that pride and confidence stemmed from their newfound ability to meet a challenge they previously saw as unattainable.

*iii) Empowerment*

The primary and secondary data indicated that students of free humanities programs experienced a greater sense of empowerment through their participation in the program. Stemming from increased feelings of self-worth it was apparent that, at varying levels, students experienced a shift in power, even within their own understandings of themselves. Serge highlighted this when he attributed his increased sense of empowerment to the knowledge that he received in the program. He said, “I feel knowledge is power in a subtle way. There's something that makes you, it kind of empowers you almost. It makes you feel comfortable within yourself”. Serge felt that this new knowledge gave him the power to engage in conversations in which he previously would not have felt comfortable or competent.

Groen and Hyland-Russell (2010a) reflected that they also saw this within their students. A program coordinator in their study said, “I think the process of actually voicing their concerns or ideas with another person was very empowering and I think they began to realize that they, you know, that they were on to something” (Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2010a, p. 65). Professor Doug West from Lakehead University triangulated this finding by reflecting on students’ experiences of a shift in power through their participation in a free humanities program:

Our students often begin with a sense of dis-empowerment and exclusion from the mainstream of society. They often express guilt at ‘never having been able to get their act together to go back to school’. This ‘going back’ is an interesting term for me, it represents a re-visioning of personal and familial historical circumstances as much as it represents a new beginning. Power comes from the recognition of ‘others’ in the same position - there is always power in numbers. It slowly comes to pass in our program that students realize a sense of empowerment as individuals but also as sharing experiential beings. (Meredith, 2011, p. 228)

A strengthened sense of empowerment through increased knowledge and inclusion contributed to students’ increased sense of self.

*iv) Confidence*

Closely tied to empowerment, the most prevalent theme of increased sense of self discussed by students was an increase in confidence through participation in a free humanities program. Safia, a program coordinator, said, “I do see, even in that short span of time, a more self-confident group”. Student responses indicated that confidence levels were increased to varying degrees. For some, confidence was increased because the program affirmed previous knowledge. Sarto said:

In this course, I have found that even that repetition, which the teacher had told me and I had already experienced before. That is a confirmation of what I have

experienced. It has given me the real confidence, base, that I was right, or I was not. But especially on the positive side.

In a similar vein, some students indicated that the program was a way of getting back to a confidence level that they had previously held at one time in their lives. Serge said, “I feel the confidence is building up again”.

For other students, the programs were a way of unleashing new confidence. Zenab, an immigrant to Canada, said that the program helped her feel more confident to speak with some authority on the country where she now lives. She said, “now I feel more comfortable to say many things about Canadian people. How they live, even about literature. I noticed myself, I'm talking about this, I didn't before, or I didn't know about this before”. Janet relayed a story of fellow student, as well as discussed her own newfound confidence:

One woman said she always wanted to go on art crawls. We have a lot of art galleries[...]. Groups go down there once a month or something and they go through and they see all the art and they talk of art. She said she always wanted to go but she was afraid she wouldn't know what to say. After a few weeks she said, ‘I'm going on an art crawl’. It was just confidence. I thought I'd like to try a course at [the university] but I thought, oh, I'll never do that. But I would now. It's totally different.[...] I built up my confidence, I did a lot more writing. Just the weekly assignments and stuff. I wasn't doing hardly any writing before that. I was talking to other people who had been unsure of themselves but every week got more and more confident. It was like it was a whole group of people just getting better and better and better.

Through new experiences, support, and knowledge, students experienced increased confidence through participation in a free humanities program.

#### *4.2.2 Meso Level Findings – Social Connections*

Through participation in a free humanities program, students experienced impacts on their relational connections with others, which in turn affected their senses of

belonging and citizenship in society. The main themes that emerged from the primary and secondary data were a reduction in isolation, positive impacts on family relationships, an increased respect for societal diversity, and an overall increased sense of belonging in society.

*i) Reduced Isolation*

Isolation in society affects one's citizenship. It is difficult to experience a sense of belonging in society when one has limited social networks and, therefore, limited social capital. This theme was discussed by students, who largely experienced strengthened social connections and a reduction in feelings of isolation through their participation in a free humanities program. As Groen and Hyland-Russell (2010a) reflected:

[...] for many students in the program, who had been isolated for a significant amount of time, they had lost the ability to engage in typical social encounters, to sustain conversation, or routine behaviours that many of us take for granted, like eating with a community around the table (p. 84).

Elaine, a program coordinator, expressed that she saw a reduction in isolation as the main goal of the entire program, indicating the importance of the connections built through the program.

The students' reduced isolation and strengthened social connections helped them to see the similarities with one other, rather than the differences. One student reflected, "we were a diverse group of people coming together to learn about our city. Everybody had a story. We made connections and friendships; we bridged gaps. We laughed, we cried. And we saw the strength in community" (McMaster Discovery Program Zine, 2012, p. 5). Another said, "we all got to know each other... I didn't feel so different after all" (Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2010a, p. 51).

Urban's (2005) thesis described the story of one student who reflected on a series of drawings he had made that depicted his reduced isolation through involvement in a free humanities program:

Most of my drawings were of a creature emerging out of something - out of a tree, out of fire. There was another fellow and all his drawings were of things disappearing into the distance - it was a theme of isolation. Me, I'd felt isolated, but I was going in the other direction. People tell me I always say I'm coming into myself, but I really feel it (p. 132).

While many students discussed a reduction in isolation during their involvement in the programs, few discussed the sustainability of these relationships. Janet noted that the connections made within the program were not sustained for her; "we haven't really carried our relationships beyond". While students may not have sustained their connections beyond the program, it was evident that the experience of connecting with one another over the duration of the free humanities program had an impact on their feelings of isolation.

*ii) Impacts on Family*

Access to post-secondary education has intergenerational effects, which was evident in the primary and secondary data. When asked how the program had impacted them, many students reflected on impacts that their involvement in the program had on their families. Zenab reflected:

Because every Wednesday, I learn something else, something new. Even if I knew something, it was just five percent of the whole amount, so I learn a lot. And I transfer that. The other thing is with my family, like with my daughter. I feel so well because I say, I can't do anything on Wednesday because I go to [the] university. She says, 'oh yeah, my mom is studying'. So I feel great too.

Serge reflected that his motivation for attending the program was to be a role model for his daughter:

I regret cutting my education short.... Now I can't stop. My daughter watches me and goes, 'I want to go to school too'. That's the bottom line for me, to get her going. She was starting to smoke marijuana and doing all that stuff. I wanted her to get a life more than what I had [...]. So that's what she's done. She says, 'you know Dad, you kind of like people. So do I. I'd like to be a psych'. And I said, 'good for you'. I thought she was just joking, but she's still following through with it to this day, so that's good.

In addition to the knowledge that is passed on to family, a student discussed that access to the university resources were helpful for her family:

I was actually glad to be able to get a library card, because my daughter's oldest, Athena, she didn't want to learn. I says, 'well, what kind of homework do you have?', and she says, 'Well, I gotta do an autobiography of this musician'. I said, 'Have you thought of a musician' and she says 'No'. I said, 'Well come with me.' I picked her up and I said 'Well let's go to university.' [The university], it's okay, it's not scary or nothing. It's inviting to go there". (Groen and Hyland-Russell, 2010a, p. 56).

Professor Stuart discussed the intergenerational impacts that occurred through exposure to the university that was provided by free humanities programs. He said of the program, "it's offering a place to say that university is something attainable and it's not even for you, but for those who follow you. For other children or other people in your community, this is open".

### *iii) Increased Appreciation for Societal Diversity*

A prominent theme throughout the primary and secondary data was that involvement in a free humanities program was often synonymous with an increased understanding, acceptance, and respect for societal diversity. Stereotypes were reduced for many through networking with fellow students who were different from them, as well as through increased knowledge through the class content. Lisa's sentiments reflect this well:

I remember that when I first came to Canada I say, ‘what do the natives want more?’. They're getting so much money from the Canadian government, how come they are, from what I could read, they're complaining. And then with the session we had last week, I came to understand why they are complaining. They are justified. So my feelings have changed. It's very, very slow, but I have changed because of that.

Maria had a similar experience, citing the impact that open discussion with class members of different backgrounds had on her:

We probably talk to cultures or immigrants or with people who weren't born here. We couldn't meet before so much. But this way you're meeting and you're getting other people's views.[...] But through the class, everybody can come together and you're almost forced to get everything in the open. And say, ‘oh look, I can see that person is a good person’. You're taking them one on one. You get to meet them as they really are.

These increased understandings of diversity had real impacts. A student reflected on their increased learning about Aboriginal people and how it has affected her actions:

[...] things that I wasn't aware of and made me look at my stereotyping, my racism, my prejudices, and opened my eyes a lot. And now I find that I'm not tolerant when, before if I heard a racial joke I'd just sort of wouldn't say anything, but now I'm stepping up and saying, ‘hey that's not right, you don't understand where they're coming from’. So I think it's opened my eyes a lot. I didn't realize I had those particular prejudices. That was an eye-opener” (van Bareneveld, 2007, p. 20).

iv) *Sense of Belonging in a Place*

Developing a stronger sense of belonging in a particular place was a theme that was noted by students, professors and program coordinators. One program in particular had a place-based theme throughout their most recent course, which was evident in the data. While this prompted more abstract reflections on senses of belonging, it was something that was also concretely fostered within the classroom. When asked about the impact that the program had on students, Andrea, a program coordinator, said, “a sense of belonging, which is a big concept but not just...it starts I think with a sense of belonging



in the class and everyone feeling completely welcome to be there”. In addition to the welcoming learning space, Professor McDonald said that, “by creating our own expressions about life in this city, together, we have created a new space for belonging in our city”.

This “new space for belonging” was experienced by students in many ways. Students reflected on how the program helped them to fit into society, either again or for the first time. Janet reflected, “well, I saw that I was not quite as useless as I thought I was. I saw that maybe I could fit into society a little bit better than I was making no effort whatsoever to do”. Another student, who was a newcomer to her city, shared:

During the three years’ time I lived in Hamilton City, I thought I was on my way discovering Hamilton. But for some reason, I still felt sometimes as an outsider looking in. I wasn’t able to find out why till I became officially a Discovery Program participant. The reason was very simple. Before the program, I was discovering “Today’s Hamilton”. After reading and learning about the history of the city and the way it changed over years, I now have a sense of belonging. I feel very connected. I am no longer an outsider looking in, but a ‘Hamiltonian’ with a great appreciation for the uniqueness of our community (McMaster Discovery Program Zine, 2012, p. 8).

Andrea, a program coordinator, shared the experience of another student who experienced a subtle yet no less profound experience of an increased sense of belonging in his city:

His project was all about his walk home because he made paintings about his walk home from the library where we met and his apartment. He said, ‘usually I don’t, I just look at the ground, go straight ahead’. Getting out is a big deal for him. But he started to look up more and realize what was around him. That was kind of his thing, was looking up and realizing... That’s one story that has stuck out to me a lot.

Another student experienced an increased sense of liberty in choosing her neighbourhood through participation in the program. Professor McDonald shared this

particular student's story:

I'm thinking of one student who said 'I grew up in the north end and I had to move away when I moved away from my family and grew up. I feel like I could move back now, I could choose to go back there'. It's a place that's had social stigma. Just this sense of now I understand my city better and I can choose where to live in it.

This student felt a renewed sense of belonging in her old neighbourhood because of her increased knowledge of the city around her. It was apparent that students translated their new knowledge of their city into an increased sense of belonging within that place.

#### *4.2.3 Macro Level Findings – Participation in Public Space*

The free humanities programs had significant impacts on students' understandings of and access to society and its public spaces. Safia, a program coordinator, referred to the programs as 'portals' in this respect:

It's about the course itself, but it's about what the course can lead to. I really kind of see [the free humanities program] as a portal. When you participate in that portal and come to that portal, it hopefully opens other threads and paths.

The "threads and paths" that will be discussed here are increased understandings of the interconnections and inner-workings of society, as well as increased access to public space, both in terms of the university space and society more generally.

##### *i) Increased Knowledge of Society*

Stemming from an increased sense of belonging and place in society, many students discussed how their participation in a free humanities program increased their understanding of the interconnectedness and functioning of society, as well as their place within these connections. Essentially, it facilitated a space where critical thinking was encouraged.

A student shared that her involvement with a free humanities program not only

broadened her knowledge of the world, but also helped her to locate herself within these structures:

[...] has sort of helped me to understand the world and see what my place in it is. For me personally, and my circle of friends and then in the community, and then in the larger community - it's helped me to understand how it all works.[...] You connect, you become aware of things happening in other places, other countries, and of other ways, so even if you're not physically there, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, you're connected with a lifeline – in that way, I think it gives a real strength (Urban, 2005, p. 92).

Serge built on this idea through his reflection on understanding his place within society and the change he sees as necessary:

And I can see change is possible, as I get knowledge I realize that our system is really just everybody else's system as well. ... I just think that the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. I see that as an obvious. I feel that the classes are making me realize that we can change. Maybe it's knowledge, or maybe it's just the fact that people are people. I'm starting to realize that the movers are all just like you and I. They're grasping at straws just as much as anybody else, it seems. I just think we can change. And I hope we do. This is something I'm starting to sense, that change of society is very possible. It's given me hope that way.

Claire, a program coordinator, echoed these reflections:

...the individual seeing you within the bigger context of a thread of history and ideas that shape things at different times, gives you such a different perspective of your own situation and the environment you're in, whether it's a country, what do you want to call it, citizenship or not. That your being inside, you come out and you can look around and you can feel part of. That's what I see happening to people when they do the courses.

Participation in a free humanities program helped to move students from a place of societal isolation towards a greater understanding of their place within society.

Many students attributed this greater understanding to the critical thinking that was facilitated within the free humanities programs. It was evident in the primary and secondary data that the encouragement of critical thinking was pivotal in facilitating

students' increased belonging and participation in society. Critical thinking skills were intentionally fostered by the programs, as was discussed by a program coordinator: "In [the free humanities program], we create the conditions where students are able to express their ideas and deepen their analysis of the world around them" (Meredith, 2011, p. 217).

Professor McDonald felt strongly about the importance of facilitating a space where critical thinking skills are nurtured. He discussed his understanding of what critical thinking looks like, as well as the impact it can have on students:

In some ways you might say critical thinking comes from being angled to the norm of things. So you can see what's getting tromped on or missed or what's not part of the regular way of seeing things because you come from an angle. You've had experience outside of the centre. So a class that says, 'that's good, we need that!', and sees that as central to learning and knowledge production. It's dignity-making.

Not only does Professor McDonald indicate that the students of free humanities programs have critical thinking capacities, but he suggests that their experiences 'outside of the centre' provide them with a unique vantage point with which to view and understand the world.

Students experienced the transformative power of being given a space in which to critically discuss the structures that shape their world. The encouragement to ask questions was the first step. One student recalled a moment in class: "I said 'I'm mad at Freud' and he [instructor] said 'it's just one man's opinion.' And then all of a sudden my thinking started changing and I'm questioning" (Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2010a, p. 52). Another student reflected, "we learned to ask the questions... it was the first thing in my life that I think has given me power" (Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2010a, p. 51). In addition

to the power that students experienced when they interacted critically with the texts, one student discussed his experience with interacting critically with the free humanities class itself: “I was able to challenge my personal belief system but also to realize the stuff they were teaching us wasn’t always right either” (Urban, 2005, p. 126).

Professor McDonald provided a rich description of a learning activity that he facilitated in class in order to provoke critical thinking and engagement with the world in an analytical way:

[...] the very beginning of the class we were starting to read history books, so I asked everybody, ‘what is history?’. So I get a definition from the dictionary and put it on the overhead and we take it apart. It says ‘history is the sequence of significant events of institutions or nations’. So people say, ‘significant? Who calls them significant? And why does it have to be a sequence? And whose sequence is the right one? And, if we always make histories of institutions or nations, what about the people who get left out? What about women’s history? What about black history? What about indigenous history?’ These are things that they’re asking. So one of the students comes up to me at break time and says, ‘I didn’t know education could be like this. I thought you were just told the definition and you memorized it. I didn’t know you got to debate the definition’. And her eyes are just sparkling with light. Because she’s having a say in the definition. And that’s so abstract, you know? Who cares? Why would people be empowered by saying what they think history is? But what they’re doing is they’re speaking out of pretty powerful experience. And people said, ‘how about women’s history?’ I mean, there’s people who are living in women’s shelters. And they know what histories are the official ones and which ones are not. So that sounds like an abstract conversation, but it’s very particular and it rises out of embedded wisdom and knowledge and experience that gets affirmed by the conversation itself.

The facilitation of critical thinking and ultimately of a greater understanding of society appeared to be a first step for many students in their claiming of public space and feeling a sense of belonging in society.

ii) *Access to the University Space*

The primary and secondary data demonstrated that students viewed the free

humanities program as a way to gain access to the university space, either through participation in the program itself or through moving on to further post-secondary opportunities. As Professor McDonald reflected, “in the mental map of people's sense of ‘where do I live?’, the university became part of where they live, rather than something over there that I don't really know much about”. One student reflected, “I wanted to be in a building that said university on it” (Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2010a, p. 52). A student from Thunder Bay’s program said of the university, “I can go in there. I've lived in Thunder Bay for 18 yrs and this is the first time I've ever been in the university” (Lakehead University Student Testimonials, n.d.).

In addition to accessing the university space solely for the free humanities programs, others used this experience as a gateway to further post-secondary education.

A student from Lakehead University’s free humanities program said:

Even though it was a non-credit course, I was going to university! Humanities 101 reignited the flame inside me and allowed university to become a reality once again for me. I enjoyed all of the lectures, but especially Political Science and the Native studies lectures. Humanities 101 gave me the motivation to finish high school and finally accomplish what I've always wanted. This year, I will be entering my first year of Political Science/Pre-law. I couldn't be happier. (Lakehead University Student Testimonials, n.d.)

Professors and program coordinators readily discussed the role that free humanities programs have played in increasing access to the university, as well as the benefits that result. Below are some of their reflections:

I think universities have always been seen to be these intellectual enclaves, ivory towers, whatever, and you know, somebody who's homeless would not necessarily think that it was a place that they would be welcomed, but they are. (Safia, Program Coordinator)

It is to introduce to a population who have not seen a university as accessible to them as being a place that might be available. It's also to open up the university to

people who won't be able to attend as regular students and to say that this is an open institution.... Again, if you've never seen university as something that's accessible to you, something that's welcoming to you, something that you could ever achieve, and this was a way to say, 'hey, this is a public institution'. And so come and be a part of these activities. (Professor Stuart)

There's something about access to what the institution of the university represents that people wanted. It's got cultural capital and [the students] wanted some of that. [The program] is meant to be a perforation of the institution. You know, let some of its hot air out and let some fresh air in. (Professor McDonald)

It was clear that this “perforation of the institution” led students to gain greater access to the university space.

*iii) Access to Public Space*

Overwhelmingly, students indicated that their involvement in a free humanities program acted as a portal towards accessing public space in a more frequent and meaningful way. Groen and Hyland-Russell (2010a) saw the students in their study experiencing this in many ways:

[The students] also typically had never visited a live performance, a library, or an art gallery. In addition to the financial constraints, the more restrictive barriers were the invisible ones which led students to believe that they had no legitimate right to access cultural venues like the theatre or gallery. When the students visited such cultural spaces during their courses, and experienced not only ideas but practices of inhabiting those spaces, they began to feel legitimate as people and as citizens. (p. 84)

Janet's story is a poignant experience in which a free humanities program had a significant impact on her access of public space. Her diagnosis with Multiple Sclerosis changed her life and limited her access of public space for twelve years. She recalled, “I didn't allow my heart or my soul to go public”. I will let her words describe her journey in reclaiming public space, as well as the place that the program played within it:

‘Cause I went right into hiding when I got in this wheelchair. Because everything changed. I couldn't work, I couldn't live where I wanted to live, I couldn't drive a

car anymore, I had no money whatsoever, someone had to wipe my ass. Like it just went on and on. It was so frickin' hard. I had a lot of trouble dealing with that.[...] During that 12 years, a long time. There was a time, several years in there, where I hardly got out of bed. I got out of bed once or twice a week. The rest of the time I stayed in bed. [...] See then I started having panic attacks too, being in bed so long. So I'd have panic attacks, have to go the hospital with them they were so bad. So that's when I got the psychiatrist. I was a bit suicidal. I even got that book "Final Exit"...I just was tired and wanted to get out of this mess.[...] That's why I was seeing a psychiatrist and all this stuff. Now, oh it's still there, I still can't do any of those things, but I'm handling it much better.[...] Something about that course just made me think, 'well, to hell with this MS. You've still got a life, make an effort'. And I did.

For Janet's final project for her free humanities program, she chose to sew a Memory Quilt that was reminiscent of the quilts that people along the Underground Railroad would create and hang on their clotheslines to indicate directions and messages to slaves. She was inspired to create this quilt in part because the church she attends was one of the last stops on the Underground Railroad. She presented it in public during Black History Month. Janet shared:

I spoke at a church with three hundred people three or four weeks ago. I spoke, mind you I used to do things like that before. I was head of a United Way agency and all of this stuff, so I would handle large group meetings and stuff. But that's like fifteen to twenty years ago. And here I am in front of the church [...] and I'm thinking, this is familiar. [...]

Janet summed up her transformational experience by saying, "I used to see kind of this black hole. Now I see a little daylight".

Other students also experienced profound changes in the ways that they accessed public space due to their involvement in a free humanities program. Andrea, a program coordinator, shared the experiences of some of the students:

...[this student] has lived in the same neighbourhood for years, but never really got that involved. And I think by some of the reading and what we were talking about, started paying more attention to what's happening in her neighbourhood and joined her neighbourhood association and got elected as chairperson. She was



like, 'I don't even know what happened! All of a sudden I'm on all these committees and stuff!' Which is pretty cool. [...] And a lot of people's work has kind of taken on new life, the projects that they did. One of our students wrote, this is from the first class, an essay about her, kind of a historical/personal memoir about her neighbourhood[...]. She ended up getting it published in [...] a local humanities journal. And it also got reviewed in the [local newspaper], which was pretty cool! She wasn't expecting this, she's just like 'I want to write this essay'. But it kind of took on life after the course. Same with one of our guys from this year. He wrote about invisible disability and stigma, and got it published in the Brain Injury Association's magazine.

Professor McDonald shared some of the ways he saw students newly accessing public space because of their involvement in a free humanities program:

[...] It's blown my mind in lots of ways what people have gone on to do after the class that they didn't think they could do before. So that could be as simple as a person who's been living in a women's shelter moving into their very first apartment. Or that can be someone who was told they were dumb in high school saying, 'I could be a university student' and signing up. Or it can be completely different. Somebody who has felt the stigma of brain injury writing about that stigma, standing up and saying, 'this isn't fair'. It can be so many kinds of things. People selling artwork they made in the class. Somebody coming to the exhibition and wanting to buy their work. These things are massive. Or a person who is a new Canadian, after we read a bunch of the history of the city saying, 'I know this place from 1840'. You know? That's quite a statement. Or, I'm known by this place. So there's huge impacts that in some ways are easy to measure because those things were not in people's lives before, and in other ways impossible to measure.

Elaine, a program coordinator, shared the story of a woman in the free humanities program she works within, describing how a class field trip enlarged the student's access to new geographical spaces that had meaning for her family:

[This student] never ventures outside of a very small geographical area where she lives. When we were here and we, driving home, I was dropping her off at her place from here, which isn't that far from [here], maybe what, five minutes? We were passing by the school and she said, (gasp) 'that's where my son goes to school! Oh, that's where my son goes to school!' She had never seen it, she'd never been there, she had no idea where it was in relation to her house.

It was clear in the primary and secondary data that involvement in a free

humanities program invited students to reconceptualize their understandings of themselves, their places in society, and ultimately their access to public space.

### 4.3 *Chapter Summary*

This chapter has outlined the findings collected for this study, utilizing both primary and secondary data. It began with contextual information about the students, which demonstrated that, generally speaking, students of free humanities programs had high levels of poverty, experienced marginalization in society, and had previous barriers to education. The relationship between citizenship and free humanities programs within the micro, meso, and macro levels was then discussed. First, people's individual senses of self were strengthened through participation in the programs. This was evident through discussion of increased self-worth and self-esteem, ability to handle a challenge, increased feelings of empowerment, and heightened confidence. Second, meso level interactions were outlined, finding that students experienced reduced isolation, a greater appreciation for societal diversity, positive impacts on family members, and a greater sense of belonging in society. Lastly, the findings were reviewed on people's macro level interactions. Students experienced a greater understanding of the functioning of society through the facilitation of critical thinking in the classroom. They also experienced increased access to the university space and public space in general, accessing these spaces more frequently and confidently than previous to their involvement with a free humanities program. Overall, students, professors, and program coordinators described that student's experienced increased citizenship within their micro, meso, and macro level interactions due to their participation in free humanities programs.

## 5. Discussion

The literature reviewed and discussed in chapter 2 provided the contextual landscape for this study. The intention was to place free humanities programs within larger spatial understandings of exclusion and inclusion in society. The literature review discussed the origins and current iterations of free humanities programs, social exclusion, citizenship as a triad of rights/responsibilities, access, and belonging, participation in public space, and learning and its relationship to public space.

Chapter 4 documented the results from the primary and secondary data, focusing on the multiple levels of relationships between citizenship and free humanities programs in Canada. The results outlined how the free humanities programs affected students' senses of self, social connections, and access to and participation in public space.

Chapter 5, then, will weave these previous chapters together to more explicitly place the results from the primary and secondary data documented in chapter 3 in conversation with the literature outlined in chapter 2. The overarching task of this conversation is to examine free humanities programs as spaces of participation through an exploration of the relationship between citizenship and participation in the programs.

### 5.1 *Increased Citizenship*

The central area that this research intended to explore was the nature of the linkages between citizenship and free humanities programs. To revisit the words of the former program coordinators of Calgary's free humanities program, "the programs are designed to be deeply transformative, moving beyond the traditional vocational training that is the usual fare for low-income people *and* opening a learning space for critical,

reflective thinking and a more engaged citizenship" (Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2010a, p. 31). This study has sought to explore this claim through the voices of the students, professors, and program coordinators of free humanities programs in Canada. Citizenship has been discussed throughout this study in post-national terms, meaning that the boundaries of citizenship were widened beyond the state. Particular attention was paid to the citizenship dimensions of access and belonging in society (Jenson & Papillon, 2000).

The findings in chapter 4 clearly outline that, based on the words of students, program coordinators, and professors, students who have participated in free humanities programs achieve a more engaged citizenship; they experienced an increased sense of belonging and greater access to public space. Utilizing the previous designations of micro, meso, and macro levels, this section will connect the findings to previously discussed relevant literature.

#### *5.1.1 Micro Level Indications*

As was indicated in chapter 4, students experienced an increased sense of self through participation in a free humanities program. Students shared feelings of increased self-worth, realizations of their abilities to handle challenges, greater empowerment, and increased confidence. While it was not the original intention of this study to focus on individual characteristics and micro level changes, it was apparent in the primary and secondary data that these characteristics of an overall strengthened sense of self greatly contributed to students' belonging and participation in wider society.

As was discussed earlier, exclusion can occur both externally and internally (Young, as cited in Fiig, 2011), with internal exclusion involving a person's feelings of inferiority in relation to others in society. It appeared that free humanities program

students' external social exclusion and isolation in society did assist in producing a sense of internalized exclusion, such as a lack of confidence or feeling undeserving to "take up space". This is in line with the social exclusion literature that discusses the mutually reinforcing nature of multi-dimensional exclusions (Cummings & Caragata, 2011). Students described multiple sources of marginalization that compounded to deepen their exclusion in society, highlighting the relational nature of deprivation (Cummings & Caragata, 2011).

Sen (2000) discussed poverty and social exclusion as capabilities failure; the lack of freedom to do certain things in society. A capability failure that many students discussed was their lack of freedom to learn and think. As one student reflected, "most of [the students] had been told, one way or another that thinking was not their job" (Urban, 2005, p. 117). Many students discussed previous negative experiences with formal education that made them feel excluded from this aspect of society. Perhaps the ultimate capability failure, which students of free humanities programs discussed, is the lack of ability to be, to exist. A student indicated this by discussing how she had previously felt that she did not deserve to take up space in society. Janet, another student, poignantly discussed her years of social isolation upon being diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, and her thoughts of suicide. Sen's broader understanding of poverty and social exclusion is in line with the experiences of students in free humanities programs, and provides a more nuanced understanding of what deprivation is.

If social exclusion is capabilities deprivation, then social inclusion is the development of freedoms (Sen, 2000). Participation in a free humanities program appeared to act as a type of facilitator or instigator for some students, as they were invited

to take up space by thinking critically, interacting in classroom dialogue, and networking with a new group of people. The free humanities program provided not only the physical space in which to do this, but also the equally critical mental and emotional space in which students could voice their opinions and have them taken seriously. Students' experiences of marginalization and social exclusion were seen in free humanities programs as sources of unique and untapped knowledge. Again, as Professor McDonald reflected, regarding students of a free humanities program, "you've had experience outside of the centre. So a class that says, 'that's good, we need that!', and sees that as central to learning and knowledge production. It's dignity-making!". Students experienced a learning environment where not only were they seen as capable and deserving, but where their unique experiences were used to facilitate deeper understandings of the world around them.

As was discussed in chapter 2, traditional conceptions of citizenship and the public sphere underestimate, and most times outrightly ignore, the significance a strong sense of self has in peoples' participation in public space (James, as cited in Lister, 1997). While differentiated citizenship has played an important role in making citizenship discussions more inclusive of particular group, cultural, and gender identities, it has not taken this movement far enough. Diversity and varying experiences are present even within these specific communities, and these factors significantly impact participation in society. Students of free humanities programs often reflected on their strengthened individual senses of self after participating in the program as compared to before, saying "I like myself better now" (Urban, 2005, p. 99) and that the course, "helped me realize that I am worthwhile" (Lakehead University Student Testimonial, n.d.). These claims of

individual self-worth and increased self-esteem were necessary first steps for students in their journeys toward increased citizenship and participation in public space.

People need to feel that their voices are worthy in order to participate in public space. Lister (1997) termed this worthiness as ‘agency’ when she discussed citizenship as the expression of agency. She stated, “to act as a citizen requires first a sense of agency, the belief that one *can* act” (Lister, 1997, p. 38). The acquisition of a deeper sense of agency is an introspective journey which many students of free humanities programs engaged in. The experiences described by free humanities students in the primary and secondary data demonstrated the strong linkage between a strong sense of self and macro level public engagement.

It was evident from the findings in chapter 4 that students experienced a process of empowerment through participation in a free humanities program. Again, empowerment can be understood as a process through which people or groups gain greater control over their lives. The primary and secondary data was congruent with Zimmerman’s (1995, as cited in Brown, 2009) conception of the empowerment process in which the first step is people’s acquisition of the belief that they are capable and potentially influential in their environment. In line with Freire’s (1970) conscientization process, discussed in chapter 2, it is evident that critical reflection and dialogue were central elements in the empowerment process that students engaged in throughout the free humanities programs. As one student said, “we learned to ask the questions...it was the first thing in my life that I think has given me power” (Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2010a, p. 51). The program worked as a medium through which students experienced a shift in power that, in turn, positively affected their overall senses of self-worth and

abilities to act as agents in society.

### *5.1.2 Meso Level Indications*

Students discussed how their participation in a free humanities program impacted their relational connections in society. The main themes shared by students, professors, and program coordinators were reduced isolation, impacts on family members, an increased appreciation for societal diversity, and an increased sense of belonging in a place. To varying degrees, these themes were also present in the literature discussed in chapter 2.

Arendt (as cited in Passerin d'Entreves, 1992) focused on the public sphere as the 'space of appearance' where citizens can interact and assert their agency through speech, disclose particular identities, establish relationships, and deliberate about matters of common concern. Similar to Taylor's (1994) politics of recognition, Arendt (as cited in Passerin d'Entreves, 1992) posited:

appearance – something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves – constitutes reality.[...] The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves (p. 146-147).

One can be sure that reality also exists in the parts of oneself that are concealed from others. Yet, the act of appearing publicly, even if only a part of oneself appears, works to ensure ones inclusion and sense of belonging in the public sphere.

To an extent, students experienced the free humanities programs as spaces of appearance. Janet, a student, shared slight surprise that her fellow students wanted to hear what she had to say. This led her to reflect, "I saw that I was not quite as useless as I thought I was. I saw that maybe I could fit into society a little bit better". Professor



McDonald described the classroom as, “a new space of belonging in our city”. Arendt discussed spaces of appearance within the boundaries of the nation state, with the overall purpose understood as a space where citizens would discuss and make collective decisions on matters concerning the common good. Free humanities programs differ from this understanding, as they represented more informal spaces of appearance that found their boundaries outside of the nation state. Arendt (as cited in Passerin d’Entreves, 1992) and Lister (1997) both discussed the strong link between the assertion of individual agency and collective participation. Self-development often occurs in relation with others through collective activities (Lister, 1997), such as participation in a free humanities program.

Students, program coordinators, and professors all discussed the importance of the connections made within the free humanities programs, citing that isolation was reduced and an increased appreciation for societal diversity was attained. While these increased connections were important for the duration of the free humanities program, the sustainability of these relationships was tenuous. Janet mentioned that she had not maintained relationships with classmates beyond the classroom environment. It remained unclear, looking exclusively at the primary and secondary data, if others experienced sustained social networks. This puts into question, then, if the reduced isolation was sustained.

While it is unclear if the relationships developed within the programs were sustainable, students discussed ways that their participation in a free humanities program impacted their relationship with other people in society. Students shared the impacts that their participation in the program had on their family members. Students felt pride that

they were attending university and could share and model this for their children. This is congruent with the literature, as it has been discussed that members of social capital networks, such as the students of free humanities classrooms, can act as agents of influence. Increased power (the status held by attending university) and resources (the library card and access to the campus) are attained through social capital networks, which can be used to influence people peripheral to the networks (Alfred, 2010), such as family members.

An unexpectedly prominent theme within the primary and secondary data was the increased appreciation for societal diversity that the students experienced through participation in a free humanities program. Students discussed that their stereotypes of others in society were reduced through engaging in dialogue with people different from themselves, as well as through the topics of discussion and the contributions of the guest professors. A student shared, “I think it’s opened my eyes a lot. I didn’t realize those particular prejudices. That was an eye-opener” (van Barenveld, 2007, p. 20). This sentiment is in line with the social capital literature, which discussed that bridging social capital, which refers to networks that unite people from diverse backgrounds, has the capability of fostering broader identities (Putnam, 2000). Students of free humanities programs are diverse in culture, age, experiences, and identities. Being united in the ‘space of appearance’ of the free humanities program worked to unite these particular identities and increase knowledge, understanding, and appreciation for diversity.

### *5.1.3 Macro Level Indications*

Students experienced a significant shift in their understandings of, senses of belonging in, and access to public space due to their participation in a free humanities

program. Social exclusion can be understood as a hindrance to fuller citizenship (Jenson & Papillon, 2000). Conceptualizing citizenship as comprised of strengthened access and belonging, it then follows that increased social inclusion and access of public space fosters greater citizenship in society. This increased citizenship was found to be the case for students of free humanities programs. Interview participants used words such as ‘portal’ and ‘seed planter’ to describe the programs, indicating that the programs were used as stepping stones to something new.

Students’ experiences were congruent with the literature on empowerment processes. Empowerment, understood as “moving out of constrained places and isolated spaces, widening the scope for action and multiplying potential sites for engagement” (Cornwall, 2002, p. 2), was experienced by the students. Their ‘sites for engagement’ in society were clearly widened through decreased internal and external exclusion (Young, as cited in Fiig, 2011). Students now viewed public spaces, such as art galleries, museums, schools, and neighbourhoods, as spaces that they deserved to occupy, and they actively did so.

The ways in which free humanities program students accessed public space also corroborated the second and third steps of Zimmerman’s (1995, as cited in Brown, 2009) empowerment process. Students gained knowledge regarding how society works, citing that they had increased understandings of the interconnections and functioning of society in general. A student reflected on the program saying, “it’s helped me to understand how it all works” (Urban, 2005, p. 92). Students went beyond understanding society in an abstract way. Many discussed that, with their increased knowledge of how society functioned, they saw themselves as inhabiting a place within it, suggesting a strengthened

sense of belonging.

Zimmerman's (1995, as cited in Brown, 2009) third step in the empowerment process is that people engage in and alter their environment. This was certainly the case for students of free humanities programs. Some examples included participation on non-profit boards, delivering public presentations, starting a community petition against a casino development, getting an article published in a local journal, and initiating a walking tour. It is clear that students cycled through the empowerment process through their participation in a free humanities program.

The critical aspect of the third point of Zimmerman's empowerment process is not necessarily that people engage in their environment, but that they alter it. The first step in altering one's space is to recognize that something needs to be changed. Free humanities programs do more than foster inclusion in society and access to public space. Through education in the liberal arts tradition, free humanities programs work to provide a space where students can develop the critical capacities to critique society and public space. Increased citizenship is more than increased engagement, but is increased critical engagement.

The place of critical pedagogies in facilitating an empowerment process has been well documented in the literature (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2010). As Giroux (2010) described, "critical pedagogy opens up a space where students should be able to come to terms with their own power as critically engaged citizens" (p. 193). Students of free humanities programs experienced this power shift through the critical thinking that was facilitated in the classroom. Freire (1970) asserted that critical thinking and problem-posing education assisted people in seeing reality as a process that is not static, but

constantly in transformation. Professor McDonald emphasized this point exactly through his example of a class in which he invited the students to discuss and debate the definition of 'history'. He recalled:

So one of the students comes up to me at break time and says, 'I didn't know education could be like this. I thought you were just told the definition and you memorized it. I didn't know you got to debate the definition'. And her eyes are just sparkling with light. Because she's having a say in the definition.

This student was given the opportunity to be an active participant and contributor to the learning environment, which gave her a new understanding of what knowledge was and who was able to produce it.

Shorris (2000) indicated that people living in 'the surround of force' were unable to think critically, and his Clemente Course was created to teach these new skills to people experiencing marginalization. It was apparent that the current iterations of the free humanities programs in Canada understood that the students already held the capacities to think critically, but due to internal and external exclusions they were not invited to engage in this practice frequently or publicly. The professors and program coordinators emphasized that the programs simply further encouraged critical thinking by providing a public space in which to do so. A program coordinator explained:

In [the free humanities program], we work to name and recognize the social, political and economic structures that shape people's lives through the course material as well as in the small group discussions. Every term we have a full class of students who come into the classroom with astute analyses of the ways their own experiences have been shaped by these structures, but who have not always had those analyses taken seriously or shared by others. In [the program], we create the conditions where students are able to express their ideas and deepen their analysis of the world around them (Meredith, 2011, p. 217).

Through participation in a free humanities program, students experienced increased critical engagement in society, signifying increased citizenship.

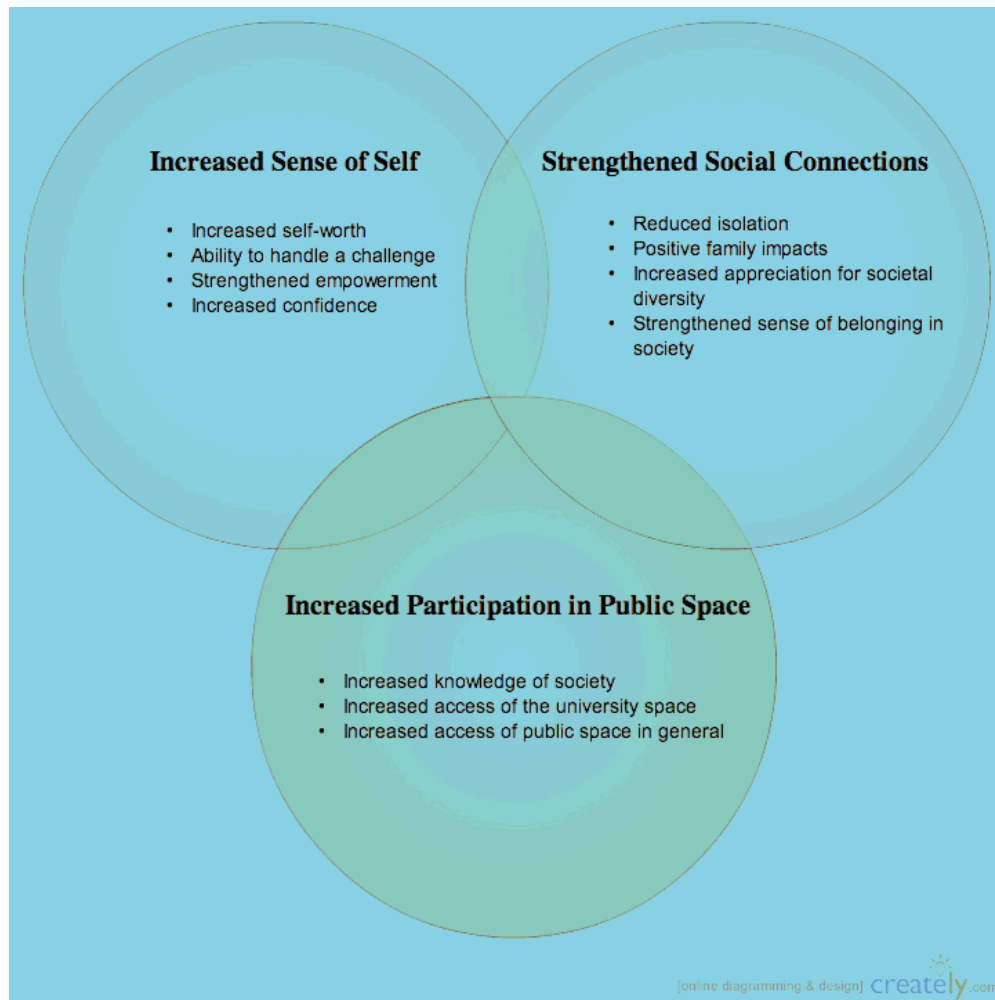
## 5.2 *Interconnections between Micro, Meso, and Macro Levels*

For purposes of clarity and organization, this thesis has utilized the designations of micro, meso, and macro level engagement throughout. In reality, the relationships between the students' micro, meso, and macro levels of interaction are fluid and likely not distinct designations at all. People cannot compartmentalize their lives in such a clean manner; there are many connections between these varying levels of interaction.

The social exclusion literature discusses multiple deprivations as mutually reinforcing (Cummings & Caragata, 2011), pointing to the cumulative effect of exclusion. Based on the primary and secondary data collected for this study, I propose that social inclusion follows the same logic. The strengthening of multiple freedoms and capabilities, to use Sen's (2000) language, leads to mutual reinforcement with the result being greater inclusion and fuller citizenship in society.

Lister (1997) and Zimmerman (1995, as cited in Brown, 2009) alluded to this in their discussions on agency and empowerment respectively. Based on the experiences of free humanities program students, I argue that social inclusion does not follow a strictly linear pattern, but rather is integrated and mutually reinforcing. Each aspect of inclusion that students experienced served to strengthen the aspects in positive and potentially sustaining ways. A visual framework can be found below (Figure 1) to demonstrate the interrelated nature of social inclusion as experienced by students in free humanities programs. Students' senses of self increased through strengthened social connections, access to knowledge, and access to public spaces that previously excluded them. The students experienced a strengthening of their social connections in part because their increased sense of self, and access to public space was increased through participation in

a free humanities program. Students more frequently and meaningfully accessed public space because of their strengthened sense of self and social connections.



### 5.3 Chapter Summary

The intention of this chapter was to join the literature reviewed in chapter 2 in conversation with the findings described in chapter 4. The importance of a person's sense of self and agency in citizenship conversations was discussed, citing that it has traditionally been overlooked in the literature. It was outlined that students in free humanities programs experienced the empowerment process through their participation in

the program. Students' strengthened societal connections were discussed in conversation with Arendt's (as cited in Passerin d'Entreves, 1992) understanding of the importance of 'spaces of appearance' for a strong public sphere. While students reported reduced isolation, it was unclear whether this social capital translated between fellow students beyond the program. Students' increased appreciation for societal diversity was presented in conversation with Putnam's (2000) understanding of bridging social capital. Students' macro level interactions increased in meaningful ways, suggesting that their critical engagement and citizenship in society was increased through participation in a free humanities program. Critical pedagogies and the facilitation of critical thinking were pivotal in this transformational learning experience. Finally, the multi-dimensional nature of social inclusion was discussed as mutually reinforcing.

## **6. Conclusion**

### *6.1 Contributions to the Literature*

This case study has examined the relationship between citizenship and free humanities programs in Canada. Citizenship literature has focused heavily on rights and responsibilities, moderately on discussions of access and belonging, and casually on the importance of agency and a strong sense of self in engagement in public space. The literature on differentiated citizenship has helped to bring needed attention to the recognition of group identity and difference (Young, 1989, as cited in Higgins, 1999). However, this conversation has not gone far enough in including and acknowledging individual experiences of negative self-perception and internalized exclusion that significantly affect agency and the empowerment to act in public spaces. The primary and secondary data discussed in this thesis has aided in demonstrating the rightful place that



access, belonging, and agency have in inclusive conversations on citizenship and the public sphere.

A gap that has been identified (Jones & Gaventa, 2002; Lister, 2007; Nordberg, 2006) is the lack of empirical work featured in the citizenship literature. Lister (2007) discussed that citizenship conversations would contain more depth if they also featured, “the cultural, social, and political practices that constitute lived citizenship for different groups of citizens in different national and spatial contexts” (p. 58). As is evident from this thesis, non-academic voices that are generally excluded from the citizenship literature provide rich contributions to the field through thoughtful reflection and discussion based on lived experiences of citizenship’s inclusions and exclusions. This thesis has worked towards helping to fill this gap in the literature.

This study has also sought to contribute to the relatively small literature body on free humanities programs in Canada. Through conversations with various program coordinators, it became evident that most of the programs struggle financially. They are often seen as peripheral to the university, making their existence precarious. This study has demonstrated how the programs contribute positively to the lives of the students, their families, the university, and society in general. The results from this thesis could potentially be utilized by new and existing free humanities programs in activities such as applying for funding or discussing the impacts of the programs. Therefore, this study has also contributed to the free humanities program literature.

## 6.2 *Limitations*

As is the case with any research project, this thesis process had limitations. The main inhibitive factor in the research process proved to be the short time period within

which it was conducted. This affected the research in a number of ways. First, the research did not employ participatory methods in the design or implementation of the study, which would have strengthened the project as a whole. Second, the reflexivity of the researcher was limited due to the time constraints. More time would have allowed deeper reflexivity to occur and may have affected the research. Third, the depth of the analysis and discussion was limited due to the time period. Particular lenses would have positively added to the analysis, such as a critical race perspective, for example. Lastly, the sample for the project was affected by the time period, as it would have been preferential to interview students from a wider cross-section of free humanities programs. The triangulation of primary and secondary data sources was used to mitigate this limitation.

In the spirit of transparency, it must also be noted that the researcher approached the research question with the hunch that free humanities programs did have a positive relationship with citizenship. This hunch, or hypotheses, as some would term it, was generated from personal exposure to the programs, as well as immersion in the existing literature on free humanities programs. The literature often referred to a link between citizenship and free humanities programs (Gervasoni, Smith & Howard, 2010; Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2007 & 2010a; Radical Humanities, n.d.; Shorris, 2000). This study intended to explore that potential link and discuss it explicitly through a triangulation of primary and secondary sources.

### *6.3 Implications for Research and Action*

This thesis has indicated that free humanities programs in Canada facilitate greater social inclusion and fuller citizenship for their students. Due to the constrained

time period of this project, the factors that contributed to these important findings could not be explored in appropriate depth. The primary and secondary data made some intriguing indications towards why free humanities programs facilitated fuller citizenship that deserve attention in future research endeavours.

Unique features of free humanities programs that provide interesting fodder for further research are their opposition to vocational training and their resistance to monetizing the university experience for free humanities program students. Andrea, a program coordinator, referred to this simply as “a different way of doing university”. The program coordinators of free humanities programs were in vocal opposition to vocational training as a method of alleviating poverty and increasing social inclusion, as is the customary direction of government interventions. Strong emotions and bold words were used when vocational training models were discussed. Safia, a program coordinator, asserted, “we’re not about vocational training at all. [...] We would stand in complete opposition to anything about vocational training”. Not only does this sentiment resist the instrumentalist idea of education that programs for people on low incomes often adopt, but it also resists the neo-liberal context that the university currently operates within. Education in the humanities is offered within free humanities programs in order to facilitate critical thinking and transformational learning experiences.

The programs also represent a “different way of doing university” due to the lack of economic transactions present in the relationship between the students and their learning environments. Students named the cost-free aspect as a basic accessibility issue for their participation in the programs. Beyond accessibility, program coordinators discussed the significance of a non-monetized learning environment within Canada’s

current university context:

As Canadian universities and colleges are undergoing major reorganization to sustain longstanding humanities and liberal arts programs, how knowledge is being reordered is significant. To what ‘degree’ are we generalists and experts on knowledge? By valuing both credit and non-credit knowledge, we call into question the practice of knowledge ‘currency’.[...] If degree granting institutions are struggling to demonstrate their value and importance in economic/capitalistic terms, we are committed to demonstrating the value and importance of knowledge in NON-economic terms. This is not vocational training. The ‘take-away’ message that the knowledge of humanities underscores is how we can ‘give back’ and create more meaning and knowledge through a better sense of ourselves (Meredith, 2011, p. 221).

It appears that free humanities programs not only intend to provide transformational learning experiences for their students, but also attempt to provide a model that demonstrates a different type of university space. As Giroux (2010) suggests, “universities and colleges have been largely abandoned as democratic public spheres dedicated to providing a public service” (p. 186). In theory and practice, free humanities programs actively resist this trend. The factors within the free humanities programs that facilitated increased citizenship, as well as the implications that the programs have on the university space, deserve further attention and research.

#### 6.4 *Conclusion*

This thesis has explored the relationship between citizenship and free humanities programs in Canada. The voices of students, professors, and program coordinators of free humanities programs were put in conversation with the literature bodies on social exclusion, citizenship, public space, and education’s role in accessing public space. The findings from the primary and secondary data illuminated that social inclusion is mutually reinforcing, with the strengthening of micro, meso, and macro level interactions leading to fuller citizenship in society. The experiences of the students of free humanities

programs in Canada demonstrated that citizenship and inclusion in public space are comprised of more than rights and responsibilities. Individual self-worth, strengthened societal connections, and critical engagement in public space are also essential elements of a more engaged citizenship. Free humanities programs take seriously the inclusionary potential of citizenship by facilitating an educational environment that encourages the students to participate in public spaces as critically engaged and empowered agents.

## Appendix 1

### WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Spaces of Increased Citizenship? A Case Study of Free Humanities Programs in Canada

Principal Investigator: Jessica Klassen, Master of Social Work Student, Wilfrid Laurier University

Project Supervisor: Lea Caragata, Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this case study is to explore the relationship between citizenship (people's sense of belonging and participation in their community and wider society) and Free Humanities programs in Canada. This study will examine existing literature on Free Humanities programs, as well as include the voices of professors, program coordinators, and past students.

#### **INFORMATION**

You are asked to participate in a one hour interview about your understandings of citizenship in relation to Free Humanities programs. You were asked to participate because of your involvement with a Free Humanities program. This interview will be set up through email or telephone correspondence to choose a convenient location and time for you. With your permission, this interview will be recorded and the principal investigator will make a transcription of the recording. If clarification is needed, you may be asked to review part or all of the transcript.

The interview with you will take approximately 1 hour and will occur in February or March 2013. With your permission, there is a possibility that you may also be contacted to review part or all of the interview transcript if the investigator needs clarification. This would take a maximum of 1 hour.

#### **RISKS**

Risks for this study are minimal. These include the slight social risk that you could be identified through references made in the interview, despite the best efforts of the primary investigator to remove all identifying information. There are also minimal emotional risks as difficult personal information may be revealed. You may feel distress or regret over revelation of such information. You may choose to skip questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. All efforts will be made to reduce these risks.

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participant's initials

**BENEFITS**

The benefits of this research include the provision of data in creating a stronger literature body around Free Humanities programs in Canada. In addition, you will be provided with an opportunity to share your reflections and opinions, which may provide an enjoyable and valuable opportunity.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information you provide will remain confidential. Your data will have pseudonym (a fictitious name) associated with it and all identifying information will be removed from the data. Only the principal investigator (Jessica Klassen) will have access to the data. The interviews will be taped and transcribed. All personal and identifying data will be removed from the transcript. Only the principal investigator will hear the tape and it will be erased after 12 months. The electronic data will be stored in a password protected computer. The raw transcribed data will be stored in the principal investigator's office. The data will be destroyed after seven years.

The research will be written into a thesis document, as well as potentially published in academic journals and newsletters. All identifying information will be removed from publications. Quotations will be utilized from the transcribed interviews. All efforts will be made to remove identifying information in the use of quotations.

**COMPENSATION**

For participating in this study, you (students of Free Humanities programs) will receive a \$5 Tim Horton's gift card as a small token of appreciation for your participation.

**CONTACT**

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study) you may contact the researcher, Jessica Klassen, at [jesslynneklassen@gmail.com](mailto:jesslynneklassen@gmail.com). This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board (REB tracking number 3492). If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 4994 or [rbasso@wlu.ca](mailto:rbasso@wlu.ca).

**PARTICIPATION**

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study, every attempt will be made to remove your data from the study, and have it destroyed. You have the right to omit any question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

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participant's initials

**FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION**

You will be provided with an executive summary of the final study by January 1, 2014. If you wish to receive the entire final study, you may contact the principal investigator at jesslynneklassen@gmail.com. The findings will be written into a final thesis document, as well as potentially published in academic journals.

**CONSENT**

I have read and understand the above information.

A. I agree to participate in this study. This includes participating in the interview and potentially reviewing some aspect of the interview at a later date if clarification is needed.

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

B. I agree to the use of quotations from my interview.

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

I have received a copy of this form (please check) \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix 2 – Recruitment Letter for Students

Hello!

My name is Jess Klassen and I am studying Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University in Kitchener/Waterloo. I am writing a thesis paper on free university humanities programs and would like to ask you some questions about your experience with this program. I am specifically interested in **how your involvement in the free humanities program has affected the way that you interact with and participate in society**. Has the program changed your feelings of belonging in society? How?

I am looking to do **interviews with students from free humanities programs**. The interview will be **audio recorded**. It will last for **about one hour**. I will provide you with a **\$5 Tim Horton's gift card** as a small token of appreciation for your involvement with this project.

My thesis project has been approved by the Research Ethics Board at Wilfrid Laurier University (REB #3492). My thesis advisor is Dr. Lea Caragata. If needed, she can be reached at [lcaragata@wlu.ca](mailto:lcaragata@wlu.ca) or 519-884-1970 ext. 5219.

Thank you for thinking about participating in an interview. I would really like to hear what you have to say! **If you want to participate in an interview, please email me at [email address]** and we can arrange a time and place that works for you.

Thank you,

Jess Klassen  
[Email address]

### Appendix 3 - Interview Guide for Students

1. Please tell me about your involvement with the Free Humanities program.
2. Do you feel that your participation in the Free Humanities program changed you in any way? How?
3. What are your reflections on this passage that was written about Free Humanities programs? (Give interview participant a written copy of the quote):
  - a. "The programs are designed to be deeply transformative, moving beyond the traditional vocational training that is the usual fare for low-income people *and* opening a learning space for critical, reflective thinking and a more engaged citizenship" (Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2010, p. 31).
  - b. Does this statement reflect your experience with the Free Humanities Program? Please explain. Can you specifically reflect on the 'more engaged citizenship' part?
4. How do you view yourself in relation to the larger community?
5. Has your participation in a Free Humanities program changed the way you relate to your community? How?
  - a. Prompts: Can you give me some examples? What was your involvement with the community before you participated in the Free Humanities program?

#### **Appendix 4 - Interview Guide for Professors and Program Coordinators**

1. Please tell me about the length and nature of your involvement with the Free Humanities program.
2. What do you see as the main goals of the program?
3. In your view, does the program impact the students? How?
4. What are your reflections on this passage that was written by coordinators of a Free Humanities programs? (Give interview participant a written copy of the quote):
  - a. "The programs are designed to be deeply transformative, moving beyond the traditional vocational training that is the usual fare for low-income people *and* opening a learning space for critical, reflective thinking and a more engaged citizenship" (Groen & Hyland-Russell, 2010, p. 31).
  - b. Does this statement reflect your experience with the Free Humanities Program? Please explain. Can you specifically reflect on the 'more engaged citizenship' part?
5. In your view, what are students' perceptions of their place in relation to the larger community? Do students' perceptions change through their involvement in the Free Humanities program? How?

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