



LiA Project Report

Deliverable 2
Amelia Hui

Introduction

My LiA explored how art, culture, and identity intersect in urban spaces, with Toronto as the central lens. It unfolded through three components: a photography exhibit, a website, and a documentary. While rooted in academic inquiry, the project was also deeply personal: it was shaped by my family's migration from Hong Kong to Toronto and my own reflections as a second-generation immigrant. Through this process, I not only deepened my understanding of the city's cultural diversity but also found new ways to merge my intellectual curiosity with my passion for art and storytelling. The main leadership themes I will explore in this reflection are 1) Emotional Intelligence, 2) Creative Ideation, and 3) Communication and Influencing.

Challenges

Last summer, I explored how art was used as a vehicle for urban change. This summer, I hoped to implement this finding to foster discussion about how art, culture, and politics are intrinsically tied, going beyond the example of Hong Kong; drawing from my own experiences as a second-generation immigrant, I aimed to encourage students and the broader immigrant community in Toronto to explore one's cultural identity through various artistic mediums. By interviewing immigrants in the Toronto region, I planned to create a long lasting impact by starting a discussion regarding the importance of preserving culture as part of one's identity.

My "Why" stemmed from the notion of immigrants having a connection to some kind of "motherland" – for me, that was Hong Kong. I found my experience reconnecting with my roots to be a fascinating exercise in re-embracing heritage, and I wanted to hear about and document what others thought about their own relationships with their home country (whether they considered it to be Canada, or elsewhere). The community I engaged with was primarily youth in Downtown Toronto, often second-generation immigrants or those brought to Toronto for their studies. Because this area was the most conducive for my interviews, I mostly focused on pockets I knew would have the most diverse experiences, including Chinatown, Kensington Market, the UofT campus, the AGO, and surrounding streets.

I had two primary challenges. First, regarding logistics, the several components of my LiA made me feel scattered and overwhelmed at times. I often had to reconsider what my project was truly trying to tackle, and recenter myself – which sometimes made it seem as if I were starting at square one over and over again. Second, during the interviewing process, some of the participants had grown up in Toronto their entire lives and had not truly thought about their relationship to their motherland. This proved to be difficult to navigate in conversation, as most of my questions were centered around introspection on culture and heritage. The initial courage it took to approach utter strangers on the street was also a hurdle, as I knew this was a topic some individuals may not have felt comfortable discussing with a stranger. I faced multiple "no"s and "sorry, not right now"s – but I am nonetheless grateful for the polite rejections that allowed me to move on without overthinking the interactions.

Leadership Skills Applied and Developed

The leadership skills I applied include communication, problem-solving, and teamwork. I had to reevaluate how I thought about different forms of communication beyond the conventional; by turning to visual communication through video and audio rather than writing, I was able to train my skills through the making of my documentary. I practiced problem-solving through the multitude of logistical issues I came across – including juggling my internship with the workload for the LiA. Teamwork skills were further trained through collaborating with the Hart House Art Committee on the planning, installation, and overall state of my exhibit.

Regarding cultural humility, I was able to get over my own cultural biases through the interviews, where I spoke with individuals with various different backgrounds. The interviews I conducted primarily consisted of me asking a few prompting questions, and the interviewees sharing their stories and experiences with immigration, the notion of home, and their culture. For example, in one of the interviews, an individual shared their experiences moving from country to country after witnessing a civil war; I practiced empathy, active listening, and self-awareness by letting them finish their part of the story, and respecting their boundaries when they did not want to share further about certain topics.

Ethical Considerations

The only ethical dilemma or consideration that arose during my project was the issue of consent during the interviews. This was easily mitigated by me asking the participant if they wanted to be featured in the documentary, or if they'd rather stay anonymous. It was also easier to simply ask if they would consent to the voice recording being published, rather than their face or name being tied to it.

Collaboration and Team Dynamics

Most of my project relied on interacting with strangers or people I wasn't entirely familiar with. I think the biggest lesson I learned was to always approach the collaboration with kindness and patience, to learn from others, and show respect for their opinion – even if I might disagree.

Conclusion

Overall, I think this LiA project was a good exercise in patience, perseverance, and creative thinking. Although I faced frustration during the REB approval process and the ideation of my documentary, I'm glad I was able to push through and gain the confidence I needed to finish something that was both deeply personal and community-oriented.