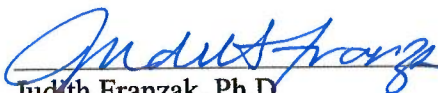# GETTING THOSE STORIES TOLD; UTILIZING SOCIAL, COMMUNITY AND ARTIFACTUAL LITERACIES TO SHARE LOCAL BLACK HISTORICAL STORIES

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Getting Those Stories Told; Utilizing Social, Community and Artifactual Literacies to

Share Local Black Historical Stories

By

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Abstract

This participatory action research documented ways that historical stories of the Black community were shared in the larger Berlin, MD. community. This act of community literacy was grounded in the belief that literary encompasses many more practices than just reading and writing. These literacy practices are social practices, intertwined with people's cultural identity, sense of themselves and their world view and knowledge. The group tasked with sharing these stories was made up of Black community elders, along with museum staff and volunteers of the Taylor House Museum, myself included. With the knowledge that dialogue is key to expanding literacy practices, we worked collaboratively to create exhibits in the museum as well as sharing stories in other locations that the participants deemed appropriate. Data collected included meeting minutes, individual interviews transcripts with committee members as well as museum and event visitors. Multimodal data included artifacts, images, and video from the exhibits and events, as well as photographs taken by participants documenting their favorite parts of exhibits and events where the stories were told. Analysis of the data found that participants made meaning with artifacts and narratives by collectively discussing ownership of artifacts and information. They had gifts that they were willing to share with the group in the collaborative actions of sharing local Black historical stories. Participants had connecting networks they utilized to design museum exhibits, and they sought a variety of opportunities to ensure on-going access to local Black historical stories.

Keywords: Community partnerships, Black historical stories, Museum studies, Literacy as a social practice, Community literacy

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On the main street of Berlin, Maryland a small town in the Mid-Atlantic region,

sits a house dating from the 1830s. Dark green shutters highlight white clapboard siding.

The front porch faces Main Street to the east, while double porches on the south side

open onto a large lawn shaded by mature sycamore and oak trees. Period furniture,

donated by local families, fill several rooms. There are also three rooms of gallery space

filled with artifacts and photographs illustrating aspects of life in Berlin from the 1830s to

the 1990s. Images of the house are presented in Figure 1through 5. This house is called

The Taylor House Museum. I have been a volunteer at the museum for 10 years, and

currently serve as the president of the museum, which is a volunteer position. The Taylor

House Museum operates as both a historic house and local history museum, claiming to

tell the stories of Berlin. Stories are powerful, the act of sharing stories encourages

humans to remember, rework and "reflect back upon ourselves" (Bergey & Quinney,

2005, p. 5). The stories we tell reflect "the spiritual life of the citizens of the community,

past, present, and future" (Primus as cited in Gates, 1989, p. 10). The act of telling stories

is a literacy practice, as a way of sharing experiences (Heath & Street, 2008, Pahl &

Rowsell, 2011).

Figure 1 and 2

The Taylor House Museum

Figure 3 and 4

The Taylor House Museum Interior

Figure 5

The Taylor House Museum Gallery

The museum is set up as a recreated 1830s home interior, so visitors to The

Taylor House Museum often ask if enslaved people lived in the house. While the

museum does have documentation stating that at least two enslaved people lived on the

property-a woman named Charlotte and a young boy whose name was not recorded-if

you were to visit the museum prior to two years ago, the only displayed information

mentioning Black Americans came from two small plastic frames sitting on tables in the

recreated office of the 1830s homeowner. Those small plastic frames held photocopies of

advertisements for a monetary reward for the return of two runaway slaves from a local

paper in the 1850s. There was no accompanying information with the frames, just the

advertisements themselves. Museum tour guides did not explain why the museum chose

to display the advertisements, and I do not know the reason for the display. No description of any discernable connection between the house and the advertisements was presented. There was no mention at all of Charlotte and the young boy. This failure to fully contextualize the story of all the humans living on the property perpetuated the image of historic houses as tangible examples of systemic racist policies and actions. These policies led to concentrated wealth of the white population through the forced unpaid labor of the enslaved Black population (Kendi, 2019, Modlin et al., 2011) As I tell visitors when they visit the museum today, the only reason that the woman of the house could sit and drink tea in the parlor was because unpaid enslaved workers were cleaning and cooking in other parts of the house and property. Although the runaway slave advertisements have been removed from the museum display space, the museum continues to grapple with the best way to respectfully present the lives of the enslaved humans living in the house during the 1830s.

The museum's display of runaway slave advertisements provided an example of artifactual literacies (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011). Artifactual literacies are defined as "a focus on objects, and the stories attached to them, with an understanding of how different stories have different purchase in particular location" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011, p. 129). If the museum had chosen to display the advertisements along with more information about the lives of enslaved people living in the area at the time, then the story attached to the artifact would have a specific purpose; that is, to share a more complete story of the house and its time period. Just having the frames sitting in the homeowner's office with no explanation left it up to the visitor to fill in the empty space with their own information.

Displayed as they were, the runaway slave advertisements told a simplistic and oppressive version of a larger complex history of the Black community in Berlin where, prior to the Civil War, several communities of free blacks existed in close proximity with enslaved people from local farms. Many members of these Black communities, such as Reverend Charles Tindley (1851-1933) and Isaiah Fassett (1844-1946), went on play a role in the larger arena of American history. Isaiah Fassett was an enslaved man born east of Berlin, who was manumitted to fight in the Union Army during the Civil War. He returned home a hero, and lived to be 104, one of the nation's oldest Civil War veterans. Reverend Charles Tindley was born in Berlin in 1851 to an enslaved father and free mother. He became a Methodist minister and gospel music composer. He wrote many church hymns, including "I'll Overcome Someday" which became the civil rights anthem, "We Shall Overcome". Four years ago, the museum created an exhibit highlighting Isaiah Fassett but prior to that stories of Black community members of Berlin had not been exhibited on a permanent basis at the Taylor House Museum. In the recent past there have been some opportunities for sharing Black historical stories in Berlin, but they often didn't involve Black community members in the presentations of the stories. This action research focused primarily on sharing and understanding those stories at the Taylor House Museum although some of the actions described in this study expanded beyond the museum.

Why Black Historical Stories Must Be Told: Problem of Practice

Museums function as "interpreters of culture" (Hein,1998, p. 9). They are seen as places that house the most important artifacts and stories of cultures and communities. But those artifacts and stories are often chosen by the cultural and community groups

with the most power (Trofenko, 2006). In order to survive and thrive, museums must

form connections with the surrounding communities (Vagnone & Ryan, 2016, Simon,

2010). Small local museums such as the Taylor House Museum depend on support from

individuals and businesses located in the community. That support can be bolstered and

sustained by creating collaborative projects that welcome sustained partnerships (Carson,

2008). These projects and partnerships have played a part in the evolution of museum

consciousness as museums have recognized their failure to represent equity in their

exhibits and programing (King, 2006). They must provide collaborative opportunities for

people to tell their own stories of their lived experiences, stories that convey meaning to

their community and culture, stories that use their own words (Simon, 2010). When

meaning is conveyed through museums, they become a "special place of gathering and

sharing" (Morrissey, 2002, p. 299). It is imperative that all visitors feel welcome, and

they see the museum as an equitable and inclusive space, a place that welcomes

community partnerships.

Although Black Americans played a significant role in building the foundations of

the United States, most of their contributions have been left out of local, regional, and

national history (Hannah-Jones, 2021). In the recent past, the United States has been

grappling with the truth of our racial history. A racial reckoning sparked by the killing of

George Floyd and subsequent protests led by the Black Lives Matter movement have

brought racial and social justice issues to the forefront of our national conversation

(Labby, 2020). Voices of Black Americans such as Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) and Ibram

Kendi (2019) have provided first person narratives of the contemporary Black experience

in the United States.

At times it can be hard to bring this national conversation to a local level. How can an individual begin to undo deep-seated systemic racism? But it is precisely at the local individual level that positive change can take place, in the everyday actions of people who know each other. Change on a local level can be more manageable and possible. The idea of local change surfaced during the research for my pilot project, where I asked Black community members in Berlin to share stories of their lived experiences. They did not just want to share their stories with me, the community members wanted their stories told all over Berlin. Their desire for greater access to their stories was the impetus for this research study. Conversations like these represent potentially hundreds of respectful listening opportunities on local levels that can then be translated into regional and national change.

One way to engage in respectful listening opportunities is to record oral histories. Oral histories provide personal connections to history. Many, many studies have documented the benefits of gathering oral histories (Black & Reynolds, 2020; Carter & Conrad, 2012; Jolliffe, et al., 2016; Rose, 2013; Trimble et al., 2020). Several of these studies highlighted the need to listen to members of historically under-resourced communities (Rose, 2013; Trimble et al., 2020). Stories provide opportunities to tell others about ourselves, construct our identity and find meaning in our lives (Berger & Quinney, 2005). In the Black community, stories have been used as socialization for the next generation (Ellison, & Solomon, 2019). Family and community elders pass on their wisdom and life experiences through stories that often serve as counter-stories to how Black Americas have been portrayed in American history (Ellison, & Solomon, 2019).

Currently, there exists a dearth of research related to museums working in equal partnership with communities to both preserve and share Black history (Love, 2000; Smith, 2011; Trimble et al., 2020; Winn, 2012). That research gap denotes lost opportunities for documenting the creation of communal experiences within specific communities. It is possible they have been happening, but not many research studies focus on these experiences. Sharing more complete and inclusive local histories allows community members to identify with and build empathy for each other (Coogan, 2006). A shared understanding builds a foundation for community problem solving, which in turn provides a framework for larger groups of stakeholders facing national issues. This dissertation is the action of the partnership with participants to share local historical stories.

My Connection to this Research

Personal stories present a dynamic way to share history. In the hands of a good storyteller, even the most mundane information becomes a compelling story. I grew up in Berlin surrounded by storytellers. As a child I sat at dinner tables listening to my grandparents, parents, aunts, and uncles share stories about our family's and our community's history. These stories were informal ways of sharing that history. Through these storytelling sessions, my cousins, my sister, and I learned about many local families, cultural norms, and our own place in the social fabric of a small community. These stories represented a form of literacy practices defined by Barton and Hamilton (1998) as "the social processes which connect people with one another, and they include shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities" (p. 7). The stories were grounded in a specific place illustrating the assertion that "Literacy needs to be

understood locally and historically (both in terms of the histories of individuals and in terms of the histories of the places and the social relationships in which they find themselves)" (Barton & Hamilton p. xiv). My father and grandmother served as unofficial local historians throughout my lifetime, nurturing my interest in the role that stories play in sharing history. That interest led me to volunteer at the Taylor House Museum where I currently serve as president.

My volunteer work at the museum has been informed by my job as the art teacher at the elementary school located within walking distance of the center of Berlin. The elementary school has a diverse population, with white students totaling 51percent of the population, and Black students totaling 26 percent (greatschool.org). Working with Black children and families has given me a more complete understanding of the history and stories of the Black community than I had from listening to the local stories from my own childhood. The stories I heard growing up focused mainly on the experiences of the white community in Berlin, with Black community members playing peripheral roles in those accounts.

My lifelong connections to Berlin meant that I was very emotionally involved with this research topic. This emotional involvement was driven by my work with Black children and families from the local community for 23 years, as well as my years volunteering at the Taylor House Museum, and my own lived experiences as a town resident. As is evident in my own experiences, in a small town, community members can wear many hats simultaneously. These multilayered and emotional connections required me to constantly reflect on my researcher positionality throughout this research process. The self-reflection was not done to make myself the center of the research; quite the

opposite, it was done to ensure the participants remained at the center of the research. This centering of research participants is a cornerstone of Participatory Action Research (Kemmis et al., 2014). Having opportunities for open communicative space emphasized the collective aims "which serve and transcend the self-interests of individual participants" (Kemmis, 2008, p. 127). Discussing biases and viewpoints of both myself and the community members involved in this study provided an opportunity to make this research study stronger by creating a deeper sense of common understanding.

My years teaching at the elementary school provided me with firsthand examples of the racial divide in Berlin. I have seen the toll that the lack of resources takes on a family: more Black families live in older apartment buildings that need repair; most Black families live farther away from the center of town and its resources. While the racial divide still exists in Berlin, in the last two years, Berlin has experienced a surge in discussion and action around diversity and equity. A Black Lives Matter protest march took place in Berlin in July of 2019, with about 100 people in attendance. During recent town elections, mayoral and town council candidates were asked how they would address issues of lack of diversity in town decision making. They were also asked how they would provide more resources to marginalized communities in town. More open discussions have been happening regarding the physical and cultural separations between Blacks and whites in Berlin. The discussions have focused on the creation of more festivals celebrating the Black community of Flower Street, a street that runs through the main Black neighborhood of Berlin. There is also preliminary planning being done for a community center located on Flower Street. Town residents have been seeking ways to

connect with each other to narrow those divides, and to create more opportunity for inclusive events and economic growth.

Discussions have taken place at the same time the Taylor House Museum has been examining the stories we tell of the history of Berlin while acknowledging its own failure to tell a more inclusive and equitable history of the town. If museum visitors must ask us if enslaved humans lived at the Taylor House, then we have not shared the complete story of the house. The museum board has been evaluating the best way to authentically represent diverse local historical stories. The stories that a community tells illustrate the values of that community, and act as community literacy practices (Larson & Moses, 2018).

My experiences both in my school as well as at the museum were the driver of this research. My ontological and epistemological beliefs stemmed from social constructivist and socio-cultural theories as formulated by Moll (1992) and Vygotsky (1978). I value research inquiry as a vehicle for social change, and as a way to leave the world a better place than I found it. If the Taylor House Museum was tasked with sharing the history of Berlin, we must ensure the stories we tell represent the whole history of Berlin. This research study acted on the directive of telling a more inclusive history of Berlin and provided documentation of those actions.

Research Questions

The aim of my research was to document the partnership between the Taylor House Museum and Black community stakeholders as we worked to preserve and present stories that tell an inclusive history of Berlin. These stakeholders included local teachers, historians, museum board members and community activists. Presenting those stories

included designing and implementing museum exhibits, as well exploring ways to share

stories at community events. My study explored the way in which participants, including

museum and community volunteers as well as museum and event visitors, made meaning

from artifacts and life experience shared through these local historical stories.

 The research questions guiding this participatory action research were:

> *What and how is meaning made with artifacts and narratives as part of historical
>
> storytelling that preserves the diverse history of Berlin?
>
> *How can community members collaborate to design and implement museum
>
> exhibits that demonstrate local Black multimodal historical storytelling?
>
> *How does the museum work with the community to ensure on-going access to
>
> local Black historical stories?

Significance of the Study

This study provides an authentic example of a community working together to tell and

share a full and inclusive history in a town that has historically been exclusionary and

segregated. The findings furnish a road map for other small historic house museums and

local museums to engage more stakeholders in the community and present inclusive

historical storytelling.

This research shows researchers and readers from other communities in other places that

change that is possible through focusing on a local lived experience.

Definitions of Key Terms

Ensuring a common understanding of key terms used throughout the dissertation

is important in helping provide an example of community collaboration, this section

presents definitions of those key terms.

Artifact- According to Pahl and Rowsell (2010) artifacts are object that embody people, stories, thoughts, communities, identities, and experiences. An artifact is valued or made by a meaning maker in a particular context (p. 2). For the sake of this research study, meaning making of artifacts is important. Multiple meanings of artifacts can be "articulated through interactions (discourses) with others and through the acquisition and development of a metalanguage around the artifact" (Van Kraayenoord & Paris, 2002, p. 224).

Artifactual Literacies- Artifactual literacy was theorized by researchers Pahl and Rowsell (2010). They defined it as "an approach that combines a focus on objects, and the stories attached to them, with an understanding of how different stories have different purchase in particular locations" (p. 129). This theory provided a framework for approaching and engaging everyday artifacts as potential sites of story, community building and identity performance (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011).

Co-construction- Defined by Flower (2008) as meaning made by: "not merely acquire[ing] knowledge, we make it through the process of inquiry" (p. 16). Hein (1998) situates co-construction in a museum setting, summarizing that visitors bring their lived experience to museums where they co-construct meaning by combining those lived experiences with information as presented by the museum. (p. 147).

Community- The Black feminist scholar Hill-Collins (2010) defines community as a group of people bound together by some common thread. Community could be defined by a physical location, ethnic or racial similarities or common interests. Some communities define themselves, while other communities are defined by people outside the group. Hill-Collins' definition is important to this research with its grounding in the

Black lived experiences. Centering the perceptive of community that informs this

research and the scholarship in Black scholars is important to forward Black voices.

Community Literacy- Flower (2008) defines community literacy as a "rhetorical

practice for inquiry and social change" (p. 16), where knowledge was not only acquired,

but made through the process of inquiry (p. 16) with an intercultural dialogue with others

(p. 19).

Ethical Remembering- Ethical remembering is a term used by McMasters and

Hetherington (20120) as quoted by Black and Reynolds (2020) to acknowledge the

"destructiveness of violence and its destructive legacy" (p. 24). Ethical remembering uses

stories as a vehicle for that acknowledgment, with the purpose of working through

difficult conversations.

Literacy- Literacy as defined by Barton and Hamilton (1998) is "primarily something

people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text" (p. 3). Literacy

as a meaning making activity is bound up in cultural norms, as well as social, economic,

and political factors. The way a person is positioned within these norms and factors,

defines their use and understanding of literacy (Gee, 2015).

Multimodal Artifact- Multimodal artifacts are "infused with meanings and carry traces

of their history with them" (Pahl & Rowsell 2010 p. 5).

Multimodality- Multimodality is the understanding that we express meaning in different

modes, that is, through gesture, visual media, oral media, and writing (Pahl & Rowsell,

2011, p. 130).

Museum- A Museum is a place that houses a collection of artifacts that a person,

community, or culture decides is worth preserving (Hein, 1998). Throughout this research

paper the term museum will be used to represent both the physical place and collection,

as well as the people involved in running museums. In some cases, those are paid staff,

but in many cases, especially in small local museums, they are unpaid volunteers.

Oral History- An oral history is a narrated recording of an individual perspective shared

as a story of the lived experience of people. Oral histories are seen as "a means to transfer

the past to the future through voices of the present" (Charlton et al., 2006, p. xi). They

have the "capacity to transform lives through the simple yet complex experience of

people talking and listening to one another

Social Literacy- Social literacy is the belief that literacy is bound up in human

connections and people's relationships with each other (Street, 1995). A person brings

their own experiences and cultural background in any interaction with literacy. Literacy

is a social practice, intertwined with people's cultural identity, sense of themselves and

their world view and knowledge.

Storytelling- Storytelling is not merely a way "of telling others about ourselves but of

constructing our identities, of finding purpose and meaning in our lives" (Bergey &

Quinney, 2005, p. 5). "In the telling, we remember, we rework, and reimagine the past,

reflect back upon ourselves, and entertain what we have and could become". Carter-

Black (2007) contextualized Black storytelling as a "complex, dynamic, integral

component of the process by which children are socialized into their cultural world" (p.

33).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore how community members collaborated in the act of sharing local Black historical stories by creating museum exhibits and participating in community events, as well as what meaning was made with artifacts and narratives presented as part of the shared stories. To better understand these aspects of social, community and artifactual literacies, it is important to review relevant literature. I begin with an overview of storytelling as a literacy practice. From there I present an examination of Black storytelling since this research study will focus on sharing Black experiences. Next, I highlight literature that examines the authentic partnerships between university researchers and local communities. The power dynamic between universities and communities often favors the university; because this study was participatory action research, understanding this dynamic is needed. I then examine the importance of museums as community literacy resources and the significant role the museum can have in local communities. I conclude by providing literature focusing on museum as a literacy experience including multimodal and artifactual literacies and the role of storytelling and experiential exhibits in sharing information.

Storytelling as a Literacy Practice

As noted in the introduction, literacy practices are defined as "the social processes which connect people with one another, and they include shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities" (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 7). Barton and Hamilton (1998) conducted an ethnographic research study on the uses of reading and writing within a working-class community in Lancaster, England. Part of the data collection

process entailed gathering stories from a variety of participants. Barton and Hamilton analyzed these stories for patterns of literacy practices constructed by both individuals and community members. They found that a person's literacy practices were rooted in their own lived experiences and personal histories. Barton and Hamilton realized the importance of community networks, both in their role as insider researchers and in the lives of the participants. These networks often shared information through storytelling as an "informal learning strategy" (p. 243) that provided support to community members. The connection between storytelling and community networks was important in my research with the partnership between the museum and community stories.

Larson and Moses (2018) exemplified understanding of stories as literacy practices. They worked in partnership with community members in a Black community in Rochester, New York to transform a local corner store into a cornerstone for the community. Their research utilized stories as the "organizing principle [to] reflect how African Americans share and transmit history" (p. xi). Larson and Moses chose to share their research methods, findings, and theoretical framework through stories written by themselves and their research participants. This mirrored the research process where stories were used to share information. They found that "dialogicality served to make sense of how meaning was constructed between and among persons, spaces and times" (p. 31). Discussion through storytelling experiences contextualized experiences in a larger framework of community partnership.

Jolliffe, et al. (2016) and Flower (2008) also investigated storytelling as a literacy practice by studying partnerships between high school students and university students. In both studies the stories themselves formed the literacy practices. These practices were

co-constructed through the interactions of both community members and students. The

stories provided opportunities for intercultural inquiry (Flower, 2008), which situated the

stories as literacy practices, with a focus on social justice. Jolliffe, et al.'s (2016) research

began by gathering oral histories in the Arkansas Delta, where the researchers worked

with high school and college students in recording the lived experiences of the

inhabitants of the Delta. Gathering the stories was seen as a critical step in repairing

"inhabitation amid damaged spaces" (p. ix). Repairing spaces was relevant to the

Arkansas delta with its history of poverty and marginalization of poor whites and Blacks.

The stories themselves served as a starting point for extensive and ongoing

community literacy projects throughout the Delta, providing high school students with

the opportunity to learn about their own community and contribute by contextualizing the

shared stories within local history and culture. Through storytelling, the participants

developed a sense of connectedness that is vital for sustaining rural communities (Jolliffe,

et al., 2016). Stories can provide a sense of self in any location as was evident in a study

by Compton-Lily (2013).

The role that storytelling can play in making human connections and self-worth

was explored in research by Compton-Lilly (2013). The study explored storytelling as a

literacy practice in the life of a young Black man. She recounted the school experiences

of a 17-year-old Black male still in 7th grade because of his low reading ability. Yet

throughout the research study Compton Lilly described the young male's gift for

storytelling; he often related his school experiences with humor and a highly developed

critical eye. While he struggled to read the written word, he took part in several

afterschool programs, and was praised in his church for his singing ability. By most

literacy standards he could be called illiterate, yet his use of storytelling was a successful literacy practice. This study highlighted the need to explore a variety of literacy practices as a means to share experiences and provide a reframing of identity and perceptions of individuals.

Collectively these studies illustrated the power of stories, and how the act of telling stories is equally powerful to the act of listening to them. Larson and Moses (2018) and Jolliffe, et al.'s (2016) studies illustrated how the simple act of sharing stories to a receptive audience can transform communities, while Flower (2008) and Compton-Lily's (2013) work showed that sharing stories can empower individuals. All of these studies provided a framework for me, as the participants and I worked to gather and present local Black historical stories.

The Role of Artifacts in Equitable Historical Storytelling

As described in the previous section, the stories we, as Americans, tell represent our values and beliefs. The same holds true for stories we, as Americans, choose to marginalize and discount. As a result of the killing of George Floyd and the #MeToo movement, the United States has been going through a period of reexamination of our history, both the history we are taught, and the history left untaught

Researchers have been examining how historical information has been presented in places such as university campuses. When analyzing the language on signage at Clemson University, Thomas (2019) saw indications of the purposeful negation of Black American involvement with the building and maintenance of campus facilities. She highlighted several examples of historical markers that glossed over contributions of Black workers who built many of the buildings on campus, including enslaved humans as

well as forced prison laborers. To bring a greater acknowledgement of their contributions to Clemson, Thomas hoped that "as an alternative to owner-centric narratives that naturalize slavery, a new marker could collectivize biography without neglecting the context for the lives of the enslaved" (p. 634). Public historical markers have been symbols of what a culture deems important. They have told the stories of our collective history; therefore, the language used, and the facts shared on them carry weight.

As a researcher, Thomas (2019) explored the literacy choices made by the people creating the narrative of the markers; the signs themselves served as literacy artifacts. By exploring the origins and creators of the signs, Thomas was able to contextualize these artifacts in the ongoing struggle for racial and social justice in this country. Artifactual literacies provided a framework for that contextualization by acknowledging "the lived complexities of communities, providing a methodology for thinking about heritage, time scales, and community spaces in new and empowering ways" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011, p. 130). Thomas' (2010) findings illustrated the importance of bringing more voices, especially Black voices, into the conversation around artifacts and the stories connected to those artifacts and provided an example of how biographical storytelling could be used to piece together fragmented details that characterize much of historical life of Black Americans (p. 626). This study presented a guidepost for my own research by illustrating how historical stories can be reconfigured from their current presentation.

Ethical Remembering Through Oral Histories

As described above, storytelling empowers individuals, creating a sense of worth to the lived experiences of the storyteller. The sense of empowerment is even stronger when the shared stories deal with difficult subjects, such as racisms and oppression.

Stories, conversation, and oral histories have all been used to document the process of

ethical remembering (Black & Reynolds, 2020; Carter &Conrad, 2012; Connors, 2016;

Grobman et al., 2015; Scott, 2019), a concept used by Black and Reynolds (2020) to

describe a framework for reaching across groups in dialogues with difficult subject

matters. Their research documenting the evolution of museum exhibits in Belfast,

Northern Ireland, contextualized divisive local history within the lived experiences of

community members. The museum exhibits focused on a time in Irish and British history

called The Troubles, a period of sectarian violence between Catholic and Protestant Irish

citizens that lasted from the late 1960s until the late 1990s. While the majority of

violence ended in the late 1990s there still existed deep-seeded distrust between some

people on both sides of the conflict.

In an effort to reach across boundaries, the staff of the Ulster Museum in Belfast

began the process of creating exhibits which presented a variety of people's experiences

and viewpoints. Recorded oral histories of people on both sides of the conflict were the

foundation of the exhibits. These recordings allowed museum visitors to hear voices of

the participants describing in their own words their experiences during The Troubles. The

museum sought feedback both from museum visitors and from people who recorded the

oral histories. Seeking this feedback created a climate of mutual respect among the

participants, and these ongoing conversations led to the expansion of the exhibits,

including a traveling component. When the exhibit traveled world-wide, the stories

provided an opportunity for others to share in the experiences of people from Northern

Ireland and illustrated a framework for difficult discussions across divided groups.

What began as a "small scale intervention… developed into something much greater- something that [was] having a direct influence on how the legacy of a violent and divided past can be handled" (pp. 33-34). The museum was able to play a role in engaging its local community in difficult questions about divided loyalties and perceived stereotypes. The project provided a safe space for communities "to explore and discuss" (p. 25). Black and Reynolds use of ethical remembering emphasized "the importance of allowing space and time for passions to be aired in order to acknowledge and understand the full range of political passions which have contributed to past and present struggles" (p. 28). Their research had a profound effect on my own study, providing an example of how the small action of respectful listening to lived experiences of people can grow into something that connects people across divides. Those actions of sharing stories provided examples of the possibility of using community and social literacy to drive social justice change (Black & Reynolds, 2020).

Oral histories provided a powerful, poignant, resource of previously unheard, historical information. Janesick (2015) defines oral histories as "the collection of stories and reminiscences of a person or persons who have first-hand knowledge of any number of experiences" (p. 593). They also have the "capacity to transform lives through the simple yet complex experiences of people talking and listening to one other" (Charlton, Myers, Sharpless, eds. 2006, p. xi). Shopes (2002, cited by Grobman et al., 2015) stated that "by recording the firsthand accounts of an enormous variety of narrators, oral history has, over the past half century, helped democratize the historical record" (p. 2). Oral histories have also often been inextricably tied to place (Carter & Conrad, 2012; Connors, 2016; Scott, 2019). Scott (2019) continued this framework of ethical remembering in

Black communities in the United States. His research also used oral histories as an opportunity for community discussion and ethical remembering. He sought to contextualize the stories of a Black community in rural North Carolina within an emerging research theory known as Black geographies (McKittrick & Woods, 2007). The participants shared their experiences living in an area physically isolated because of racist infrastructure policies. These policies intentionally left out Black communities when allocating funds to pave local roads. Black geographies referenced "particular spatial productions of the African diaspora that take form via narrative and lived experience" (p. 1097), reevaluating the role of place in the experiences of Black Americans all over the United States, specifically in relation to their collective history of forced movement and relocation. Scott's research illustrated the use of Black oral histories to ground life experiences within a particular place, helping to decolonize current geographic practices. These oral histories represented an ethical remembering (Black & Reynolds, 2020) that created a counternarrative of under-resourced Black rural areas. The stories were a way "to critique the ways racial capitalism affects the production of space" (p. 1097). Research findings illustrated "that investigations of particular places or localities benefit from comparatively localized knowledges that are not provided by more impersonal, generalized narratives" (p. 1099). Scott stated that as more stories were told, a greater understanding of the lives in Black communities, and the resulting theory of Black geography, would transform how we understood our collective history. Scott's work had special resonance for my research because of the highway that physically divided white and Black communities in Berlin.

Once stories were told as oral histories, providing community access to them was crucial. Research by Carter and Conrad (2012) explored the way in which archives were "responsible to the principles of ethical representation and reciprocity" (p. 84) as they pertained to the communities who were sharing their oral histories. The research participants were local writers, archivists and a rhetorician who spent time working with Black communities in Texas. They investigated the restrictions that spell out guidelines placed on ownership of oral histories collected during research undertaken by universities. Carter and Conrad found evidence of oral histories that disappeared behind a wall erected by universities under the auspice of protecting participant's identity. In reality, that wall kept community members from accessing documentation of their own local histories. The research findings described the need to form a "network of reciprocity" (p. 86), with the creation of sustainable archives to house oral histories from Black communities that would be accessible to all community members.

Connors (2016) described the process of respectfully listening to voices of frequently marginalized groups of people through oral history projects. He explored a community inquiry project in which undergraduate students collected oral histories of community members in the Arkansas Ozarks. *The Literacy in Ozarks Lives* project was seen as a way to reclaim narratives about literacy (Connors, 2016, p. 443). The students recorded stories from community members, then produced video essays presenting the information gathered from the stories. Findings showed that the process of gathering oral histories and telling their stories empowered both the students who collected the stories, as well as the participants who shared stories of their lived experiences. The students felt

a sense of responsibility to respectfully share the oral histories of the community

members.

This sense of responsibility on behalf of the student researchers was also evident

in the study by Grobman, et al. (2015). Their research chronicled university students who

needed to create a narrative from the original oral history recordings of one participant: a

local community member instrumental in creating a Black history museum in a small

Pennsylvania city. The community member had passed away suddenly before the

students began their work, so the project was fraught with issues of authentic voice and

ownership from the beginning. The students were required to make editorial and

contextual decision without feedback from the original speaker. As the students worked

with the oral history recordings, they grappled with issues of intent and authentic voice.

Another part of this dilemma was the racial make-up of the students. Of the 14

participants, 13 where white and one was multi-racial. The researchers did not fully

explore the impact this may have had on creating the narrative, but it must have had some

bearing on the finished product. The research findings showed that as the students

worked through all these issues, it was in moments of ongoing group conversations

"when the students came together to blend their voices that the narrative was formed" (p.

13). These findings highlighted the importance of on-going reflective conversations with

research participants.

Collectively, research by Black and Reynolds (2020), Scott (2019), Carter and

Conrad (2012), Connors (2016), and Grobman et al., (2015) illustrated the tension

between the researcher and the oral history participants' work in ensuring the findings of

the research stay true to the words and stories shared through oral history storytelling.

These studies also contributed to the emerging body of research using community-based literacy as a vehicle for sustainable social justice in this country.

Black Storytelling

Since the purpose of this research study was to share local Black historical stories, it is important to understand the underpinnings of Black American storytelling. Historically, many Blacks were denied the opportunity to learn to read and write (Gates, 1989). For generations sharing information orally was the main vehicle for passing on historical information (Banks-Wallace, 2002). As a result, storytelling continues to play a large role in Black culture (Carter-Black, 2007). Research by Thomas, (2019) Love, (2000), and Trimble et. al., (2020) illustrated the role historical storytelling has played in building community connections. A common finding from these studies was the participants' and researchers' realization that life experiences are history, and historical stories are individual stories. These studies also showcased the rich lived experiences of Black Americans in the United States. In many cases that rich lived experience is told mainly through oral histories (Grobeman et al., 2015; Love, 2000; Rose, 2013; Scott, 2019; Trimble et al., 2020).

Research has shown that in the Black culture storytelling has been used for generations to pass on traditions and to teach cultural values and socialization (Carter-Black, 2007; Fabius, 2016; Williams 1991):

> The stories that we tell ourselves and our children function to order our
> world, serving to create both a foundation upon which each of us
> constructs our sense of reality and a filter through which we process each
> event that confronts us every day. (Gates, 1989, p. 17)

In many cases the stories have been shared by family members and community elders in

connection with church or schools (Chancey, 2014; Wynter-Hoyte & Boutte, 2018).

Sharing stories within these spaces provided an example of "culture as a verb" (Heath &

Street, 2008). With this theory, culture was not static or fixed but rather "unbounded,

kaleidoscopic and dynamic" (p. 7), constantly moving and changing in order to remain

relevant. Storytelling provided "general guidelines" (Banks-Wallace, 2002, p. 410) for

perpetuating Black culture through the sharing of community norms and history.

Guidelines included actions centered around generativity, socialization, and counter-

storying (Banks-Wallace, 2020; Carter-Black, 2007; Gates, 1989). Providing guidance

for the next generation, socializing them to cultural norms and providing counter stories

to the prevailing narrative of Black Americans were all reflections of culture being

constructed and sustained through action. The stories reiterated what Black Americans

deemed culturally important. Generativity, socialization, and counter storying in Black

culture will be discussed below.

Elders and Generativity

Intergenerational relationships have always played a key role in African American

culture, with family and community elders sharing information with younger people. This

concept of generativity was defined as the "psychosocial goal of providing for the well-

being of the next generation as a legacy of one's self" (Fabius, 2016, p. 427-8). It was the

elders' job to transfer both cultural traditions and tools in order to maintain those

traditions in the African American community. This process of transferring led to

established and renewed self-identity among the elders, where they were seen as "links

between the past and the present" (Fabius, 2016, p 429).   Research by Lachuk (2015),

Rose (2013), and Trimble et al. (2020) also explored the role of storytelling and its connection to generativity.

Lachuk's (2015) study focused on literacy practices in a Black community located in a southern state. One of the major findings of the study was the use of literacy by community elders to facilitate literacy practices and the education of other community members. These literacy practices provided community members with personal power that they were expected to use for community betterment (Lachuk, 2015). The findings in this study were presented in the form of data poems in which the actual words of participants were rearranged into poem form, thus ensured participant's voices were in the forefront of the research.

Black voices were also evident in research by Rose (2013), and Trimble et al. (2020) that focused on intergenerational interviews with Black communities in Pennsylvania and Michigan. Rose's (2013) work took place at Dickinson University and chronicled a multi-year process of gathering oral histories of community members near the University campus. One of the findings of the research highlighted the strong connection created between the participants and university students. During the process of documenting Black community elders' life experiences, the students learned about themselves and their own place in society. At the same time, the elders felt appreciated and respected for their willingness to share personal stories (Rose, 2013). The community elders were able to pass on their life experiences to a younger generation, who then used those experiences to inform their own lived experiences. "This authentic connection and generosity of spirit made the experience a rich and meaningful one" (p. 96).

Trimble et al.'s work focused on oral histories recounted by Black elders living during the 1967 Detroit Rebellion. This intergenerational study provided opportunities for university students to write essays based on the oral histories, as well as opportunities for community elders to write personal narratives of their experiences (Trimble, et al., 2020). Students realized that their "writing and research were connected to real people's lives and their stories" (Trimble, et al., 2020, p. 158). The community elders saw themselves as part of a collective inquiry tasked with recording an important part of American history specific to the Black American experience. Sharing these lived experiences served another purpose in Black storytelling: presenting cultural and racial identities used in socializing members of the Black community.

Socialization and Cultural Identities

In her research on storytelling among middle class mothers and children, Williams (1991) stated that "Black Americans in general attest to the very central role that stories of personal experience have played in their sociocultural experience" (p. 401). Studies by Carter-Black (2007) and Richardson (2002) provided examples of that assertion. Carter-Black (2007) explored the use of storytelling and its impact on social work and found that stories were used to "confront unacceptable behavior" (p. 45) which in turn "fostered healthy racial identity development" (p. 45) as well as an appreciation for the rich heritage of Black American culture and experiences. Williams visited Sunday school classes as well as homes of Black families. Her research findings detailed stories about how school and church socialized children "into fundamentally cultural frame[s] of being, that of literate [selves] who value[d] schooling and literacy" (Williams, 1991, p. 407).

Supporting the findings of Williams' (1991) work was Richardson's (2002) study with Black female literacies. Richardson found that "storytelling remains one of the most powerful language and literacy practices that Black women use to convey their special knowledge" (p. 687). Richardson explored not only the stereotypes of Black women but also how stories can be used to counter those stereotypes. Richardson's research also illustrated another purpose of Black storytelling: to counter-story an existing negative. Counter-storying is described in more detail in the next section.

Counter-storying

The research of Fabius (2016) and Carter-Black (2007) provided examples of the Black American experience being presented in a positive light, through stories of individuals and groups overcoming adversity using their own abilities. This use of counter-storying has been used by Black Americans to bring attention to "the perspectives of marginalized and silenced voices" (Ellison & Solomon, 2019, p. 224) It also stands in "opposition to dominant stories of opposition" (p. 224). In the Black community, stories have been used as "a highly effective medium of teaching African-American children about their legacy, as well as effective ways of thriving in spite of life's adversities" (Fabius, 2016, p. 425). As community members and elders shared stories of their own experiences, they presented examples of individuals overcoming adversity, and striving for a better life (Carter-Black, 2007). These positive stories represented a counterbalance to stories told by whites that focused on deficits of Black Americans (Ellison & Solomon, 2019).

Research by Ellison and Solomon (2019), Chaney (2014), Love (2014), and Wynter-Hoyte and Boutte (2018) all focused on the role of counter-storying in Black

American storytelling. Exploring digital literacy, race, and the digital divide was the basis

for Ellison and Solomon's (2019) research. Through discussions with Black families, the

researchers found that counter-stories had the potential to be foundational tools

connecting teachers, children, and parents, both inside and outside school. Building

connections helped "diminish deficit-thinking about African American populations" (p.

239) and provided for a sense of empowerment for children.

Connection building was the focus of Chaney's (2014) study of economically

disadvantaged Black families. While researching storytelling, she found that

intergenerational connections fostered during storytelling promoted higher self-esteem

and strengthened self-confidence (p. 35). Children received first-hand accounts of Black

history while the elders who shared the stories were honored for their knowledge and

insights. Comparing church and school experiences for middle-class Black children

illustrated the role of counter-storying in both locations (Wynter-Hoyte & Boutte, 2018).

The research findings showed the Black church provided a place where children's voices

were encouraged and honored. The researchers observed those same voices being

marginalized in classroom settings.

Counter storying was also the focus of research by Love (2014). She chronicled

an after-school program that taught Black adolescent students to use hip-hop literacy as a

vehicle for telling stories of their own lived experiences. The students wrote songs and

created storyboards to guide the filming of short movies. These stories "challenged

dominant discourse and w[ere] culturally relevant to their community" (p. 57). For these

students literacies went beyond reading and writing to embrace multimedia that

supported them in controling the story. They used their own life experiences as a counter

story to white dominant discourse. While these studies explored the role of school and church in Black storytelling, the findings of the research could be applied to museums as well.

Authentic Partnerships

Studies focused on authentic partnerships between communities and university researchers were integral to my understanding of the power of respectful, honest, equal collaboration. While they did not take place in a museum setting, they set the standard for my own research practices and positionality and provided a vision for community transformation. Projects beginning with listening have the power to transform communities and push forward social and racial justice initiatives. Research done by Larson and Moses (2018), and Dempsey (2010) are examples of such partnerships.

When university-based researchers come into a community with a research project already in mind, they risk alienating the very people they claim to want to help, as happened with Larson and Moses (2018). Their research evolved from a study of eating habits of a low-income African American neighborhood in a city in upstate New York, to a community partnership that created a community corner store and a neighborhood school, transforming the community in the process. The researchers found that by "collaborating with community in authentic ways, what we learn, and how we learn it, expands in unexpected ways that, in turn, build knowledge that would not have been possible without the collaboration" (Larson & Moses, 2018, p. xi). In the beginning, the researchers approached the community with a project already created. But the community pushed back, questioning their intentions. In their refusal to passively acquiesce to the researchers, the community enacted the "generative, analytic practice" (Tuck & Yang,

2014, p. 817) of saying no, they resisted "the agenda to expand the knowledge territory of the settler colonial nation" (p. 812). The community members were vocal in their initial distrust of the intentions of the university researchers, and their belief that the university was there to tell the community what to do, with little respect for the local knowledge of the community members (Larson & Moses, 2018, p. 24). Their initial refusal sparked open-ended, meaningful discussions around community needs and university intent. As a result of respectful listening to the authentic voices of the community, the researchers and community developed a true partnership.

Dempsey's (2010) research documented a "conflict- filled, deliberative process through which community- based stakeholders shaped the contours of engagement" (p. 367). Thirty-eight participants took part in a planning meeting between university staff and statewide community members, where the university envisioned their role as a coordinator of services for community organizations. Community members did not agree with that vision, arguing "that campus folks were not knowledgeable about their local needs" (p. 12). The ensuing conversations provided opportunities for community members and university staff to openly discuss perceptions of university practices, including IRBs. Community members spent time describing their vision for the university where they "drew on campus community divide to assert greater control over the shaping of the partnership, including opening up space to communicate directly about how these effects efforts served to reproduce existing power relations" (p. 17). Participants wanted the university to remove itself from the process and let the organizations talk, sharing their communal knowledge. Findings of this study highlighted "the role of communication in challenging the power relations that arise in community engagement

efforts" (Dempsey, 2010, p. 23). The university researchers took steps to reorient their community work, including "implementing an informal process of community review for academic forms of research" (p. 22). These conversations provide a framework for transparency and listening to authentic voices in university planning processes.

Collectively these studies illustrated that the foundation for meaningful community research begins with listening to the voices of the community. Rather than dominating the process, researchers must work in partnership with participant communities. These equal conversations provided examples of community literacy, where local knowledge was used to further group goals. As described in the following section, the findings of these studies can be utilized in museum settings as well.

Museum as Literacy Resource within Communities

Museums are places where we store, protect, and display artifacts that we, as a society, deem to be important enough to represent shared values and beliefs. Paradoxically, museums have also been seen as places where voices of authority would catalogue and display artifacts in a manner that is meant to educate passive visitors. We have all been to that kind of museum: full of dusty glass cases, stuffed with boring artifacts only identified by lengthy written labels.

Hopefully, some of us have also been to museums where wonder and discovery are evident, where exhibits are created allowing for exploration and meaningful engagement, where the visitor is respected and encouraged to use their own specific knowledge, as a partner with the museum in co-constructing meaning (Hein, 1998). The changes in museum practice, referred to as New Museology (Mairesse & Desvallées, 2010) have mirrored the expansion of literacy theory and its own inclusion of more

voices, social practice, and lived experiences, referred to by Gee (2015) as New Literacy Studies.

New Literacy Studies is bound up with Barton and Hamilton's (1998) definition of literacy as "primarily something people do; it is an activity, located in the space between thought and text" (p. 3). Literacy as an activity has been bound up in cultural norms as well as social, economic, and political factors (Gee, 2015). The positioning of a person within these norms and factors defines their use and understanding of literacy (Gee, 2015). All of these explanations of literacy carried over into visitor's museum experience. As observed by Brooms (2011):

> When people enter museums, they do not leave their cultures and identities at home, nor do they respond passively to museum displays. They interpret museum exhibitions through their prior experiences and through the culturally learned beliefs, values, and perceptual skills that they gain through membership in multiple communities. As such, museums are symbols and sites for the playing out of social relationships of identity and difference, knowledge and power, and theory and representation." (p.511)

This quote emphasizes the need that current museum visitors have to connect their own life experiences and prior knowledge with museum artifacts, they want to feel empowered by their museum experience.

When a museum is located in a small community, such as the Taylor House Museum, stories and artifacts can carry deeper significance because the opportunity for personal connections with visitors is greater. But to make that connection, the museum must be relevant to the community members. The survival of museums depends on the

communities' perceptions of them. Do community members see museums as welcoming

places that are relevant to their own lives? Or do they view museums as disconnected

from the community they are supposed to serve? To answer these questions museum staff

must interact with the community to help the staff understand what the community

values. Themes such as family, neighborhood, and workplace would attract people from

not only the targeted community groups but could bring in others as well (Brown, 1992).

As Simon (2010) stated: "When people have safe, welcoming places in their local

communities to meet new people, engage with complex ideas, and be creative, they can

make a significant civic and cultural impact" (p. 351). Small local museums have an

opportunity to make these significant impacts on their community. Vagnone and Ryan

(2016) applied these concepts to historic house museums (HHM) in their research. Many

HHMs are located in places with which they no longer have a connection because

neighborhoods have changed since the houses were built. HHMs often acted as guardians

of collections, not members of the community. Vagnone and Ryan held workshops in

HHMs all over the county, meetings with staff and visitors. Together these groups

explored the physical space of the house and reviewed programing of the HHM to

identify opportunities for more meaningful engagement between the space and visitors.

Vagnone and Ryan's research illustrated ways that some HHMs built meaningful,

authentic relationships with the surrounding communities. These relationships provide

opportunities for connecting community and social literacies with museum literacies

including multimodal and artifactual. Museum literacies will be discussed in the

following section.

Museum Literacy

Museum literacy is defined by two interconnected concepts: what a visitor needs to know when entering a museum, and how the museum builds on that visitor knowledge to create equitable opportunities of meaning making with the collections (Stapp, 1992). As explained by Hein (1998), these two concepts interact constantly, with visitors responding to exhibits presented by the museum, while at the same time making their own meaning based on their own lived experiences. Exploration of museum literacy and its grounding in visitor knowledge and museum purpose was the focus of research by Phillips (2005) and Whitty (2017).

Phillips' (2005) study explored indigenous people's voices as a form of museum literacy. The lived experiences of museum visitors influenced how they read objects, as one visitor contextualized an object in a completely different way than another museum visitor. This was especially the case with sacred objects originally created by indigenous people (Phillips, 2005). A major finding was that the literacy experience of a variety of visitors must be considered by the museum. Honoring those visitor experiences created opportunities for the museum to recontextualize exhibits in a more respectful manner (Phillips, 2005).

Whitty (2017) found that families brought their "everyday literacy practices" to the museum, combining them with other literacies in the museum setting. Her research focused on how meaning was "assembled around collection objects" (p. 246) and what museums could do with an understanding of that meaning making process. Whitty found that utilizing various literacies allowed families to make meaning of the artifacts and information displayed. The research findings suggested that museums "consider how

meaning is assembled around collected objects" (p. 246). Literacies such as multimodal and artifactual can be utilized by museums to support engaged visitor meaning making.

Multimodal Literacies

Multimodality is grounded in the understanding that ideas "can be drawn, enacted, modeled or spoken" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010, p. 4). Multimodal literacy is at the heart about choice. Kress and Selander (2011) state: "Choice derives from and rests on the 'interest' of the maker of the sign, who is at the same time the maker of meaning" (p. 267). Their assertions highlight the importance of utilizing many voices and modes to present information both in a museum and in the community. The *making* involved refers "to the very process of engagement, transformations and sign making to explore the world and take part and communicate with others in a certain context" (Kress & Selander, 2011, p. 267). Once the exhibit has been created, the use of choice inherent in multimodal literacies moves from the exhibit creator to the museum visitor.

Museums that utilized a variety of literacies, "verbal, visual, technological, social and critical" (Schwartz, 2008, p. 29), provided choices for the visitor; therefore, deepening engagement. Studies by Claisse, et al. (2018), and Hunner (2011) explored the role of multiliteracy in visitor engagement, while Saal and Gomez's (2020) study highlighted the role of multiliteracy in community presentations.

The work of Claisse et al., (2018) focused on a historical house museum in Sheffield, England which sought to captivate audiences with multiple forms of engagement. The museum created a multi-sensory experience for visitors that used integrated digital technology to share stories about inhabitants of the house across time. Voices, sounds, and smells were utilized to create an immersive environment. The

research findings showed the use of multimodal experiences "encouraged repeated visits

and extended engagement" (Claisse et al., 2018). The use of technology encouraged

visitors to actively explore all rooms of the house and form connections with the

inhabitants' stories.

Hunner's (2011) study explored Historical Environmental Education (HEE), a

pedagogy that uses primary sources at local sites to engage students with history (p. 34).

Students were immersed in experiential learning. For example, rather than reading about

the Depression, the students took part in activities such as washing laundry with a

washboard in a recreated Hooverville home (p. 36). The students used their multiple

senses to explore how people lived in the past, allowing them to gain a more complex

knowledge of history. The findings showed that situating these experiences in local sites

created personal connections with the students. They saw themselves as part of a

community and felt more comfortable working towards solving local community

problems.

Research by Saal and Gomez (2020) focused on using multimodal experiences as

a means for participants to critically view their own community. The participants used

photovoice as the impetus for discussion around solving problems within their

communities. Photovoice is a participatory action research method which provides

participants an opportunity to photograph places and objects that have meaning to them

in the context of their research. In Saal and Gomez's study, participants took photos of

spaces in their own neighborhoods. The multimodal use of photovoice provided an

opportunity for the participants to "dis-compose the narrative and then re-compose it

according to their own discourses and desires" (Schwartz, 2008, p. 31). They had the

agency to comment on their own situation and work for better solutions. The photographs were tangible objects used in that work. Objects, or artifacts, carried emotional weight and became representative of the human lived experience. Photovoice was also used in Whitty's (2017) study. Museum visitors took photographs of their visit which were subsequently used as talking points for a post visit interview. Whitty envisioned using multiliteracies as a tool for visitors to redesign "an exhibition according to their agendas or responding to an issue presented in the exhibition" (p 55). The use of photovoice provided the perfect opportunity to gain visitor feedback for the museum. If the photos were left at the museum and integrated into the exhibit, then the visitor's own voice became part of the exhibit story.

Artifactual Literacies

Artifacts have power, as evident in the way humans hold onto them through time. From Tutankhamun's gold-filled tomb to the mid-century American practice of bronzing baby shoes, humans see artifacts as symbols for our lived experiences, both personal and collectively. Pahl and Rowsell (2011) theorized the study and use of artifactual literacies. They defined the theory as "an approach that combines a focus on objects, and the stories attached to them, with an understanding of how different stories have different purchase in particular locations" (p. 129). They believed that "literacy itself can be found within everyday storytelling" (p. 130). Van Kraayenoord and Paris (2002) echoed this assertion, "it is the richness, power, and emotion of the stories that ties objects to viewers and makes the reading enjoyable" (p. 226). Local museums have opportunities to present artifacts that are relevant to their community, and to build upon the lived experiences of those community members.

Scholarship by Pahl and Rowsell (2010, 2011, 2019) provided a cornerstone of support for my research, with their combined elements of social, community, critical, and artifactual literacies. They discussed ways in which artifactual literacy could be used to build connections between communities and local museums. Pahl and Rowsell (2010) believed that "artifacts mattered to the meaning- drenched process of composition because they create opportunities for interaction and listening, offer insights about everyday life, and provide an understanding of culture, family, and community" (p. vii). This "interaction and listening" was explored in Rowe's (2002) and Winn's (2012) research. Rowe focused on conversations around objects in the St. Louis Science Center. Analysis of conversation transcripts led Rowe to see that artifacts became thinking devices to generate meaning making and had the potential to support multiple interpretations and activities.

Winn's (2012) study chronicled the creation of an exhibit at the Carter G. Woodson African American History Museum. The exhibit consisted of taped oral histories, archival materials, and personal objects used to "capture the memories and stories of the elders" (p. 67). While the main purpose of this research was to explore how oral histories were collected, Winn included information about the personal artifacts donated by community members. These objects held significance for the person donating them, and Winn (2012) described the process of deciding which objects to keep for display. In some instances, Winn disregarded the meaning attached to the object. While objects were "regarded as pristine material embodiments of cultural essences" (p. 73), Winn asserted that it was the curator and exhibit designer who gave these objects

meaning. This seemed a lost opportunity to create an exhibit that synthesized artifacts and lived experiences with both the object donor and the museum visitor.

Pahl (2004) provided an exemplary study that situated the research as a respectful exploration of artifacts and their literacy connection. The research examined "the interplay between artifacts and oft-told narratives within families" (p. 339). Pahl analyzed artifacts of several families in the London area, specifically how the objects were arranged in the home, as well as writings and drawing connected to the artifacts and the family stories associated with the artifacts. The study also explored "the mediative nature of artifacts in connecting communities, affording new forms of talk, engendering critical literacy, and providing spaces for authoring new selves" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010, p. viii). The findings showed artifacts as the driver of narratives that evoked "emotional links to the past" (Pahl, 2004, p. 347). The artifacts acted as catalysts for the narratives which were told repeatedly within the family. The use of artifacts in a museum can play a role in how either stories or information is shared. The exploration of historical consciousness is explored in the next section.

Historical Consciousness in the Context of Museums

The history of humans has often been told from the viewpoint of the group with the most power. In the United States that group historically has been white European males. As a counter to that narrow viewpoint, we have tried to confront racial inequality at various times in our history, as the Civil War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Lives Matter Movement can attest. Through these confrontations, often a better understanding of the lived experiences of more Americans is reached. That understanding then translates into how we present our shared histories. To gain a better understanding of

the use of dominated viewpoints in museums, I must first discuss the concept of white

settler traditions as described by Seawright (2014). Seawright provided a critical

examination of western white culture, and its domination of place, with a discussion of

how white settler traditions have been used to dominate an individual's and a group's

sense of self within a physical location. Seawright stressed the need to critically examine

our own sense of situatedness within a place, leading to building "healthy, sustainable,

and reciprocal relationships … that include one's own community, town, city, [and]

geography" (Seawright, 2014, p. 555).

This critical exploration has connections with historical storytelling through the

examination of:

> [t]he ethics, logics, and ideologies foundational to a knowledge system that has
>
> been passed down across generations, a knowledgeable framework that
>
> establishes what is known (the socially constructed common sense of a culture),
>
> how things come to be known (the process of attaining new knowledge), how the
>
> world is to be interpreted according to what is known (the social construction of
>
> reality), and how the self is known in relation to perceived reality the politics of
>
> self. (Seawright, 2014, p. 557)

With its focus on knowledge grounded in geographical location, this research is relevant

to my study because of the connection between location and a local museums role as a

place

of education (Hein, 2002). As such, the stories we tell collectively in museums have an

impact on how people view themselves and their own place in the physical landscape.

Smith (2011) contextualized this examination of the United States' "settler historical consciousness" (p. 156), using the exhibits and displays in a local history museum in Arizona to illustrate the concept of elimination. Elimination is the reframing of Native American history and culture, by enforcing a "settler colonial historical consciousness" (p. 156). The Navajo County Historical Museum is located on the ground floor of an old courthouse in Holbrook, Arizona. The space itself provided a poignant example of historical elimination. In the old office spaces several exhibits glorified past sheriffs, while in the former jail cells, artwork created by long ago prisoners was crumbling and flaking off the walls. Most of these drawing showed Native American and Hispanic heroes and important historical and cultural figures. Smith's findings showed that the museum's resources preserved the white settler's version of local history rather than a more inclusive exploration of all inhabitants of this area of Arizona.

The discussion of who is in control of historical narrative in museums was the focus of King's (2006) study examining how the Delta Blues Museum in Mississippi communicated meaning around blues music. King highlighted the ways in which white promoters have been in control of "rhetorically creating and disseminating cultural narratives of Mississippi's blues culture to the immediate region and outside world" (p. 237). Ultimately, whites have operated with "cultural authority" to "perpetuate White control over an African American art form" (p. 237). Many of the exhibits at the museum presented Black blues musicians as poor and primitive. Yet, these exhibits failed to contextualize the musicians within the framework of racial oppression that was the norm in the southern United States in the 20th century. Here again was an example of white settler historical consciousness as described by Seawright (2014) and Smith (2011), with

its failure to tell an authentic history of the United States. King's (2006) study illustrated

the power of white's historical consciousness and its ability to "influence how visitors

remember the past" (p. 247). This research highlighted the need for museums to think

about and discuss "what visitors actually make and do with their own literacies" (p. 283),

as opposed to the literacies the museum would like them to have. Museum curators have

limited control over how visitors will make meaning of exhibits and artifacts on display

(King, 2006). Museums need to include a variety of voices when creating museum

exhibits, especially the experiences of people with personal connections to the artifacts

and images on display.

In contrast, research done by Brooms (2011) focused on how information on

slavery has been exhibited in museums organized and maintained by Black Americans.

He described three main themes evident in the presentation of information: educating

visitors about the Black experience, educating visitors about Black contributions to

society, and providing "historical context for contemporary views of the American racial

discourse" (Broome, 2011, p. 513). The themes were presented within the framework of

telling the Black American story. These presentations were in marked contrast to other

museums whose portrayal of slavery amounted to "symbolic annihilation and

trivialization and deflection" (Broome, 2011, p. 512). Broome's research highlighted the

dramatic difference in rhetoric of museum display depending on who is creating the

exhibits.

Collectively these studies showed that if we are going to tell a truthful account of

our American history, we must include a variety of voices in the planning and exhibition

of museum displays. When a museum is tasked with telling local history, community

voices need to be part of the storytelling. Museums must be cognizant of both the

community and the museum visitor.

Community as Curator

Museums may claim that they want community input and partnerships, but

museum staff often struggle with sharing control of what is displayed and how those

displays are shaped. (Coghlan, 2018; Smith, 2016; Trofanenko, 2006). Yet research

documenting this is scant. Most of the studies illustrated the struggle between staff and

community, with the staff having difficulty relinquishing control of museum programing

and exhibits.

One exception was Smith's (2016) research about a digital archive created in the

aftermath of the Boston marathon bombings. Smith documented "the reflexive collection,

preservation, and display of archival content" (p. 115). People who added content to the

digital archive saw themselves as part of the Boston community, even if some of them

did not physically live there during the bombings. Such multimodal literacy exhibits

illustrate that when people are asked to share their own experiences about an event or

topic, it leads to an emotional connection to the archive or exhibit.

The archive began as an open crowd sourced platform, but due to the sheer

volume of data shared on the platform, the local NPR station and the Boston Archives

formed partnerships to share data management. These organizations took on the role of

helping manage the archive. These management partnerships created questions "about the

way partnerships can affect practices developed to align with project goals" (Smith, 2016,

p. 127). Smith's exploration of these partnerships found that the balance between

community and researcher must constantly be monitored for equal access. Participants

needed to reflect on their "positions of influence" (p. 126). The process of reflexivity

around influence and participant positions is relevant to my study design as participatory

action research. The participants and I will be working collaboratively; therefore,

examining structures of power will be needed to ensure all voices are heard and valued.

Coghlan (2018) documented a more traditional relationship between a museum

and museum visitor. In this study the museum served as the expert creating exhibits then

allowed the public to comment on and create their own content within the exhibit space.

But Coghlan's findings showed that museum staff frequently undermined the stated

purpose of the exhibit.

Visitors were asked to create drawings or writing as part of an exhibit on

democracy at the Museum of Australian Democracy (Coghlan, 2018). At the end of each

day, however, many visitor comments were removed by the museum staff. This editing

undermined the stated purpose of the exhibit. Instead of fostering visitor agency, the staff

diminished the value of visitor comments, "determining which comments [were]

'authentic,'[and] underestimating or failing to listen to our visitors" (p. 806).

Interestingly, the content that was removed by the staff were the very pieces that other

visitors found the most compelling. This study, like Smith's (2016), showed the

importance of museum staff relinquishing control to allow visitor and community voices

a role in critiquing museum display.

Trofanenko (2006) provided another example of visitor groups playing a role in

creating and critiquing content. At the Glenbow Museum in Canada, researchers followed

students and a few teachers as they spent a week at the museum learning about aspects of

Canadian history including indigenous peoples. The students explored the history

presented in the museum and were encouraged to "begin to question the museum's tradition of thought" (p. 60). They were also encouraged to share their thoughts with staff and fellow students in conversations they had while visiting the museum. These conversations were a starting point for the museum's examination of structures of power in presenting artifacts and information about those artifacts.

The opportunity to critically examine museum exhibits was part of a larger push by the Glenbow staff/board/etc. to include more voices in the display and written interpretations of artifacts that once belonged to indigenous people. The museum created advisory panels with indigenous peoples, and in turn, these panels served as advisors for new exhibits, educational programming, and repatriation of objects. Trofenanko (2006) demonstrated that "museums may control the collection through displays, but this control is never absolute" (p. 62). Museums must seek out local community voices and build partnerships with those community members.

Collectively these studies depicted various levels of community input in museum displays and presentations. Museum visitors increasingly expected museums to tell more inclusive and relevant stories that connect with visitors to objects and places on a personal level (Vagnone & Ryan, 2016). Many historic sites and museums in the United States are beginning to grapple with issues of power structures intertwined with racism and oppression. Stories can provide personal connections to issues of power and oppression, the research discussed in the following section provides examples of stories used in museum settings.

Museum Storytelling

Humans learn by doing, and further strengthen their learning by telling stories about their learning experiences (Heltne, 1992). Often parents or authority figures share stories where their actions led to some kind of lesson learned. In sharing their story, they hope to impart their learned wisdom to the next generation. Once the stories are shared, humans want their experiences validated, like a parent asking, "Are you listening to me?" once they have finished telling their story.

Museums can serve as both storyteller and validator, providing partnerships with visitors building on existing stories and creating new ones (Heltne, 1992), and as discussed previously, a museum must work for its community. One way to do this is by creating spaces for mutual storytelling and meaning making (Hodge & Beranek, 2011). Studies by Gruen and Lund (2019), Russell-Ciardi (2008), and Claisse et al. (2017) explored the role of storytelling in community museum spaces.

In Gruen and Lund's (2020) case study, adult learners used artifacts in a high school equivalency class to create a personal museum. The participants presented the museum to the community, sharing found objects as well as objects they created specifically for this project. This process allowed the participants an opportunity to critically examine their community by gathering stories and reflecting on their own experiences within that community. The creation and presentation of personal museums were seen as acts of counter storying, as opportunities to reframe and retell stories of their community. Reframing and retelling stories using artifacts was seen as an act of civic engagement, having power "to shape personal and civic identities" (p. 6). Where participants were given the tools to see "their work as holding social import in the face of

incomplete and negative public stories of their community" (p. 6). In this instance, the

personal museums helped the community and participants see themselves in a new, more

positive way. The participants used their literacies to "serve their community" (p. 1).

Serving the community was also the focus of research by Russell-Ciardi (2008).

This work focused on exhibits at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York

City. The museum was engaging visitors in critically examining and shaping the civic

issues of concern to their communities" (p. 39). They did this by providing personalized

narratives illustrating the struggles of families living on the Lower East Side throughout

history. The stories were used to contextualize issues still relevant today such as public

health, working conditions, and voting rights. Findings of the study showed that visitors

were not coming to the museum to learn from experts; rather, they wanted to exchange

ideas, learn from each other, and come to their own conclusions about the importance of

history. By presenting stories of the lived experiences of community members, the

museum illustrated how local issues can be contextualized within the larger national

arena.

Research by Claisse et al. (2017) provided a fascinating exploration of the use of

stories in a historic house museum in Sheffield, England. Another study of this museum

was discussed in the previous section on multimodal literacies. This study focused on

how the researchers connected museum volunteers with museum visitors by presenting

personal individual stories of ordinary people who had lived in the house throughout

history (Claisse et al., 2017). An exhibit titled *Containers of Stories* presented stories and

artifacts of the house that had personal connections to the volunteers. Findings from the

study showed that visitors had a "more intimate and emotional experience of the place

through the eyes of the volunteers" (Claisse, et al., 2017, p. 12). As these studies

illustrated, creating connections with communities and museum visitors through

storytelling enhanced the relationship between museums and people. Studies in the next

section explore experiential exhibits in museum settings.

Experiential exhibits

Hein (1998) was a proponent of creating constructivist museums, where

knowledge was actively constructed in visitor's minds while they interacted in

exhibitions which were physically, socially, and intellectually accessible. The concept of

the constructivist museum proposed in Hein's work is expanded and built upon in

research conducted by Simon (2010).

Simon took the theoretical stances laid out by researchers like Hein and translated

them into actionable steps museums could use to build a museum more supportive of

visitor meaning- making. Case studies from a variety of museums supported Simon's

case. The findings highlighted the importance of emphasizing the visitor experience over

the collection of artifacts. Museum professionals must explore topics that would appeal to

the visitor, not to "dumb down" the content, but to respect the visitor and appeal to their

own intellect and interests. It meant believing that the visitor's opinions had value, that

they were seen as collaborators on what content should be shared and how. For example,

in one section Simon (2010) described what a participatory experience in a historic house

museum could be like (p. 28). Emphasizing social connections, Simon saw the historic

house museum as a place where during a tour, groups of strangers would feel comfortable

enough to share information with other strangers, to tell stories, to ask questions, to co-

construct meaning around artifacts displayed in the historic house museum.

Vagnone and Ryan (2016) adapted Hien's (1998) constructivist theory for use in historic house museums. Their research documented workshops and seminars held in HHMs all over the United States, where they asked HHMs to completely re-evaluate how they were organized. Vagnone and Ryan wanted the museums to remove barriers to visitor's experiences, such as ropes used to close off spaces, and docent led tours presenting outdated and irrelevant information. Through these meetings Vagnone and Ryan found that while the majority of HHMs were quiet and formal, visitors wanted the "ability to touch, experiment, and learn about the House and its history through immersive tactile interactions" (p. 115). The visitors wanted more personal connections to the physical space of the HHM as well as the inhabitants of the house

Collectively these studies illustrated the importance of relevance in visitor's museum experiences. They wanted to connect their own lives with stories told and artifacts shared. These personal connections moved through and past museum visitors out into the surrounding communities.

Summary of Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review was to examine literature that grounded social and community literacy, museum studies and community action within the practice of sharing stories and draw upon that work for the foundation of my research. These studies were connected by the importance of sharing lived experiences of humans within a community and out into the wider world. The acts of sharing stories and respectful listening of those stories creates opportunities for empathy and connection building. Black storytelling exemplified these connections with its focus on using stories to perpetuate human connections and cultural frameworks. Artifacts can play a role in

creating these shared connections. Museums have a specific role to play in locations for

storytelling and exhibiting artifacts connected to local communities. In the next chapter I

will explain my research methodology and theoretical framework that supports the

research.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

For this study, I developed a qualitative critical participatory action research (CPAR) inquiry, built upon a pilot project study I completed in the Spring of 2021 (Reid, 2021). The pilot study was a qualitative ethnographic inquiry into perceptions of Black community members on historical storytelling in the local community. One of the findings of the study was participants didn't want to share their stories just with me, they wanted to share their stories with many people in many places. My pilot project was grounded in respectful listening (Ravitch & Carl, 2021); therefore, this dissertation research was grounded in action arising from that respectful listening. The actions in this critical participatory action research focused on sharing local Black historical stories in the town of Berlin. Those stories are being told in the Taylor House Museum, at local town events, family reunions, and the local elementary school. My role as researcher was supported by my position as president of the Taylor House Museum (a volunteer position), as the art teacher at the local elementary school, and as a lifelong resident of Berlin. The research actions were undertaken in partnership with a group of volunteer community members, who are described in more detail later in this chapter.

Local knowledge was utilized during this study in the creation of two museum exhibits, a public art mural, a month of local storytelling in the local elementary school, and field trips taken by elementary school students to the Taylor House Museum and the Germantown School Museum, a former Rosenwald school that has now become a museum. Rosenwald schools were built in the American South between 1917 and 1932.

They were built to educate Black students at a time when school segregation was the

policy of public education in the United States (https://www.nps.gov/articles/the-

rosenwald-schools-progressive-era-philanthropy-in-the-segregated-south-teaching-with-

historic-places.htm). The Taylor House Museum was working to support the

Germantown School Museum as it transitioned from a community center to a more

formal museum. Pseudonyms for places and participants were not used in this study due

to the nature of PAR's focus on collaboration and creation of shared meaning (Kemmis,

et al., 2014). Utilizing the true names of people and places provided ownership of the

actions for the participants.

My role in the research process was complex. While I undertook this research to

fulfill Salisbury University's requirements for a doctorate degree, I was also a community

member committed to equity and inclusive storytelling at the Taylor House Museum, and

other locations throughout Berlin. My role as the president of the museum and as the

local elementary school art teacher provided the platform for the research action. The

museum acted as a collaborating agency for this research. A letter of support is located in

Appendix A. I was asking community members to collaborate with me in the research

process, and as such, the notion of critical self-reflection that "actively interrogates the

conduct and consequences participant's practices" (Kemmis, et al., 2014, p. 6) was

crucial for me during this research process.

Critical examination and self-reflection of researcher and participant actions

supported the argument that participants have the right of refusal in sharing stories with

researchers whose work "serves up pain stories on a silver platter for the settler colonial

academy, which hungers so ravenously for them" (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 812). Tuck and

Yang's ideology supported Street's (1995) and Flowers's (2008) theories of literacies that

honors people's own lived experiences and uses those experiences as a vehicle for

community empowerment and engagement.

Those ideals of community empowerment and engagement drove this research

project. We all have experiences to share in relation to life in our small town, and the

partnership between community participants, the museum, and the university provided

opportunities for sharing those stories throughout the wider community. Presenting the

stories through the local history museum, highlighted their historical importance and

illustrated the need to preserve local Black historical stories to ensure they can be told

and retold for generations.

With these ideas in mind and based on findings from the pilot study, the following

questions for this research study were developed:

*What meaning is made with artifacts and narratives as part of historical

storytelling that preserves a diverse history of Berlin?

*How can community members collaborate to design and implement museum

exhibits that demonstrate local Black historical multimodal storytelling?

* How does the museum work with the community to ensure on-going access to

these local Black historical stories?

The research questions focused on actions, such as meaning making, collaborating, and

working, therefore participatory action research was the best methodological fit for this

research.

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Participatory Action Research provided the framework for documenting ways that historical stories of the local Black community were shared in the larger Berlin community. According to Cornwall and Jewkes (1995), PAR is grounded in respect of "the people with and for whom researchers work" (p. 1674). Collaboration between researcher and participants utilizes local knowledge participants bring to the action in PAR (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995).

Ravitch and Carl (2021) described PAR as research "with a goal of creating the structures and conditions for people to tell their own stories" (p. 155), with an emphasis on collaboration between researcher and participants. They act as equals in a "living, emergent process…that changes and develops as those engaged deepen their understanding of the issues to be addressed" (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 4). This emergent process depends on authentic dialogic cycles of action and reflection (Brydon-Miller, 1997) which provide opportunities for the participants and researcher to use their own specific expertise and local knowledge to find solutions for mutually identified problems. These research actions grew out of dialogic cycles grounded in mutual respect and a shared purpose with participants. Dialogic cycles were opportunities for participants and me to share ideas and thoughts which were often revisited in later conversations.

In this research study these dialogic cycles happened during meetings and interviews shared between the participants and myself. Sharing Black historical stories provided opportunities for the participants themselves to be the experts, bringing their own knowledge and information to the process (Kemmis, 2008). That expertise was used

in actions that shaped "policies and processes that affect their own well-being and that of their families and communities" (Brydon-Miller, 2008, p. 202). At the start of this action research study, the goal was to create two new exhibits at the Taylor House Museum focused on local Black historical stories. As the research progressed, the actions expanded to include planning a mural dedication for a mural located in downtown Berlin, planning and executing a field trip to the Taylor House Museum for students from the local elementary school, and sharing local Black historical stories in that same elementary school during Black History Month. The expansion of actions meant some of us attended meetings with other groups that were established for other events, such as the mural dedication and Black History Month at the local school. These actions are reflected in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Actions Undertaken During This Study
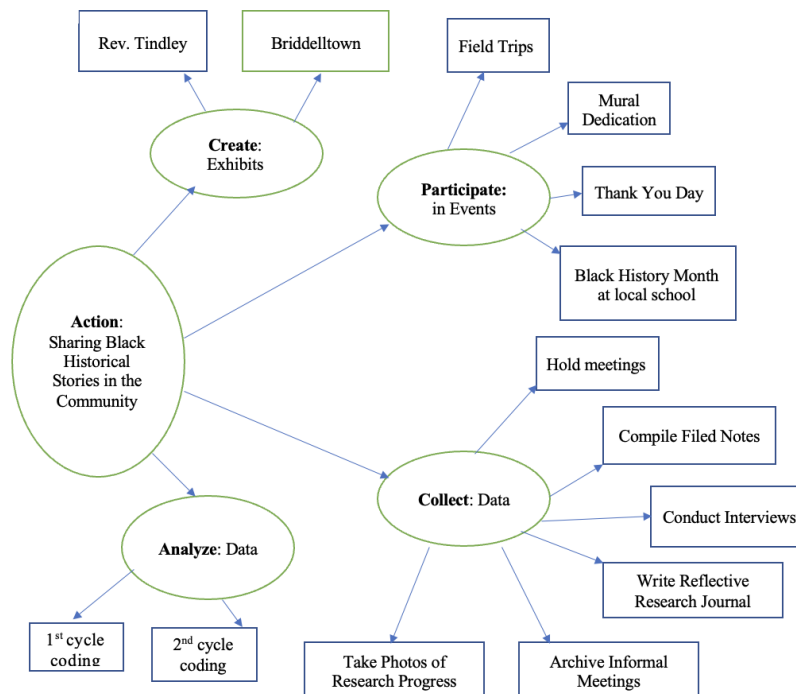
The dialogic interactions that were a part of meetings and interviews provided opportunities to examine and seek understanding of local structures of power. Understanding these power structures helped inform where and how we shared historical stories in our community, Critical PAR provided those opportunities.

Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR)

As stated above, dialogue and conversation are key in action research, in Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR), conversations revolve around knowledge and information shared by participants grounded in their community:

> in critical participatory action research, we see our practices as located not just in abstract time and abstract space, but as embodied and located in people's bodies and biographies, and in shared local histories, and in what people do and how what they do is enmeshed with particularity's of local sites-the places-where they live and work and interact" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p 77).

Being enmeshed in the local allowed us (the participants and myself) to move beyond simply understanding the roots of local power structures and towards the action of creating change within our local setting. Conversations and discussions around how to share local Black historical stories constituted the creation of a public sphere, a cornerstone of CPAR (Kemmis et al., 2014). A public sphere is defined as a place created by participants as they worked towards mutual understanding of each other's perspectives and build consensus on a shared concern (Kemmis et al., 2014). Key features are "communicative action for public discourse" and generating "communicative power" (Kemmis et al., 2014). Dialogic interactions with participants were used in decisions making throughout the research actions, for such things as locations of meetings. During

this action research study the public sphere grew from one initial group to several

overlapping groups as we sought out more participants and opportunities to share Black

historical stories.

Theoretical Framework

This action research was deeply connected to the community where I lived and

worked, the participants and I utilized local knowledge and relationships in the actions of

this study. Therefore, this theoretical framework is grounded in literacies that make use

of human connections and lived experience as learning opportunities. My belief that

knowledge is constructed by interactions among people and influenced by communities

and cultures means I aligned myself with researchers such as Street (1995), Flowers

(2008), and Larson (2017). Communities have their own set of parameters that define

who they are and how they function. How a community shares the information that

defines those parameters is grounded in concepts of literacy explored in the theoretical

framework used in this study. The belief that "people's own knowledge is valuable"

(Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p. 1670) is the foundation of CPAR as a research method and

has connections to New Literacies as described in the next section.

New Literacy Studies (NLS)

Thanks to work done by New Literacy Studies (NLS) in the 1980s the view of

literacy shifted from a neutral skill to be learned towards a view of literacy as a

sociocultural experience integrated with social, cultural, and historical practices (Gee,

2015, Leu et al., 2017). NLS posits that literacy practices are bound up in cultural norms,

social, economic, and political factors. A person's position within those structures defines

their use and understanding of literacy. If literacy is defined as simply a set of neutral

skills, that leaves an entire group of people disenfranchised and their knowledge gained

from lived experiences is disregarded (Gee, 2015).

Social Literacy

Literacy is a social practice, intertwined with people's identities, sense of

themselves and their world view and knowledge (Street, 1995). Street's ideological

model "attempts to understand literacy in terms of concrete social practices and to

theorize it in terms of the ideologies in which different literacies are embedded" (Gee,

2015, p. 43). The exploration of power and the ownership of stories are central to theories

of literacy as a social practice. Dialogue is key to expanding literacy practices, where

rather than be called illiterate by others, groups of people co-construct their own literacy

practices that speak to their own lived experience and knowledge gained from that lived

experience.

Street's (1995) work also examines the power structure built into practices around

literacy, more specifically the idea that people who can read and write hold power over

those who cannot. In Street's (1995) view, power should not be seen as something to be

taken from one group and given to another group; rather, power can be transformed "so

that it works instead in a positive way to bring out human potential and to harness

creative energy" (p.13). That transformation is part of the co-construction of meaning

through literacy practices that inform the actions of this research study. This

contextualization of literacy has a direct bearing on this study because the United States

has a history of denying Blacks the right to learn to read and write; therefore, most of the

Black American history has been shared through oral storytelling (Banks-Wallace, 2002).

As I described in chapter 2, storytelling itself is a social literacy practice where various types of information are shared through stories (Heath, 1983). Power structures had an implicit bearing on the actions in this study, because we sought to share stories in locations that were new to Black historical storytelling. These locations had their own power dynamics that we had to take into consideration. Street's critical examination of literacy practices has deep connection with Freire's (1970) theory of critical literacy.

Critical literacy

As Street (1995) states "Freirean theories of literacy suggest a fuller and richer view, focusing on self-development and realization… and on real shifts in political power in society" (p. 9). Instead of being used to keep people from understanding and accessing levers of power, in Freire's (1970) view, literacy can be a vehicle for critical discussions, a way to examine and disrupt structures of power. Each human has the capacity for deep thought and profound meaning making that goes far beyond just knowing how to combine letters and sounds into words that can be read and written. Freire's (1970) belief that given the right tools humans can empower themselves and transform existing power structures drives this dissertation research.

Gruenewald (2003) adds another dimension to critical literacy theory by describing the connection between critical literacy and geographical locations. He advocates for critical literacies to examine existing structures of power and social groups within a specific place, calling it place based pedagogy. "Places are social constructs filled with ideologies" (p. 5) that are particular to where people live. He encourages a critical examination of people's own lives, and how those lived experiences are influenced by where they live. Examining those experiences allows communities to

change what needs to be changed and keep what needs to be conserved. For this research, those power and social hierarchies are bound up with the concept of community.

Community Literacy

Community literacy has its basis in local social relations (Barton & Hamilton, 1998), with its emphasis on interactions among people identified within a particular group. It utilizes the knowledge of the group. Addressing community diversity is crucial to any research done in connection to a specific community. It is important to work equitably with community members to understand their perception of their own situation and needs. Community can be specified many ways- a group of people with similar interests (a community of birdwatchers), a group of people living in the same geographical area (the community of Berlin), or a group of people that share the same ethnic or physical traits (the Cuban American community). Some communities strictly represent one single group, but in many cases communities overlap one another. For example, one could be a Cuban American birdwatcher from Berlin. These specifications lead to the question: what is the definition of community, and who has the right to define it as such?

Writings done by Hill-Collins (2010), Dempsey (2010) and others examine the meaning of community. Hill-Collins describes community as an ever-changing concept, intertwined with identity, power, and social structure. She discusses the use of the word community to unite groups or isolate groups with less power, such as people of color, people living in poverty and new immigrant groups. Groups in power seek to name then organize *others*, perpetuating symbolic boundaries, in order to keep groups in their place both physically and physiologically.

With her belief that the "place-based underpinnings of the construct" Hill-Collins

connects with Gruenewald (2003). Their grounding of community in physical space was

illustrated in Berlin, where the physical boundary of a highway bolstered physical, mental

and opportunity barriers between Black community members and the rest of Berlin.

Artifactual Literacy

Artifactual literacy is theorized by Pahl and Rowsell (2010) who posit that

artifacts "tell stories, hold memories, and evoke identities connected with their existence

(p. vii). They describe the communication flow that exists when communities share

stories grounded in artifacts.

The theoretical framework is illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Theoretical Framework
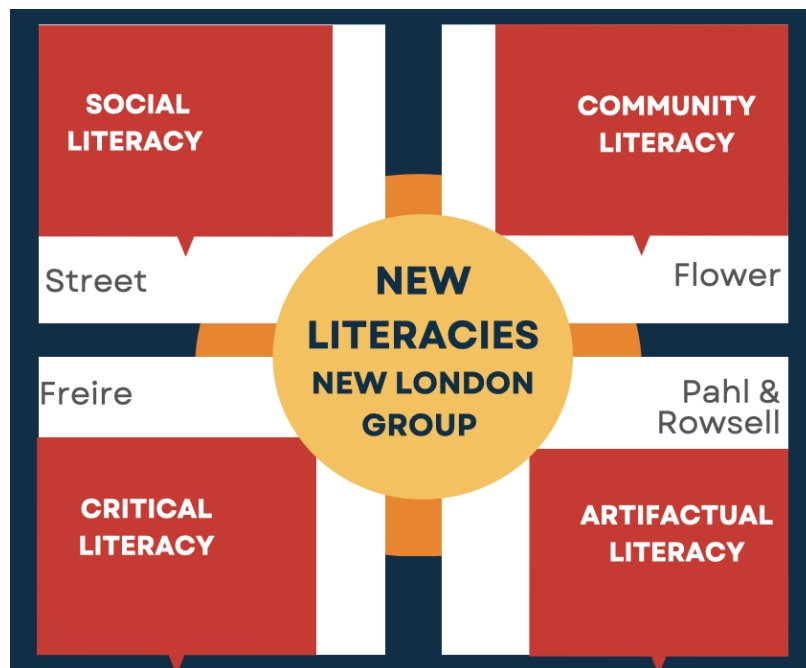
Critical Self Reflection and Positionality

As mentioned in Chapter 1, in this research process I was both an insider and outsider. Many of the research participants knew my family. And yet, as a white woman, my experiences of Berlin were very different than those of members of the Black community in Berlin. The struggle to join these concepts of insider and outsider was supported by CPAR methodology. CPAR's focus on continuing conversation and recursive discussion, also called the dialogical cycle (Brydon-Miller, 1997) demands constant reflection. This constant reflection grounded this work in partnership and collaborative exploration of the research questions. Critical self-reflection (Kemmis et al., 2008) ensured I monitored the overlapping loyalties of the various positions I held in the community. Reflective journaling and repeated participant discussions helped with that monitoring process.

Research Setting

Berlin

Berlin is a small town located on the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland. Non-native settlers have been living in the vicinity of Berlin since the 1600s. The town itself was incorporated in 1868, and currently has 5,026 residents (census.gov). The town has a complicated racial history reaching back prior to the Civil War. Free Black communities existed alongside enslaved Black communities, and subsequent relationships from this close proximity resulted in families where children had one enslaved and one free parent. After the Civil War, several Black families purchased large tracks of land east of the town and established communities such as Briddelltown, and Germantown, remnants of which still exist today. In the early 1950s, U.S. Route 113 was built in a location that

segregated existing white and Black communities (Archer, 2020). This barrier continues

to perpetuate an opportunity divide. On the west side of the highway, most residents are

white, and on the east side most residents are Black. The west side of Berlin houses a

brand-new library, the local elementary school, and a counseling center that runs summer

camps and afterschool programs. The east side has a brand-new police station, an

outdated Head Start center, and a condemned community center building. A divide also

exists between civic groups in Berlin. On the west side of Berlin, the American Legion

and the Freemason's Society meet in newly renovated buildings fronted on major roads.

On the east side of Berlin, an American Legion also exists, as well as a Freemasons'

Society housed in antiquated buildings located on peripheral side streets. This unequal

allocation of resources makes it harder for an under resourced community to access

educational and mental health resources needed to make any community successful.

Berlin's geographical and psychological conditions drive home the importance of

archiving and sharing local historical stories of the Black community. As these stories are

told in more location in Berlin, then hopefully more connections between groups are

made, whichever side of the highway they live on. The process of sharing stories showed

the community that these stories have worth. The study was conducted in several

locations within the Town of Berlin. They were chosen specifically because of the

community connections, with participants attending meetings in places where they spend

a lot of time as well as places they had never been.

Most of the meetings took place at the Taylor House Museum, a historical house

museum located in downtown Berlin. Other research sites for this study included St Paul

United Methodist Church, and the Germantown School Museum. These sites are anchors

of Black culture and history in Berlin. Some events also took place at the local

elementary school located within the town limits of Berlin. Due to the evolving nature of

PAR (Kemmis et al., 2014) the research participants decided which site were used for

meetings and events. Their decisions depended on the purpose of the meeting and event

as we moved through the actions of this research.

Participants

Participant relationships in PAR can be very complex, especially in a small

community (Torre, 2008). The participants in this research reflected that complexity.

They came from many parts of the Berlin community and represented multiple social

identities. For example: people whose family have been here generations, people who

have just moved here, Black community members, white community members, some

involved in many other organizations, and some who were involved only at the Taylor

House Museum.

Because this research involved creating museum exhibits, and sharing stories at

other community locations, some participants took part in all actions undertaken in this

research, while some took part in only a few actions. Their personal connections to

specific locations and stories drove their level of participation. These "multiple,

overlapping, potentially conflicting, identities, loyalties and allegiances" (Torre, 2008, p.

112) created opportunities for sharing and questioning of preconceived ideas and

opinions and beliefs, as well as exposure to a variety of viewpoints and opinions. One

common connector to all these participants was their love of local history and

appreciation of historical storytelling. This commonality helped the participants stay

focused on the goal of creating opportunities for sharing local historical stories from the

Black community.

Participants for this study fell into three main categories: 1) Planning and

Briddell Family Committee Members, 2) Community Partners, and 3) Visitors. There

were two museum committees: the Planning Committee which created the museum

exhibit on Rev. Charles Albert Tindley and the Briddell Family Committee which created

the museum exhibit on Briddelltown.

Within the Planning Committee there were two types of participants: community

members and museum volunteers. Community partners were individuals who played an

import role in providing information and support in sharing local Black historical stories,

yet they did not fit into either the Planning Committee or the Briddell Family Committee.

Within the visitor category there were two types of participants: museum visitors and

event visitors. All participants were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix B).

Members of the Planning Committee and Briddell Family Committee were

chosen using purposive sampling (Ravitch & Carl, 2021) and snowball sampling

(Merriam & Tissdell, 2016). Purposive sampling specifically utilizes existing networks

of people, and it was used to identify and invite most of the participants for the study.

Snowball sampling (Merriam & Tissdell, 2016) occurs when participants suggest other

people who should be invited to participate. Figure 8 shows the organizational structure

of the participants in this study.

Figure 8

Research Participants
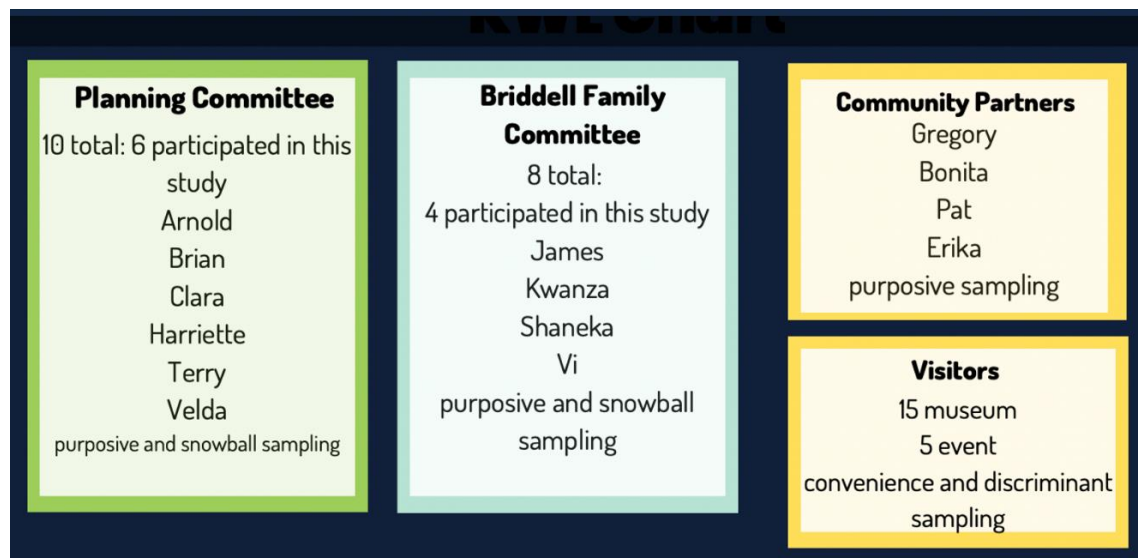
Planning Committee

     The Planning Committee was formed under the auspice of the Taylor House

Museum, and from the beginning the members knew their goal was to create

opportunities for sharing local Black historical stories. This committee was comprised of

local community members and museum volunteers, with a total of 10 members

(including myself). Eleven invitations were initially sent out, including participants in the

pilot project who asked to be a part of this action research (see Appendix C). The

inclusion criteria for the participants focused on knowledge of local Black historical

stories.

     Ultimately five community members joined the committee: four were Black and

one was white. Four of the Black participants from this group functioned as "community

elders" (Torre, 2008) of the Black community in Berlin, volunteering with many civic

and non-profit groups, as well as acting as mentors for younger community members.

Local knowledge is a key element of PAR (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995), and these community members were steeped in local knowledge, bringing many different life experiences to the study. In PAR actions are collectively constructed and "must be understood not solely from the perspectives of the individuals involved, but also in terms of the collective understandings and collective effects of those involved" (Kemmis, 2008, p. 124). Having a committee with a variety of members engaged a range of people in the action of the research.

All members of the Planning Committee were invited to participate in this research study, both community members and museum volunteers. Even though all Planning Committee members collaborated to design and implement museum exhibits, six out of the ten committee members chose to participate in this research study as well. While this committee was working on creating an exhibit at the museum on Rev. Charles Albert Tindley, another volunteer group in Berlin was working on planning a mural to be painted in downtown Berlin of Rev. Tindley, a locally born man of national importance in American Black culture. Many members of the Planning Committee were involved in that work as well (including myself). After the completion of the mural the two committees merged under the title of Planning Committee.

Community members on the Planning Committee

Terry. She is a Black retired public-school educator from Berlin, she is an award-winning elementary school teacher, vice principal and Board of Education community liaison. She represented a bridge between the Black and white communities in Berlin. It seemed like Terry knew everyone in the Black community, and if there was someone she

didn't know, Black or white, she had no problem reaching out and creating a connection

to help individuals or organizations get the resources they needed.

Arnold. He is Black and was serving as the chief of police of Berlin at the time of

this study. He is a true community police officer, who volunteers with a variety of local

organizations, and is the official historian of St. Paul United Methodist Church. His

encyclopedic knowledge of Rev. Tindley's life was invaluable for the museum exhibit.

Arnold was also a participant in the pilot project that was done as a precursor to this

research study.

Velda. She is also heavily involved in St. Paul. Her father was the first Black

Berlin Town Council member, and her mother was one of the first Black teachers to teach

in the former white elementary school in Berlin. Velda volunteers at several local

nonprofits and along with her husband, Pat, has just started a nonprofit focused on

mentoring middle and high school students in need of support for life skills. Velda was

also a participant in the pilot project that was done as a precursor to this research study.

Clara. She is a Black woman who has spent her working life collecting and

archiving local Black historical stories. She is a retired history professor from Salisbury

University, and has published several books on local Black history. Clara was also a

participant in the pilot project that was done as a precursor to this research study.

Brian. He is a white musician with extensive knowledge of music and lyrics

written by Rev. Tindley. He is a host at the local NPR radio station.

Museum Volunteers on the Planning Committee

Harriette. She is a white woman who had volunteered as a docent at the museum

for many years. She has served on the museum's board for 10 years. Originally from

New Jersey, she has lived in Berlin for many years and is involved in several other community groups.

Museum members brough with them institutional knowledge of the museum as well as an understanding of exhibit creation. They were all white women, who lived in the Berlin community as well and they brought their own awareness of local historical storytelling.

Briddell Family Committee

This committee was created under the auspices of the Taylor House Museum to create an exhibit on Briddelltown, a historical Black community located in Berlin. Members of the Briddell family were asked to bring any family members who they felt should be included in planning the exhibit. There were 8 members of the Briddell Family Committee, and four participated in this research study. They included four women and four men, and all were Black.

James

He was the initial member of this committee and also participated in the pilot study. James has been collecting information on his family for many years and holds many original documents of Briddell family history.

Kwanza

She is James' daughter and helped organize the family meetings and gather artifacts for the exhibit. She and her sister started the Briddell Foundation, a nonprofit focused on literacy for elementary school student and college scholarships. The foundation has supported reading initiatives at the local elementary school. James and

Kwanza invited any Briddell family members they felt should be included in the creation of the exhibit.

Shaneka

She is cousin to James and Kwanza. Shaneka lives in Berlin and is the first Black woman to be elected to the Berlin Town Council, currently serving a four-year term. She works in in the intermediate school located in Berlin.

Vi

She is Shaneka's mom and has extensive knowledge of Briddell family history. She brought many family papers to the meetings and shared various stories about the family.

Community Partners

As the action research progressed, it became evident that another category of participants was needed. There were several individuals who played a role in sharing local Black historical stories, but who were not members of the Planning Committee or Briddell Family. The inclusion criteria for this group was based on an individual's role in sharing Black historical stories in Berlin. In total four community partners participated in this research, two men and two women.

Gregory

He is an esteemed member of the Black community in Berlin. He was involved with local Black organizations such as the Masonic Temple, and the American Legion. Anytime there is an event organized by the Black community, such as the Berlin Memorial Day Parade on Flower Street, or the Rev. Tindley mural dedication, Gregory is the emcee. He became involved with the Taylor House Museum when he was asked to

narrate our exhibit on Isaiah Fassett, a local Berlin man. Gregory served on board of

directors of the Taylor House Museum for 5 years before retiring due to health problems.

Pat

He is a Black painter with a regional reputation for documenting the places and

people of the lower Eastern Shore. He is a Berlin native who is married to Velda, another

participant in this research study. Both Pat and Velda's families have deep roots in Berlin

and surrounding communities such as Sinepuxent and Whaleyville. He provided artwork

for the Rev. Tindley exhibit.

Bonita

She is a Black member of the Tindley family who organized the Tindley Family

Choir. They sang as part of Black History Celebrations at the local elementary school as

well as the mural dedication for Rev. Tindley. Bonita also attended a few of the Planning

Committee meetings and provided feedback for the Rev. Tindley exhibit.

Erika

She is a white third-grade teacher at the local elementary school. She was

involved in planning a field trip for students to visit the Taylor House Museum as well as

the Germantown School Museum.

Visitors

To gain an understanding of how meaning was made with artifacts and narratives

of Black historical storytelling, I asked visitors about their experience with these stories

then shared this information with the Planning Committee. Convenience sampling

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and discriminant sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2016) were used

to choose visitor participants. Sampling "based on time, money, location, and availability

of sites" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 98) made sense, because these individuals were

chosen from the people visiting the museum or attending the events. Discriminant

sampling allowed me to gather "additional information from individuals different from

those people initially interviewed to determine if the theory holds true for these additional

participants" (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 9). Discussion with visitors helped the Planning

Committee and Briddell Family Committee see how the public made meaning with the

artifacts and stories being shared. Twenty museum and event visitors were interviewed

either at the Taylor House Museum, or at local community events connected to this

research.

Museum Visitors

Fifteen visitors to the Taylor House Museum were asked, once they had finished

touring the museum, to take part in a short interview or fill out a written survey with the

same questions (see Appendix D and E). The process for interviewing these participants

will be explained fully in the data collection section below.

Event Visitors

Five people attending community events such as Thank You Day and the Rev.

Tindley Mural Dedication, where historical stories were shared were interviewed (see

Appendix F and G). The process for interviewing these participants will be explained

fully in the data collection section below.

Data Sources and Collection

Data sources and collection were multilayered and ongoing throughout this

research study. While most of the data was collected at Taylor House Museum, some

pieces were collected in other locations in Berlin. Data sources for this study fell into five

categories: transcripts of formal meetings, interviews, field notes of formal and informal

meetings, multimodal data, and reflective researchers' journal. Multimodal data included

images, videos, and voice recordings. The data collection process was "cyclical,

emergent and recursive" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 106). During the research process,

data collection opportunities arose that we hadn't planned for, like the mural dedication

event. As the participants and I worked through the actions of sharing local Black

historical stories, questions would arise "in response to the learning that happen[ed]

throughout the research" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 106). Interviewing specific

individuals, such as community partners, helped answer some of the questions, thus

allowing for co-construction of meaning between myself and the participants. All these

processes are described in the following sections.

Formal Committee Meetings

As described earlier, an action of CPAR involves the creation of a public sphere

(Kemmis, 2014). Meetings provided that dialogic space in this research study, creating

opportunities to collectively explore a local problem or issue. As the president of the

museum, it was my job to schedule the meetings, but during the meetings themselves, all

the committee members functioned as equals, freely sharing ideas and opinions. During

these meetings participants worked to find and devise actions to mitigate the identified

problem (Brydon-Miller, 1997): how to share Black historical stories out in the wider

community. The Planning Committee met eight times and the Briddell Family met five

times. The meetings were dialogic cycles (Brydon-Miller, 1997) where questions were

raised, discussed, and answered as a group. These discussion cycles led to data being

generated and co-constructed rather than merely collected (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 106).

These meetings were powerful examples of respectful collaboration and opportunities for co-construction (Flower, 2008) of meaning grounded in shared lived experiences. More specific information about each type of meeting is discussed below. All meetings were recorded, and I wrote write field notes after each meeting. More information about the use of field notes is discussed below.

Meetings provided two sources of data: transcripts of the actual meetings and my own written field notes to be analyzed. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state "interviews and conversations are often interwoven with observation" (p. 137). Having two data sources from the same event allowed me to compare my observations and impressions to the actual meeting transcripts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I was able to see if what I thought happened really did happen, and hear ideas, comments, and discussions I missed as I participated in the meetings. Only relying on field notes was not sufficient because "they are mediated by memory, which can be imprecise and self-serving" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 139). Utilizing two data points from one source helped "triangulate emerging findings" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 139), as well as provided a type of member checking for myself. These meetings provided opportunities for revisiting stories and information shared at previous meetings, reworking concepts, and ideas.

Planning Committee Meetings

Planning Committee meetings were held regularly throughout the study. The action of these meetings began with the creation of museum exhibits and moved to sharing local Black historical stories in places beyond the museum. The initial Planning Committee meeting took place at St. Paul United Methodist Church, while the reminder of these meetings were held at the Taylor House Museum. They took place monthly and

lasted between one and two hours. A total of eight meetings were recorded. As previously

noted, in my role as the president of the museum I scheduled the meetings, but during the

meetings themselves we acted as equals: the group made decisions and planned next

steps. After the exhibit was finished, the Planning Committee merged with the

community group that helped plan the Rev. Tindley mural. That committee continued to

meet after this research study was over, its focus shifting to gathering the oral histories of

community members.

Briddell Family Committee Meetings

A total of five Briddell Family Committee meetings were held at the Taylor

House Museum which focused on the creation of the Briddelltown exhibit. The format of

the meetings mirrored the process of "Community Based Oral Testimony" as described

by Ravitch and Carl (2021). They defined this oral testimony as an "expressly relational

approach to individual and group narration of experiences and perspectives (p. 158).

These oral testimonies had connections to oral histories, with its focus on recording life

experiences (Rogers & Charlton, 2006). During these Briddell Family Committee

meetings experiences were shared in narrative form, with lots of insider jokes and

reference that were only understood among family members. The act of telling their own

experiences shaped the information that was eventually displayed in the exhibit. Again, in

my role as president of the museum I scheduled the meetings, but during these meetings I

only acted as recorder and sometimes asked guiding questions. For all intents and

purposes, the family ran these meetings, guided the decision-making process, and

planned the next steps.

Final Reflective Meeting

A final reflection meeting took place in September 2022 as an opportunity for

members of the Planning Committee to discuss the process of sharing historical stories

with the community. The meeting lasted about an hour and a half. This final act of

dialogic engagement (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 376) supported the collaborative nature of

this PAR and provided an opportunity for closure of this process (see Appendix H).

A final reflective meeting was also held by the Briddell Family Committee as part

of an open house at the Taylor House Museum. This open house was held during the

annual Briddell Family Reunion. Family members were asked to provide feedback on the

exhibits, including both images and text chosen for display.

Informal meetings

Any collaborative actions done in a small community means that information,

ideas, and concepts are often discussed in informal settings. Throughout this study, I

encountered participants in the grocery store, at school, or on the street in Berlin. During

those unscheduled times, discussions about research actions took place as a naturally

occurring phenomenon.

As Tarditi, cited in Ravitch and Carl (2021), notes that PAR is built on the belief

that participant/researcher relationships are "steeped in respect, trust, dialogue, and

dynamics that treat all engaged as valued knowers" (p. 377). That means that whenever

an opportunity arose with community participants to discuss the research actions as they

were being created or implemented, I was available. Over the course of this research

study there were approximately twenty-five informal meetings, lasting from 5 minutes to

thirty minutes. When aspects of the research study were discussed, I used field notes and my reflective research journal (Ravitch & Carl, 2021) to record the information shared.

Interviews

Interviews were key to this participatory action research. They allowed me to investigate participants' perspectives to "achieve fuller development of information within and across individual[s] and groups" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 126). Interviewing a variety of participants helped me "look within and across experiences in ways that help decipher meaning, experience, similarity, and difference" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 126). They were held with Planning Committee members, Briddell Family Committee Members, Community Partners and museum and event visitors. Interviewing is not a passive process (Talmage, 2012). The researcher must take an active role in the interview, listening to what the interviewee is saying. They must recognize their own feelings and emotions as they interview others and work to mitigate possible tension around sharing personal experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Conducting interviews allowed a more personal conversation between the individual research participants and me. The interviews provided an opportunity to discuss thoughts that may have not surfaced during larger committee meetings. Self-reflection is an integral part of CPAR:

> The situations, settings, conditions, and circumstances of practice cannot be adequately understood without also appreciating how practitioners understand them- *and* how the practitioner's interpretive categories are located in history, culture, discourses, social networks, material, and economic exchanges. (Kemmis, 2008, pp. 126-7)

The interviews were occasions to reflect on committee members' interpretations of

actions taking place as this research study started and then concluded. The individual

interviews often referenced questions raised during group meetings, and they helped

answered the group questions.

As mentioned previously, structures of power played an implicit role in this

research, as the action of the study was sharing Black local historical stories with a

broader community than where they have been previously shared. Contextualizing these

issues of power in a small town was important during the individual interviews. This type

of interview, with its concentration on restorative justice, is defined by Merriam and

Tisdell (2016) as a decolonizing interview. Central to the mission of a decolonizing

interview is ensuring the participant feels respected and heard and that their lived

experiences are seen as having value.

To facilitate personal interactions these interviews were semi-structured

(Seidman, 2006) and lasted about an hour to an hour and a half. An aspect of a semi-

structured interview is a general set of questions that are asked to all participants, with

enough flexibility to allow for specific follow up questions based on the information

shared by those participants (Merriam & Tissdell, 2016). Semi-structured interviews are

vehicles that allows for exploration of participants' lived experiences and have the

potential to contextualize a complex story (Galletta, 2013).

Ravitch and Carl (2021) provide an interview framework that supports the

participant- centered ideology behind decolonizing interviews. They suggest that the

researcher conduct interviews that are relational and non-evaluative with the

understanding that the interview is temporal, representing "snapshots of a moment in

time" (p. 129). These issues were crucial for me to think about as I developed an interview protocol, because the participants and I were discussing personal experiences of life in a racially divided small town.

Individual Committee Member Interviews

Individual interviews were held with six Planning Committee members and two Briddell Family Committee members. These lasted about one hour. These interviews were held both at the very beginning of the study and at the end of the study, for a total of sixteen interviews (see Appendix I and Appendix J). Photographs taken by the research participants were used as talking points during the final interviews (see Appendix K for photovoice use protocol). This use of photographs—referred to as photovoice for the purposes of this research-will be explained in more detail in the data analysis section below.

Community Partnership Interviews

The four Community Partners were interviewed once. Each interview took place during the study whenever a Community Partner was identified, and each followed a semi-structured format. They focused on the experiences of the participants in relation to Black historical storytelling in Berlin. See Appendix L for the interview protocol.

Visitor Interviews

Since the purpose of this research was to create connections with visitors and the general public, it was important to gauge their perceptions and reactions to the research actions. Therefore, visitor interviews provided an important data source for this research (Vagnone & Ryan, 2016). The community and museum research participants had an emotional connection to this research which made it hard for them to be objective.

Seeking information from people who are not so involved in the process allowed us to

gain different viewpoints of local Black historical stories. All visitors participating in this

research were 18 and older.

Museum Visitors. The museum visitor interviews followed a highly structured

format (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In order to gain as much specific information as

possible in a time limited interview, the same questions in the same order were asked for

each museum visitor (Appendix D). A written response sheet was also an option for

visitors. This sheet had the same questions as the interviews (Appendix E).

Event Visitors. While the event visitor interview also followed a highly

structured format (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), a different set of questions was used for

interviews of visitors to the community events. (Appendix F). Again, because time was a

limiting factor, the same questions were asked in the same order for each event visitor to

gain as much specific information as possible. A written response sheet was also an

option. These sheets also had the same questions as the interviews. (Appendix G).

Multimodal Data

The main goal of action in this research study was the creation of exhibits that

tell the historical stories of Black individuals' lived experiences. Multimodal data

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) included images, videos and text from the exhibits created at

the Taylor House Museum as well as images from other events where the local historical

stories are shared. The participants explored "which tool or technique will produce the

desired participatory experience" (Simon, 2010, p. 1). Utilizing multimodal approaches

acknowledges that "multimodality now surrounds us with a vast array of modes acting

interactively and separately in order to 'speak' to us" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001 pg. 2). Making use of multimodal approaches helped the exhibits speak to visitors.

Photovoice

Photographs created by Planning Committee members and museum visitors were also collected as data, because images can convey feelings and thoughts not easily expressed with words. The process of taking and sharing photographs is called photovoice:

> As people speak (and hear) about the meaning of the visual imagery, the narration of these choices requires the sharing of feelings, experiences, expertise, knowledge, and the like in ways that are more contextualize an embedded in daily experiences than traditional data collection methods (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 156).

Photovoice fits well with CPAR, because it provides data chosen directly by research participants.

As we went through the process of sharing Black historical stories in the community, the Planning Committee members and Briddell Family Committee members were asked to take pictures of parts of the process that made an impression on them, including the parts of the exhibits they connected most strongly with. They shared their photos during an event at the museum called "Thank You Day" that will be described in Chapter 4. The photos were also displayed in the museum on a board in the Harrison Room where all the tours finish.

Photovoice was also used with museum visitors for the purpose of exploring how they made meaning of the artifacts and stories presented in the museum. When visitors

took a tour of the museum, they were asked to take an instant polaroid camera with them. As they toured the museum, the participants took a picture of their favorite parts of the museum. These images were posted on a large display board in the Harrison room of the museum, the final room of the tour.

Artifacts

When objects are displayed in a museum their meaning and context carry more weight as most of society see museums as places where important objects are preserved (Paris, 2002). Integrating them into collected data was important because artifacts are touchstones for people's lived experiences (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010). Merriam and Tissdell (2016) define artifacts as sources of data that are ready made, and accessible to researchers willing to look for something imaginative. Objects can carry powerful associations with people's lived experience. Pahl and Rowsell's (2011) theory on artifactual literacies illustrates the relevance of artifacts in storytelling connected to lived experiences. Gallette (2013) recognizes the importance of artifacts as a way to "draw researchers into both the everyday activities and the significant historical moments of a community" (p. 25). This was evident during the pilot study when participants told stories related to artifacts they shared during interviews. Some of those same artifacts were used in the exhibits created during this action research study.

Field Notes

I used field notes to record thoughts, ideas, and musings on information that was not discernable through transcriptions alone. Miles, et al. (2014) and Creswell and Poth (2018) mention interview write-ups as a form of field notes. These field notes were written after every meeting and interview to ensure that I captured all the musings and

perceptions of the interviews while still fresh in my memory (Miles, et al. 2014). I included descriptions of setting, participants, actions and interactions, conversations, and comments on my own behavior (Merriam & Tissdell, 2016). Field notes also provided a place to record all the non-verbal information, including where participants sat, how they sat in their seats, who made eye contact, and who did not. All this nonverbal information conveys meaning that is connected to the words that participants chose to use (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Reflective Research Journal

While field notes provide *in the moment* information, a reflective research journal was something quite different. The research journal is an "ongoing, real-time chronicling of your reflections, questions, and ideas over time" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 116). My level of involvement in this research and the community in which it takes place required me to frequently document my thought process. This weekly documentation allowed me to examine my positionality to ensure that the participants' voices, thoughts, and ideas remain at the forefront of the research process. As Ravitch and Carl (2021) state: "Collaborative work requires actively appreciating and accounting for the myriad-individual, social, [and] institutional-complexities of this sort of work and their impact on our actions and interactions" (p. 223). Reflecting on the process helped document all of these voices and concepts.

The nature of PAR provided ongoing conversation and discussion around the actions being taken as part of the research study (Kemmis, 2008). These conversations evolved as the study itself evolves and changes. The journal provided a place to record that evolution and provided context for data analysis.

A table of data collected is shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Data Collected

Meetings		Interviews		Multimodal		Writing Resources	
	Total		Total		Total		Total
Planning Committee	8	Individual:		Photos Taken by Participants	20	Field Notes	40
		Committee Members	12	Photos of Exhibit Development	10	Reflective Journal Entries	43
Briddell Family Committee	5						
		Community Partners	4				
Reflection Meeting	1			Displayed Artifacts in Exhibits	25		
Informal Meetings	25	Visitors:		Photos of Events	6		
		Museum	15	Videos	1		
		Event	5	Voice Recordings	3		

Data Analysis

Creswell and Poth (2018) described data analysis as a series of spiral steps that overlap. For this research study, some data analysis steps followed a specific order, while others happened simultaneously. As soon as any meetings or interviews took place, I used a listening guide (Ravitch & Carl, 2021), also called oral coding (Saldaña, 2016). Although it is called by different names, the process was the same: recursive, focused listening of recordings.

The listening guide (Ravitch & Carl, 2020) was a framework of specific questions and steps I followed that helped contextualize the voices in the recordings. Oral coding (Saldaña, 2016) requires the researcher to repeatedly listen to an interview in order to gain in-depth knowledge of information shared by the participant. I repeated this process

after every meeting and interview. Many times, when I would go back to an original

recording and listen to it again, I would catch something that I missed in the first

listenings. As the study went on, the participants' voices began to live in my head.

Coding was a step in the data analysis spiral that is described in the following section.

First Cycle Coding

Coding was the next step in the analysis spiral after recursive listening to

transcripts. To help manage the large amounts of data generated during this research

study, NVivo software was used to store and analyze data. Once a transcript had been

created, In vivo, process and descriptive coding was used for first cycle coding. In Vivo

coding uses the participants' own words as codes, ensuring that the research "prioritize[s]

and honor[s] the participant's voice" (Saldaña, 2016, p.106). Honoring the participants'

voice is vital in research that focused on perceptions of Black community members.

Using In Vivo coding served as a check on my emotional bias towards this research

because it required that I work with the exact words of the participants, not solely on my

impressions of what was said. In Vivo coding with its focus on participants' voices

represented a good fit for PAR with its foundation of collaborative action between

researcher and participant (Saldaña, 2016 p.106). As my analysis continued, In Vivo

codes became the title of some themes and findings.

Process coding was an important focus for first cycle coding in this research

study. Two of the research questions explored how participants collaborated and worked

together to create museum exhibits to ensure access to Black historical stories. These

questions were based on the actions of collaboration; therefore, process coding, which

implies action "intertwined with the dynamics of time, such as those things that emerge,

change [and/or] occur in particular sequence" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 111), provided a natural

fit for coding this data. This concept of action that emerges and changes is a hallmark of

PAR (Herr & Anderson, 2014).

Descriptive coding was also used during first cycle coding. This type of coding

was a good fit for this study because I had a variety of data sources such as meeting and

interview transcripts, field notes, journals videos, and photographs. And descriptive

coding helped identify and summarize the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data"

(Saldaña, 2016, p. 102). This summarizing worked across all types of data.

All three types of coding ensured that I had the tools to analyze the variety of data

sources generated by the emerging and changing actions of the research study. The first

cycle coding process allowed me to compare ideas and information and to begin the work

of identifying patterns and emerging themes.

Second Cycle Coding

Once first cycle coding was finished then more focused coding took place. This

involved identifying recurring patterns and themes found through In Vivo coding as well

as integrating information from analytic memos and artifacts. Saldaña (2016) calls this

process code weaving: a way to interpret how the individual parts of a study weave

together. The process of code weaving allowed patterns and themes to emerge.

These patterns and themes were organized into categories (Merriam & Tisdell,

2016). which needed to be "responsive to the purpose of the research" (p. 212) as well as

sensitive to what was in the data. As this research was founded in social justice, keeping

participants' voices forefront in my mind was crucial in the organization and naming of

categories. An important tool in organizing these categories was a visualization map, also known as a network (Miles, et al., 2014).

Visualization Map

A visual display of data is important in exploring codes, themes, and patterns, and in clarifying thinking (Saldaña, 2016). I used visualization maps to organize and connect nodes (codes found in In Vivo coding) with links (lines with directional arrows) (Miles, et al., 2014). These nodes and links were continually rearranged as new themes and patterns emerged. Using NVivo software for network building allowed me to physically move nodes around to find the best organizational structure and hierarchy which made it easier to see the connected web of larger ideas. The visualization map was shared during the final Planning Committee meeting to help the participants see the themes found during the data analysis process.

Analytic Memos

Analytic memo writing began while first cycle coding took place and continued throughout the data analysis process. Memos are documents that reflect the coding process, and a record of code choices and possible definitions (Saldaña, 2016). Segment memos were used first to identify initial codes (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) explain that memos can be used to group different parts of data into clusters, so project memos were used next as a way to record multiple concepts connected across the entire project (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Analysis of Artifacts

Saldaña (2016) describes artifact analysis as a holistic interpretive process, guided by intuitive inquiry with questions created from data gathered during analysis of

interview transcripts. Miles, et al. (2014) suggest analytic memoing of ideas and concepts developed while using the holistic interpretive approach. For analysis of artifacts, they suggest jottings and memoing be done first, then coding as a second step.

Pahl and Rowsell (2011) also provided a protocol for artifact analysis, describing 6 areas of focus: analyzing the value of an object, its' timescale, when it was made, the historical context of that time, the production of the artifact, and its relation to institutions of power. Their focus on an artifact's timescale and relation to institutions of power were helpful when I was analyzing artifacts.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the foundation of PAR. Working together with participants towards a common goal requires trust and equitable power relations (Herr & Anderson, 2015). But that emotional involvement could have also acted as a blinder for my research analysis and highlight biases I might have had. The addition of the critical element (CPAR) to PAR as the research methodology helped mitigate those biases.

 To ensure the validity of the findings, triangulation of data and member checking was done (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Collecting data from multiple data sources helped with triangulation of data and validation of research findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Triangulation also occurs with the inclusion of multiple voices (Herr & Anderson, 2016), which the Planning Committee, Briddell Family Committee, Community Partners and the museum and event visitors provided. The participant make-up of the Planning Committee also supported democratic or local validity (Herr & Anderson, 2015), with participants coming from a variety of places in Berlin, such as community elders, museum volunteers, members of local churches and civic organizations, with age ranges from late thirties to

late seventies. These various voices worked in collaboration with each other on the action

of this participatory action research. Including a variety of voices in the action elevated

validity to "an ethical and social justice issue" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 69). Their

local knowledge was instrumental in driving the direction of the research action. On-

going reflective conversations provided dialogic validity (Herr & Anderson, 2016). With

dialogic validity the focus in on "validation-both during and after the study-that methods,

evidence, and findings resonate with a community of practice" (p. 70). The Planning

Committee and Briddell Family Committee acted as the community of practice, and the

action of sharing their own stories created the validation. The methodology of PAR

requires ongoing participant reflection, or member checking (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), a

critical step in establishing credibility, by allowing the participants to review the data and

make comments on the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). That way one data source was

compared with another to look for patterns and recurring themes. This research project

was only possible because of the generosity of the individuals who participated. I have a

deep respect for the participants and their willingness to share their own stories as well as

their ongoing commitment to sharing Black historical stories in the local community.

Their personal investment provided validation of this participatory action research as we

worked collaboratively to ensure these stories were told and were accessible for future

generations.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This participatory action research was initiated and facilitated by me in collaboration with other Berlin community members. We acted together to share local Black historical stories in Berlin. Through collaborative action and inquiry, I sought to answer questions regarding meaning making with narratives and artifacts, as well as community collaboration on museum exhibits, and ensuring access to local Black historical stories. The focus of these questions was the process of sharing historical stories themselves which is at the heart of the literacy practice of historical storytelling. Through sustained and systematic analysis four distinct themes emerged that answered the questions:

1. Quilt of Berlin: Discussing Ownership and Truth of Information and Artifacts

2. A Patch in the Larger Quilt of Exhibits: The Actions of Sharing of Gifts

3. Stitching Patches Together: Connecting Networks Utilized in Designing Museum Exhibits

4. Spreading the Quilt by Getting Those Stories Told

This PAR showed that participants made meaning with artifacts and narratives by collectively discussing ownership of artifacts and information. They had gifts that they were willing to share with the group in the collaborative actions of sharing local Black historical stories. Participants had connecting networks they utilized to design museum exhibits, and they sought a variety of opportunities to ensure on-going access to local Black historical stories.

Although I was able to differentiate these findings into four distinct themes, they are not mutually exclusive. Just as the stories, artifacts, and participant experiences were all interconnected, so too are the findings interwoven. These areas of overlap illustrate legitimate aspects of meaning I uncovered as I analyzed the data. For example, sharing of gifts and connecting networks are closely related with some overlap of concepts; sharing of gifts explains individual interactions within the participant groups, and connecting networks addresses participant connections outside the participant group. These overlaps highlighted the organic nature of qualitative research in a small town, with community participants who knew each other in a variety of capacities.

The metaphor of patches and stiches of quilts is used to present the findings. The connection between quilt imagery and American Black history and culture is centuries old. From the belief that quilts were maps of the underground railroad to the popularity of quilts made by the Gee's Bend community, quilts are ubiquitous in Black America (Beardsley et al., 2002; Tobin & Tobin, 2000). Normally, I would have been hesitant to include such a well-used metaphor in my research findings. Yet, two different participants; Brian and Gregory, used quilt metaphors to describe their roles in this research study. Once the image was in my mind, I began to visualize a quilt as a group of separate patches that were stitched together to create a larger cohesive whole, finished by a group of people in a social setting. It is both a thing of beauty and a comfort to people. The colors and patterns used in the designs provide the beauty, and the fabric and interior batting provide the warmth and comfort. Comfort is provided by the memoires and stories bound up in the creation and use of the quilt. The idea of separate parts being assembled into a larger whole represents the actions we undertook in this participatory

action research where separate participants and separate actions came together to create a

whole framework of sharing local Black historical stories.

Overview of Presentation of Findings

Given the central place of storytelling to the research, the actions, and the data

themselves are rich in stories, storytelling, and conversations. The findings contain data

from all participants. To bring forward those stories and voices, each finding opens with a

story or description of the actions of sharing Black historical stories in Berlin. Following

the story or description, an explanation of a supporting literacy theory is included. Just as

the four main findings are interwoven so too are the literacy theories. While one central

theory is discussed for each finding, there are places where other literacy theories and

concepts are interwoven in each section. The central literacy explanation is followed by

data and discussion that supports each finding. Other literacy theories will also be woven

in throughout the findings' sections. The people and stories and artifacts that were part of

the process of sharing historical stories are also interwoven throughout all these findings.

The participants took great pride in sharing stories of their own lived experiences as well

as those of community members who had gone before them. They have ownership of

their stories.

Quilt of Berlin: Discussions of Ownership and Accuracy of Information and Objects

Over the course of a month and a half, several people gathered around the long

wooden meeting table in the Harrison Room at the Taylor House Museum. Strewn across

its mahogany surface were plates of food, papers, and photos. A recorder sat in the

middle of it all to capture the discussion. The people seated at the table were all members

of the Briddell Family Committee, and they had come to the museum to talk with me

about what information the family wanted displayed in a new exhibit. Photographs of the

meetings are presented in Figures 9 and 10.

Figures 9 and 10

Briddell Family Committee Discussions

The exhibit would highlight the Briddells, a family, whose roots in Berlin could

be traced back to the 1870s. In the first meeting Kwanza, a Briddell family member

clarified the purpose of the meetings: "We asked what the question was, what is the most

prominent, who was the most prominent person? And what was their contribution to the

family?" These Briddell Family Committee conversations lasted over two hours each,

with topics ranging from land ownership to family tree connections.

At that first meeting, discussions went on for almost two hours until Donald who

seemed to sense a need to redirect, got everyone together. "Let's go back to the

beginning. Because time is winding down... What are we going to have at the top [of the

exhibit space]?" James answered "Right, Let's see the top of the board. What do we agree

on?" The committee members were then able to make some initial decisions on the title

of the exhibit.

At the next Briddell Family Committee meeting, six family members spent forty-

seven minutes discussing the connections between the early Briddells, the location of the

original Briddell properties, who possibly owned them originally, and who possibly owns

them now. Eventually Kwanza synthesized all the information:

 Follow me, follow me So that's owned by Briddells? [family members

interrupting] Listen to my question, listen to my question. So originally, we had

three parcels and from that time period up to now we own more area of land in

Briddell[town] because of the part that Uncle Danny's parents owned was not

originally owned in our three parcels. That's additional property that now we own

as Briddells because that's that's your land, right? [looking at a family member at

the table] That was not part of our original three parcels because that property was

part of [another Briddelltown resident].

Several family members answered her by saying "Yes. Right" at the same time.

Some family members brought photos and papers that had been found in one of

the older family homes. Some of these documents James had shared with me during the

pilot project the previous winter. Some of the papers and photos were spread on the table,

some were kept in bags held by family members. These photos and documents often

served as touchstones for family stories (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010, p. vii). At one point a

photo from a previous family reunion was passed around:

>Shaneka: I remember when we took that picture at Billie Jean King Park

>Several voices all together: Yes, I remember

>Donald: Yeah, I got that one at home.

>James: Yes

Throughout the large Briddell Family Committee meetings everyone often talked

at the same time, sharing information, working out who the people in some of the photos

were, and how they were all connected. They talked about who could get photos of

people that needed to be on display with Vi pointing out that she had "a lot of pictures"

on her phone. The discussions were laced with family jokes that were only understood by

one another and laughter interspersed with serious conversation. Often, they seemed to be

in a world of their own, sharing family nicknames like "Aunt Sis Babe" and stories

describing complex and dynamic family relationships. The Briddell Family Committee

meetings illustrated participants' discussions of ownership and truth of information and

artifacts. The conversations created opportunities for the family to make meaning with

their historical stories and family artifacts. Individual family members learned new things

about their own family history as these conversations unfolded. They were also searching

for the truth of their histories in relation to what actually happened, as best as they could

find it.

No matter how descriptive my writing is, it falls far short of conveying the

experience of listening to these family members discuss their family tree and history,

their voices, and interactions. Participating in these conversations allowed me to witness

"culture as a verb" (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 7) in action. To Heath and Street culture is something dynamic and always evolving. The Briddells were "sustain[ing] themselves through learning to be and to work together, knowing that their representation to the outside world depend[ed] on how effectively they create[d] and maintain[ed] their identity" (p. 14). Their identity is grounded in being a Briddell, and the museum exhibit was a chance to highlight their heritage. "My last name is Briddell" Kwanza explained "but for my daughter whose last name is Curtis and her future children, for them to say I'm a Briddell and come home to have this exhibit here" showed pride in their family heritage. The Briddell Family Committee discussions around artifacts they brought as well as artifacts they created for the museum exhibit highlighted how meaning was created through narratives attached to those artifacts. During these discussions, as well as discussion among the Planning Committee who created the exhibit on Rev. Tindley, committee members collectively worked through ownership and accuracy of information and artifacts

The stories that were shared in these conversations were grounded in the artifacts they brought, such as photos and family documents. Artifacts "tell stories, hold memories and evoke identities connected with their existence" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010, p. vii). Artifacts as repositories of stories is best articulated in the theory of artifactual literacy.

Artifactual Literacy in the Creation of Museum Exhibits

Artifactual literacy calls for "studying existing artifactual practices and also creating opportunities for artifacts to be centered in inquiries about literacies" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010, p. viii). It also explores "the mediative nature of artifacts in connecting communities, affording new forms of talk, engendering critical literacy, and providing

spaces for authoring new selves" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010, p. viii). The Planning

Committee and Briddell Family Committee who were planning and creating the exhibits

at the Taylor House Museum embodied these concepts by using their dialogical circles to

co-construct meaning through sharing stories grounded in artifacts.

The exhibits and events described in this research study were closely bound up in

place; they were specific to the Town of Berlin. As Pahl and Rowsell (2010)

acknowledge "Neighborhoods and communities hold valuable stories that are often

instantiated within objects" (p.1). This sense of stories and artifacts grounded in place is

evident in the final museum exhibits with their use of maps to locate events and places.

These maps were co-constructed by the participants using their various funds of

knowledge (Moll, et al., 1992).

Presenting stories in the museum through the use of artifacts confirmed their

value to the community and visiting public. Artifactual literacy is grounded in the idea

that objects and stories carry different weight in different settings (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011).

The Taylor House Museum presented itself as a place that tells the stories of Berlin,

therefore the artifacts displayed in the museum were seen as a part of those Berlin stories.

This idea is supported by Winn's (2012) belief that "objects are described as documents

or evidence of the past and are regarded as pristine material embodiments of cultural

essences, which transcend time, place, and historical contingency" (p. 73). The exhibits

presented examples of counter-storying resisting and challenging "opposition, racism,

and classism, thus working toward the goal of social justice" (Lewis Ellison & Solomon,

2019, p. 224). Rather than displaying stories of victimhood these artifacts told a story of

empowerment.

Qualitative studies that involve artifacts open a world of research possibilities and provide opportunities to share in the ongoing human story. In this study artifacts became tangible connections to these lived experiences and allowed those experiences to live long past our lifetime. Examples of this tangible connection included a map of Briddelltown described later in this chapter.

Patches of Berlin History

Storytelling

Storytelling was instrumental in sharing Berlin history in this participatory action research, specifically stories centered on local Black history. "Black Americans in general attest to the very central role that stories of personal experience have played in their sociocultural experiences" (Williams, 1991, p. 401). Stories shared by individuals or groups served the purpose of making sense of their world by using their own voices and experiences (Goss & Barnes, 1989, p. 17). The act of meaning making through storytelling has been "responsible for the survival of the African American and their culture" (Goss & Barnes, 1989, p. 17). The stories shared during the meetings and interviews were actions to save local Black historical stories. As stories were shared, they also became intertwined with artifacts such as photograph and maps. These artifacts then reflected back to the viewer the lived experiences shared in the stories.

In some of the meetings one person served as the main storyteller. The role of storyteller as historian was venerated and often commented on by other participants, as Gregory said: "Arnold is doing a wonderful job here a great job, explaining to you, giving you the tidbits…he's giving you the rest of the story. (laughter) You know, and

that's important." There were other meetings where the whole group worked together to complete a story:

> James: "I don't know what the house looked like back at the branch [small stream running on the edge of Briddelltown]. And the old house up front looks like the Shockley House."
>
> Robert: "Pop and them's house did, Pop and Ms. Alberta …"
>
> James: "Do you know? The one, the old white house that Pop Jake built."
>
> Donald: "Our grandfather, Mom, Blondie and Pop Charlie lived..."
>
> James: "They lived in the white house first."
>
> Donald: "That's where Raymond stays."
>
> James: "Where now? Pop built that house, right?"
>
> Robert: "Pop [would] be up there [in that house]"
>
> James: "Yeah, I'm talking about the old white house."
>
> Robert: "Where Tom and Leonard lived at..."
>
> James: "No the one I was born in."
>
> Kwanza: "Which house, which house did pop build? You said the one where

Ray.."

> James: "Yeah, Yellow. The yellow house."
>
> Kwanza: "The yellow house."
>
> Several Speakers: "No, it was white, the white house."
>
> Robert: "Its yellow now."
>
> Kwanza: "Do we know what the addresses of that house, so we could find any document?"

James: "It's whatever Ray mailing address is"

These kinds of exchanges were used to co-construct meaning around the family members' individual and collective experience and artifacts such as photographs and the Briddelltown map described later in this section. In some instances, the same stories were shared by the same participants on multiple occasions. James often told the story of George and Martha, the landowners of the original family property in the late 1800's. He would repeatedly share the story of Martha's name on any land deed recorded as "Martha, wife of George."

> We need to figure out what George was. Now everything that I've read, everything on history books, everything on like your deed, all the things say Martha Briddell wife of George... Like the only things written about that man are; Martha Briddell bought that land and who was she? Martha Briddell, wife of George.

See Figure 11 for photograph of George and Martha, which was included in the Briddelltown Exhibit.

Figure 11

Photograph of George and Martha Briddell (date unknown)

The photograph was one of the largest images in the exhibit, holding a prominent place

near the center of the display. The size and placement illustrated the importance of the

image to the Briddell family. A museum visitor described their own feelings about the

photo: "In the midst of a society that worked to oppress Blacks, it shows a dignified

couple standing in spite of it." To me this photo was one of the more moving artifacts

from both the museum exhibits. When I look at George and Martha, I see two human

beings who lived through the historical transition from human enslavement to a freedom

that was fraught with the questions of how to create a life within the residual framework

of systemic racism? How did Black people live next to their former enslavers? How did

they build a place for themselves and their family in post-Civil War society? And yet

George and Martha did build a place for themselves. They bought land, they became

prosperous enough to have a photograph taken. George has a pocket watch and chain,

that was a display of wealth, and social status in the community.

George and Martha were repeatedly discussed in every Briddell Family

Committee meeting. This repetition served a purpose where "through these stories the

beliefs, values, fears, and triumphs of a cultural group…are reported, self-analyzed, and

analyzed by others through repeated retellings over lifetimes" (Williams, 1991, p. 401).

As I listened to participants it seemed as though the stories were like pieces of

information they individually owned, they kept bringing it back up again and again to

prove their ownership of them. The stories were like family currency. They had value,

and each family member worked together to co-construct meaning by joining individual

pieces together. "In African American communities, oral traditions are much more

important than written for many people", this quote by Arnold supported the participant's

actions of collectively working through information shared in stories. During this

research almost all information was shared orally. There were some written sources we

used, but in most cases, the exhibits were planned around stories shared during meetings,

as well as artifacts that the family owned. Some artifacts were also created by the family

through these family meetings. An example of this was the map of Briddelltown,

described later in this finding.

In this study, sharing history through storytelling was also bound up with oral traditions (Jolliffe, et al., 2016). As Clara stated, "It's those oral histories that are much more much richer than anything that you would possibly find in a little blurb somewhere or newspaper article or even the mere mention of them in a textbook." Participants such as Gregory mentioned the role of oral storytelling as a way to learn:

> My grandmother used to talk to me about different things and so forth. And it's according to whether I had the time to listen, that I would. Or if I had the willingness to listen to it, I would, you know, and I gathered up a lot of stuff.

Gregory's description of learning by listening to his grandmother echoes Williams' (1991) characterization that "Black Americans in general attest to the very central role that stories of personal experience have played in their sociocultural experiences" (p. 401). This research study's focus on Black historical storytelling meant that race relations was an integral part of the research actions.

Race Relations

As described in chapter one of this research study, Berlin has a racial divide, both geographically and culturally. Although that divide was not explicitly discussed with the larger groups during the creation of the exhibits and events of this study, it did come up during individual interviews. Gregory put it bluntly "I think when you do, when you do the research, and you chronicle it, it gives a better scope of what, in reality, happened in East Berlin [the predominantly Black community], in relationship to West Berlin [the predominantly white community]" He had a fear that "so many good people and great people from on the East side could be left out of the conversation, unless the full history

of the incorporated town be brought forth". Gregory's worry was shared by members of the Planning Committee and the Briddell family.

Race relations were often a part of the discussions as the Planning Committee and Briddell Family Committee worked through information to share in the exhibits. James often mentioned his belief that during that post-Civil War era, Black and whites in Berlin had positive relationships:

> To me that the whole the thing that I'm most proud of, wherever I go, right, I'm a Briddell from Briddelltown, my ancestors purchased land as a free blacks, right, immediately after the Civil War, and all that, to me all of that ties in, because me and Melissa have talked before, because to me, and I said, and I'll say it again, because that meant that somebody in this community was in agreement with, you know, and allowed Blacks to purchase land, immediately after slavery.

Although James felt that there have been positive relationships between Black and whites in the past, other stories emerged that offered a different point of view. One story shared by the Briddell family raised the possibility that white landowners basically stole land from Black families in Briddelltown. Land that was foreclosed on was then sold at a tax auction to a local white landowning family:

> Carol: "Okay, so here's let's go back to Julia. So, here's what happened., Julia and Solman In 1906 didn't pay their taxes and their property, it was sold at a tax sale "
>
> Shaneka: "To who? "
>
> Carol: "To Orlando and George Harrison."
>
> Shaneka: "Aww see, they paid their taxes. They paid their taxes. That money just didn't get put in the record books That's what happened there."

Carol was a museum volunteer who had been doing property title searches for the

Briddell family. Her discussion with the family provided them an opportunity to have a

clearer picture of family members who had gone before them (Banks-Wallace, 2002).

Her work also provided a sense of ownership of the family history they shared in stories.

She provided facts that supported many of those stories.

 The issues of race relations also played a role in the creation of the Rev. Tindley

exhibit. Several times during the Planning Committee meetings, the lack of inclusiveness

in local historical stories was discussed, mostly regarding Rev. Tindley. Arnold and Brian

often remarked about Berlin's failure to recognize Rev. Tindley in the town history. As

Arnold explained:

> Seeing how unappreciated he has been here in this area, when somebody is, you
>
> know, so prominent, number one. It's not just about being born here. But again,
>
> the time he had in Pocomoke and the family he still has, those are things that
>
> history books never really look at. And the lack of recognizing then again, in
>
> Berlin. It was definitely a driving force and something that was really important.

The lack of recognition locally was also mirrored in a paucity of Black history being

shared to a wider population beyond the locality of Berlin. As Clara explained:

> So many things that need to be shared with the larger population, …with African
>
> Americans, and especially young people, because they have no concept of it.
>
> They have no concept of the history. They have no concept of American history,
>
> because in many instances is not being taught in the schools… So, these young
>
> people are being basically hoodwinked in some respects, because they don't know
>
> about the other histories that… help to make up American history. American

history is basically a mosaic. And if we leave out a lot of history, it means that

you get a fractured history. You're not getting the full picture.

The acknowledgment of lack of representation in Black historical storytelling in Berlin

was echoed by visitors who were interviewed after the Rev. Tindley mural dedication:

But I'm almost 40 years old. And this was the first year I ever heard of Reverend

Charles Tindley, even though I'd heard the song We Shall Overcome many times

in my life. So, I was so surprised that he came from the area where I grew up, and

yet wasn't celebrated. And I'm wondering how many more stories like his are out

there.

Another event visitor stated they were "in favor of long overdue a recognition of an

important African American man." This speaks to the idea of ownership of stories and

experiences, and who has the right to share this information. The museum could have

created exhibits on Rev. Tindley and Briddelltown on our own, but the museum would

have neglected an entire segment of the Berlin community who had a personal stake in

these stories. The participants themselves had ownership of aspects of these Black

historical stories.

In this research study, sharing Black historical stories was entangled with

questions of accuracy and truth. Much of Black history before, during, and after the Civil

War remains unknown. In many slave inventories, enslaved humans were listed as

numbers not names (Stahl, & Owens, 2022). The first census that recorded Black

Americans by name was in 1870 (National Archives and Records Administration, 2012).

And as I describe later in this finding section, often the census takers did not record all of

their information accurately. Throughout this participatory action research all participants

were concerned about accuracy of information presented in the museum exhibits and on

the Tindley mural in downtown Berlin.

A Chance for us to make it right: Making Meaning Through Accuracy and

Information

From that first Planning Committee meeting, accuracy was a concern. The

Planning Committee felt strongly that information presented in the Rev. Tindley exhibit

was as accurate as possible. As Terry explained, we need to "make sure we have accurate

information regarding the roles of African Americans in the Berlin community. That it's

reported…with dignity and integrity, and… accurate information." The Briddell family

was looking more for validation that supported all the family stories shared through oral

history (Janesick, 2015). James described what he wanted:

> Because the family history is really important to me, and I want it to be… on
>
> record so that it can be passed down to my grandchild[ren]. And then hopefully,
>
> … you know, you record it, [because] we need to know where we came from, so
>
> that we know where we're going.

Throughout the research study the participants struggled to piece together

fragments that detailed life histories of Black Americans (Thomas, 2019). Clara

commented that "I think the big thing is, there's not a lot of ways that black history was

actually recorded." Arnold concurred:

> And if we have to look for people of color at this point in time it's not gonna be a
>
> whole lot of things that are going to be remarkable to be documented. [The
>
> documented history] going to actually be destroyed at certain points in time.

But historical accuracy in relation to Black Americans has been fraught because history

has always been told by the group with the most power, often white people (Alderman &

Modlin, 2008). White people have repeatedly shaded history towards their viewpoint

whether it was truth full or not (Hoelscher, 2003), they have owned the stories. As Arnold

referenced earlier, most Black American history has gone undocumented, or the

documents have been destroyed over time, therefore the members of the two committees

and I negotiated the truth as best as we could with the resources we had available.

Arnold and Terry provided an example of struggle with their exchange regarding books

written about Rev. Tindley:

> Arnold: "But those books are not factual so don't get that confused, this is
>
> definitely not factual. The words in here are all not factual"
>
> Terry: "Are or are not?"
>
> Arnold: "Are not."

Often, we were working together to separate myths and folklore from factual information.

In that collaboration members of both committees were able to take ownership of the

information presented in the two exhibits.

Accuracy in the Rev. Tindley Exhibit

The Rev. Tindley exhibit highlighted two opportunities to collectively negotiate

myth and accuracy. One of the historical stories about Rev. Tindley described his

teaching himself to read. (Tindley, 1942, p. 7). Yet, local history recounts that a local

teacher and banker in Berlin taught Rev. Tindley to read (Page, 1936, p. 215). The

Planning Committee spent several hours discussing how to represent that story in the

exhibit. We tried to find as many sources as possible that shared the story, Velda described one:

> Well, let me throw something into the mix. Because I spoke to someone just
> before we came in here. and they had information…she was saying that Charles
> Albert Tindley's dad put him out to do odd jobs. He did odd jobs on Calvin B
> Taylor's farmland and Calvin B Taylor's mother was teaching him [Calvin B
> Taylor] the child how to read. While Charles Albert Tindley was doing odd jobs.

We decided to tell both stories, with the explanation that they were part of the folklore of Rev. Tindley's life.

Another of the historical stories about Rev. Tindley recounts the first time he went to church. The story tells of him walking barefoot to church as a young boy and surprising the minister and the congregation with his ability to read. The Planning Committee again spent hours trying to figure out where the church was located, sharing any pieces of information we had (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). We read all the versions of the story we could find to help us identify the location (Scott, 2019). We discussed what churches were in Berlin at the time, and which churches had galleries for the local Black population. As Arnold explained, we even discussed how far Rev. Tindley could have walked "So, when you actually come back in time and you say that he walked from wherever he was living… as a child to presumably Stevenson [local Methodist Church], how far could that be?" Because Arnold had an extensive understanding of local Black church history (DeVore, 2007), the Planning Committee was able to use photos of local churches to identify which was likely the church Rev. Tindley visited. See Figure 12.

Figure 12

Photograph of Stevenson Church Displayed in the Rev. Tindley Exhibit (date unknown)

This image provided a tangible connection to the stories of Rev. Tindley's life. The photograph has been in the museum's collection for years, but now it carried new meaning as the possible location of a seminal event in Rev. Tindley's life. The collaboration of the Planning Committee made that connection possible.

Accuracy in the Briddelltown Exhibit

The Briddell Family Committee also struggled with issues of accuracy and truth as they worked together to plan the exhibit. The family took their responsibility seriously. They took their time working through the complicated family tree, and they were not going to be rushed or hurried in the process. Most of their discussions focused on two pieces of family history: which family members owned which parcels of land in Briddelltown and how their last name was spelled across the generations. The Briddell

Family Committee talked for several hours about land ownership; eventually the decision was made to make a map the focal point of the exhibit. Through the sharing of stories of pride, loss, racism, struggle, and overcoming, the map became an artifact cocreated by the family as a touchstone of collective meaning. See Figure 13.

Figure 13

Briddelltown Map Displayed in Briddelltown Exhibit
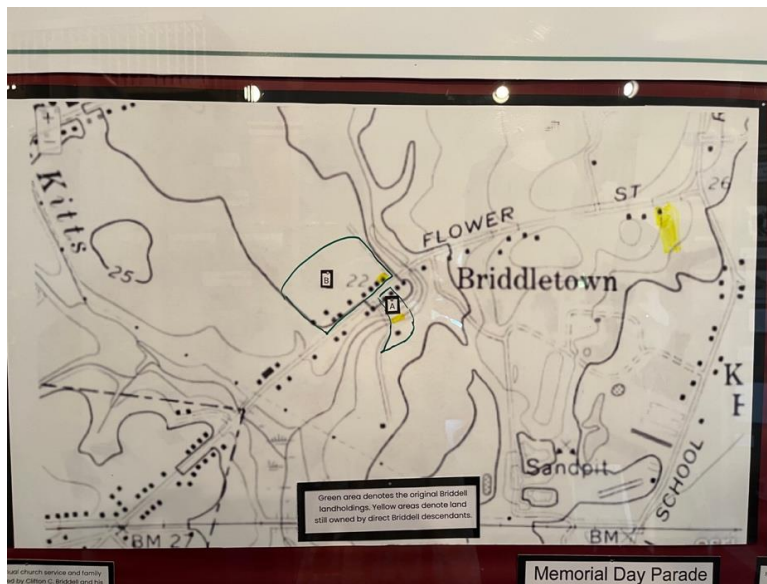
This exchange of stories across generations illustrated Lewis Ellison's (2016) description of family literacy traditions (p. 515). These family literacy traditions were intertwined with family legacy and ownership of the stories and the photographs and documents connected to them.

Land ownership represented family legacy. "When the war was declared over," James said, "our ancestors were able to purchase land as free black people in that area, and because of that, we still had...our heritage". Some family land had been lost through various acts of institutional racism, such as taking land in an illegal foreclosure. James shared another family story of land being taken away:

When cousin Joe Purnell was living, he told us in church one Sunday that the land

that the Harrison group owns used to be a part of our land. He said that when the

Harrisons came to town that Pop Jake or somebody loaned him a horse and mule

and they started to plow that land over there and then some kind of way they

ended up with it. That's the story Pop Joe told us.

Vi summed up the family's feelings about the land, by explaining that they do not want

any more land sold: "If something happened to us, we're going to make sure that nothing,

[the land] never be sold to anybody. It just goes down to generation to generation. That's

how we want it. That's how we want it." The younger generation's investment in the

family properties was articulated by Kwanza when she explained that she wanted all non-

family members to sell their land in Briddelltown, "I want to purchase land, whatever

becomes available."

The Briddell's ability to maintain family land and their rich oral histories

provided an illustration of how Briddell Family Committee members "leveraged their

knowledge and engaged in meaningful civic action through counter-storying," allowing

the family to speak through the act of counter storying the family "spoke back to

narratives about their community" (Gruen & Lund, 2019, p. 1). The map in the exhibit

illustrated to the outside world that this Black family had held onto land for several

generations.

Another area where the family struggled with accuracy was in the spelling of their

last name. In various historical records, the name Briddell has been spelled several

different ways. James described what he knew:

Here is on that sign [the historical Briddelltown marker on Flower Street] is Jake,

and all the others they spelled Briddell...like we do. On the census they spelled it

Bridill… Some of the people they spelled it wrong but when they got to…

Martha, Jacob, and George, they needed to do what we do [spell it Briddell] and

that was during the 1800s and early 1900s.

Then Vi added:

At that time, they did not say Briddel as we spell it now B R I D D E L L,

Briddell on that [photo] it is spelled B R I D E L. That's how they spelled it back

there in those days… When Jacob came from Philadelphia, or when my father

came to Philadelphia, that's when they put D E L L in it, and they put on another

D on it.

James added his own thoughts about the spelling "So what I'm saying is, we've always

spelled our name wrong. The misspelling was done by whomever." Robert replied, "All

I'm saying is that I think we got two different historians myself, one writing it up one

way and one writing it up another." The family's experiences with census records was

corroborated by Arnold, "You have to go ahead and understand that the censors

themselves how true they are. They are in error so many times." He gave the example of

a local woman who passed away, "We can walk through to her headstone in the

cemetery, in which the part again says 1878 to 1940. And we can see that we see her

name, we see the dates, but coming back in the census, they're not matching".

When the family asked me what I thought, I deferred to them, explaining that they

were the ones who needed to choose what they wanted, they were the experts

(Trofanenko, 2006). Ultimately the family decided to spell the name Briddle in the title of the exhibit but include language explaining the various spellings (see Figure 14)

Figure 14

Museum Exhibit Text That Described the Various Spelling of Briddell
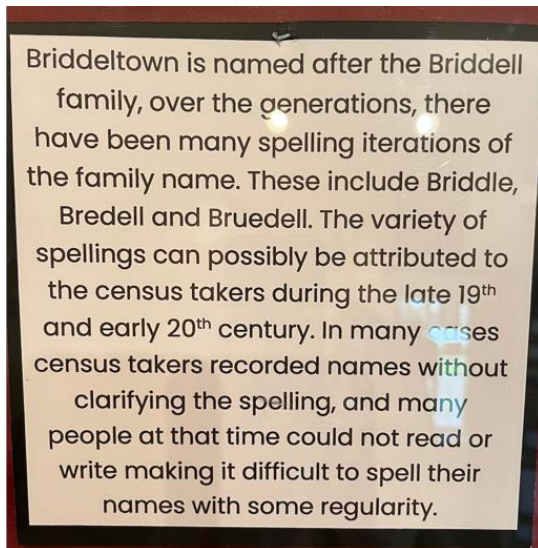
Robert clarified the view of the family during a discussion about how to represent the various spellings of the Briddell name, "How they did it 100 years ago is their way, but now this is our way."

Collectively working together to share stories that codified their family history was an example of heritage in action. "Heritage is not only defined as the artefact or site but also as the activities around it- e.g... acts of communicating, remembering, and meaning-making" (Claisse et al., 2017, p. S2908). For the Briddell Family Committee remembering and meaning-making was represented in the use of family photographs in the exhibit (see Figure 15 and 16).

Figure 15

Family Photos in Briddelltown Exhibits

Figure 16

More Family Photos in Briddelltown Exhibits

These photographs were "infused with meanings and carr[ied] traces of their

history within them" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010, p. 5). A museum visitor unrelated to the

family remarked on the whole group of photographs of family members: "You get a

sense of the closeness and connectedness. All the photos of civic engagement and

business strength. One feels good to see such a group." Both the Briddell Family

Committee and the Planning Committee utilized stories and artifacts in their meaning

making around local Black historical stories. Through extensive conversations, the

participants collectivity worked through issues of accuracy and ownership. The resulting

exhibits utilized artifacts to tell stories of empowerment and dignity in the face of

difficult circumstances.

A Patch In The Larger Quilt Of Exhibits: The Actions of Sharing Gifts

It was a warm early summer day. Clouds passed across the blue sky and a stiff

breeze was blowing. In a parking lot just off Main Street in Berlin a small tent was set up

with about 20 chairs under it. On the edge of the parking lot stood a folding white table

with platters of cookies, water bottles and an arrangement of flowers collected from the

yard of a neighbor. Towering over the parking lot was a white wall, the side of a local

dress shop. The wall was a mix of flat brick and textured form stone, a material that used

to cover the majority of buildings in downtown Berlin. This wall is where the Rev.

Tindley mural was painted.

That combination of materials dictated where the mural was placed on the wall, it

could only be painted on the flat brick, so it occupied the top half of the wall. The mural

was created to celebrate the life of Berlin native Reverend Doctor Charles Albert Tindley.

Under the mural stood a podium and a sound system because this marked the official

mural dedication ceremony.

The mural itself was composed of two likenesses of Rev. Tindley along with

musical notes and a large image of St. Paul United Methodist Church, the largest Black

church in Berlin. The edges of the mural extended outside of the flat brick area onto the

textured form stone. This was an artistic decision that mirrored a mural of Harriette

Tubman located in Cambridge, her birthplace two hours away from Berlin. In that mural

Harriette seems to step out of the frame towards the viewer. In the Rev. Tindley mural,

the extended edges also seem to bring the images closer to the viewer. A large open book

takes up a significant amount of space in the bottom left corner of the mural representing

Rev. Tindley's connection to reading and learning. Although the mural is located on a

side street, the face of Rev. Tindley can be seen from Main Street. He seems to be

looking down on Berlin from this vantage point (see Figure 17).

Figure 17

Rev. Charles Albert Tindley Mural Dedication

For the dedication, people began to fill in the area in front of the podium and

elderly folks took the seats under the tent. Copies of the dedication program were handed

out along with brochures highlighting the Tindley exhibit recently completed at the

Taylor House Museum located a few hundred yards from the location of the mural.

Gregory was the emcee, his powerful, deep voice booming out over the crowd of about

one hundred people. The dedication was rich in spoken word, including a brief history of

Rev. Tindley, and acknowledgment of local funding sources but a much deeper emotional

level was reached when the choir sang.

The choir was composed entirely of descendants of Rev. Tindley and his extended

family. They had originally been organized by Bonita Tindley as part of Black History

Month Celebrations at the elementary school in Berlin. They closed the mural dedication

by singing the hymn "By and By," written by Rev. Tindley, a staple of gospel hymns

sung in the Black church. The song's universality was evident once the choir reached the

chorus, when ninety percent of the audience spontaneously joined in. And each time they

reached the chorus the voices got louder with the audience clapping their hands to keep

time. Those moments of all voices singing in unison seemed to crystalize the feelings of

community and connectedness that had been a part of the planning for the mural and

museum exhibit (see Figure 18).

Figure 18

The Tindley Family Choir Performing at the Mural Dedication

As one of the event participants said:

> It's…beyond what I imagined; the music was really, really touching. I…wanted …to show my support, see what was going on in town. And I was really impressed with the amount of people that showed up, and how supportive everybody is, and everybody's just seems so happy…I'm really, really proud of our town today.

Another event participant echoed those thoughts:

> I thought the event was lovely. People were lovely. They were kind, they were appreciative. And the music, the choir singing was inspirational, to say the least. I just loved it. It brought the community together. I was happy to see so many people in attendance. Hopefully we'll do more of this and we'll get more people on board. And I smile every time I drive past it.

The mural dedication happened within a few weeks of the opening of the Rev. Tindley and Briddelltown exhibits at the Taylor House Museum. These exhibits and events were the result of hours of civic dialogue (Coogan, 2006) where community members collaborated to share information through storytelling and discussions. It was evident that each participant brought a particular set of skills to the design and implementation of these exhibits and mural dedication. Each person had a role to play that was very unique and specific from the others, yet the act of sharing their gifts created a cohesive whole. Committee members and community partners seemed to me like patches of a quilt, each person represented by their own square made of individual colors and shapes. When pieced together, those individual squares formed a single beautiful quilt.

Through sharing their gifts, the research participants collaborated to design and implement museum exhibits focused on local Black historical stories. Collaboration among Committee members and community partners led to other actions beyond the museum exhibits. Each specific gift fit together in creating the actions of sharing Black historical stories. This sharing of gifts has its roots in social literacy theory and its assertion that literacy is intertwined with "a large number of other social factors, including political and economic conditions, social structure and local ideologies" (Gee, 2015, p.43). Sharing of participants' gifts and funds of knowledge, throughout this participatory action research was an example of social literacy in action.

Social Literacies in Berlin

Barton and Hamilton (1998) describe literacy as "essentially social … located in the interaction between people" (p. 3). The mural dedication illustrated that definition of literacy through the interaction of the choir and audience singing together. The song "By and By" has been a staple hymn sung in Black churches all over the country. As Gregory explained:

> [My wife and I] went to California in 2000 and so we just wanted to go to a church and so we went to this big, I think it was a Baptist church actually, but it was named New Bethel and that's why we decided to go to it. And so, when we were there, and we were sitting in the audience, and they sang By and By and I had everything in me to get up and say that song comes from a man from my hometown.

Literacy practices came from the collective understanding of the song. And from a sense of community ownership of the song. Terry also provided context for that collective

understanding with her comments about the song's origins: "Didn't they say that "By and By" come from out of pain?" She also shared her feeling and associations surrounding the song: "Well by and by" (Terry singing) … Oh my god. It made me want to be back in my church just hearing that." The choir and the audience at the mural dedication had a "shared cognition" (Barton & Hamilton, 1998 p. 7) of the significance of that particular hymn.

The shared action of singing the hymn together provided an example of a literacy practice as defined by Barton and Hamilton (1998), "practices are the social processes which connect people with one another, and they include shared cognitions represented in ideologies and social identities" (p. 7). Prior knowledge of the song was crucial; it spoke to that collective understanding. Most of the audience grew up singing the hymn in church; they understood the themes of overcoming and faith in a greater plan. The literacy power came about because of the collective knowing. During this mural dedication "literacy bec[ame] a community resource, realized in social relationships rather than a property of individuals" (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 12). The meaning made through interactions of the audience and the choir illustrate sharing gifts as a form of social literacy resulting from the collaboration of community members in telling historical Black stories. The mural dedication and the mural itself were gifts shared with the community. The experience of the whole audience singing together with the choir brought everyone together, providing a shared experience of both Black and white community members that was not often seen in downtown Berlin.

Specific Gifts Shared by Participant

Focusing

Most of the Planning Committee and Briddell Family Committee meetings tended to go much longer than I had planned. During these meetings many stories and personal experiences were shared (Fabius, 2016), which lead to the sharing of other stories and experiences unrelated to the museum exhibit. Although discourse was a "key component in knowledge construction and validation" (Kittleson & Southerland, 2004, p. 268), and even though a lot of information was gained in these conversations, focus was needed regularly to keep the process moving forward.

Terry (Planning Committee), Vi (Briddell Family Committee) and Kwanza (Briddell Family Committee) all played a role in their respective committees in focusing conversations when they drifted away from the topic at hand. Terry's experience as a teacher was evident in her ability to ask questions that focused the group discussions. She utilized open questions that encouraged the participants to share ideas, invent possibilities and justify their opinions (Chin, 2004). Terry often used productive questions, a type of open question that focused on attention-focusing, measuring, comparison, action, problem-posing, and reasoning (Chin, 2004), asking "So what do we want? What do we want people to know?" Her pointed questions kept everyone focused on the task at hand (Richardson, 2002). Terry was intent on making sure that the information shared in the Reverend Tindley exhibit was accurate, as noted in the previous finding, especially information regarding Rev. Tindley and his connections to local churches. There are several Black churches in Berlin, and several claim to have a connection with Rev.

Tindley. The Planning Committee struggled with an accurate portrayal of those

relationships:

> Terry: What would the verbiage be for those two churches that...
>
> Melissa: Local connection?
>
> Terry: Local Connection? I think that, then you're not saying he preached there,
>
> you're not saying that he attended there, He just had a connection Yeah.
>
> Clara: That way you don't offend anybody, and everybody's happy to do it.
>
> Arnold: And if we find more information, we can add it

Terry's questions often made the Planning Committee pause and reflect on what we were

doing, ensuring we fulfilled our original intent as seen in the following excerpt:

> I understand Arnold all what you're saying. I understand all this history and why
>
> [its] important. What I'm trying to understand is what is the end goal here? What
>
> are we trying. [to say]?... Thought this information is great, you just told me
>
> something yesterday, I didn't know…. But where are we going with this?

Terry played the same role on the committee that planned the Rev. Tindley mural. The

committee had many conversations about what images should be included in the mural.

Terry became very concerned that people would not recognize Rev. Tindley because the

images that were originally chosen were not ones that most people would recognize:

"With that mural, I do not, I did not know who that was if this picture wasn't up there. I

would not have known who that guy was sitting in that chair." She spoke to the woman in

charge of the mural committee, expressing her concerns and the more recognizable image

was ultimately used in the final mural.

Terry's focused commitment to the process of creating both the exhibit and mural was evident in all aspects of this research. Before her initial interview with me, she asked for the questions ahead of time. Then on the day of the interview she wanted to work though her answers to the questions before I began recording. We sat together for about an hour and a half talking about what she wanted to say during the interview. She chose each word carefully to ensure the words represented exactly what she meant. The discussion also provided an opportunity for me to clarify my purpose for asking specific questions, and what information I was asking the interviewees to share during the interviews (Talmage, 2012, p. 296). The revised interview questions provided a more collaborative focus on how to keep the projects moving forward. Terry's gift of focused engagement to this project helped us craft a more complete and accurate celebration of Rev. Tindley. She worked to help us answer her own questions; "So what do we want? What do we want people to know?"

Kwanza, like Terry, shared her gift of focus in the Briddell Family Committee meetings. She is the daughter of James, one of the Briddell family historians. Kwanza played a key role in focusing group dynamics. Reflecting what Lewis-Ellison (2016) observed about history shared in story form, the Briddell family history was shared in many lengthy discussions throughout the process of planning the exhibit. Robert, the older brother of James commented on their process: "Well see, cause what we're doing is we're reminiscing. (But now) Let's look at it from facts." In this instance reminiscing served as "complicated expressive instruments" (Carter-Black, 2007, p.35) that characterized Black storytelling. Kwanza kept the family members focused on the facts:

> let's, let's bring it back together for a second because… you want to talk about the
>
> stories, (but the) focus is what do we think are the most prominent things that
>
> should be displayed? So yes, we need to discuss some of the history, but the
>
> question is not going into the cemetery, okay, we know the lineage, we know how
>
> many generations. The question is what is the most prominent piece of history of
>
> Briddelltown and the Briddell family that we think she should be displayed? So
>
> [when] a total stranger comes in, what should they know?

She often interrupted lengthy storytelling with comments such as "Follow me, follow

me" and "listen to my questions".

Vi was another Briddell family member involved in the Briddell Family

Committee discussions and also brought the gift of focuser of group discussions. At one

point during a family meeting, the discussion had drifted and Vi brought it back on track:

> Right now, you know we don't need to be concerned about them. [other branches
>
> of the Briddell family]. We're gonna be concerned about what we got from there,
>
> and what she needs from us. Because there is a whole lot of Briddells right? A
>
> whole lot.

Both Kwanza and Vi understood the "relationships and social pathways" (Larson &

Moses, 2018, p.107) of their family. This understanding was a gift they used to reassure

and focus the family to ensure the Briddelltown exhibit represented the family history in

a coherent way.

Collaboration and Reassurance Among Committee Members

Women typically are the drivers of support systems in the Black Community

(Richardson, 2002). This proved to be the case in this research study as well, with several

women bringing gifts of collaboration and reassurance. Velda often spoke of working

together, "So I think we all have a little piece that we play in this, no matter how big or

small it is, we're always a group. And we're working through this." She was not one of

the most outspoken members of the Planning Committee, yet when she spoke it was

usually to present an idea for the physical exhibit, such as creating the central focus of the

Rev. Tindley exhibit, bringing up the importance of collaboration among people and

groups (Carter & Conrad, 2012). It was Velda's idea to merge the Planning Committee

from the Taylor House Museum with the Rev. Tindley mural committee: "We have, like

the mural people, and you have (the Planning Committee) … should we come together?".

The two groups merged and continued to meet after the mural and exhibit were finished.

At the time of this writing, they still are meeting, even after the end of formal data

collection for this research study.

Vi took part in two of the family meetings held to decide what information should

be presented in the Briddelltown exhibit at the Taylor House Museum. At the first

meeting she mainly listened to the information being shared by other family members.

The times she did speak, she worked to find consensus within the group:

> Vi: "Which goes back to George and Martha, and more George and Martha and
>
> Jacob so we can stop to five [generations]. It's fine with me. What y'all think
>
> about that? Y'all think it's fine to stop at five [generations]?".
>
> Bink:" It's fine with me too."

She asked the group what they thought, and in that act of collaboration Vi moved the

group past areas where they were stuck (Ellison & Solomon, 2019).

The Briddell Family Committee spent approximately 6 hours working through land ownership and family tree connections. But on more than one occasion, Vi provided the reassurance the family needed to move past the sticking points and continue to collaborate on working out information to present in the exhibit. In the following example, Vi is reassuring committee members during a discussion of where to include the family tree in the exhibit:

> Right, there you go, and take it from there, that would be fine because from there everything's going to have to fall in place. Okay, everything will fall right in place there. Okay. And wherever it ends up at, it, ends up where you're at ...where it's at now."

Family members followed her lead and moved on in the conversations.

The committee members' gifts of collaboration and reassurance illustrated individual actions that supported other participants in the exhibit planning meetings (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). Their funds of knowledge were used to create an environment where people felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and trying out ideas (Larson & Moses, 2018). As was true with the Planning Committee meetings, I looked forward to the Briddell Family Committee meetings because everyone supported each other. People were respected and listened to, and I think both exhibits reflected the collaborative nature of the group.

Visual Images

Pat is a celebrated local artist whose artwork was chosen by the Planning Committee to be incorporated into the exhibit on Rev. Tindley. These included a quarter-length portrait of Rev. Tindley, paintings of the stained-glass windows from St Paul

United Methodist Church and a drawing of Tindley Temple (Rev. Tindley's last church

in Philadelphia). Pat's portrait of Rev. Tindley carried special significance for the

Planning Committee and their vision for the exhibit. It was originally commissioned by a

university group in Maryland to be part of a series of paintings of prominent Black

Americans to be displayed in each county of Maryland. As Pat explained:

> Reverend Dr. Charles Albert Tindley is one of the most noted pastors and
>
> songwriters in the United States. But the most paradoxical thing about Reverend
>
> Tindley is he's barely notice here in his own county…. Their desire was to have
>
> my image of Reverend Tindley [have a] home in the Worcester County Library in
>
> Snow Hill. Well, lo and behold, I got a call or notice that that was rejected, that
>
> they didn't want to hang the painting of Reverend Tinley, and this was around
>
> 1985, 1986. So, whoever was part of the administration, during that period of time
>
> down to the library, decided that they didn't want to hang the painting down there.
>
> Ironically, [it] didn't surprise me. There were not major things as far as the racial
>
> inequality in Worcester County, but it was there. And this was just a prime
>
> example of a few people dictating something that affects a broad expanse of
>
> people.

As a collaborator on this research, I felt a special poignancy with this artwork. This

research was focused on sharing and understanding local Black historical stories, yet this

painting represented the suppression of local Black stories. The original painting now

hangs in the church hall of St. Paul United Methodists Church in Berlin. Several

members of the Planning Committee knew the history of the painting, so the decision was

made to use a reproduction of Pat's painting as the main image of the exhibit, therefore

providing greater access to the image (see Figure 19).

Figure 19

Painted Portrait of Rev. Tindley
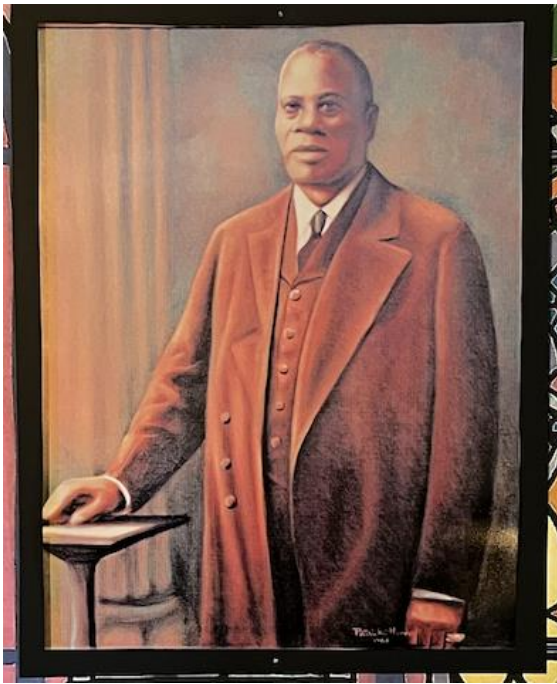
As Pat explained, his artwork "was my expression of a time and place of my life

that tells the story." This quote could easily describe all his paintings, they all tell a story

of either a person or place, sometimes both (Serafini, 2022). Pat has also used

photographs to share historical stories in the Black community in the past several years.

He explained:

> Velda's Aunt Maude passed away. Her mother was executor of the estate, and
>
> they were cleaning the house. Velda went by and here was this bag of old vintage
>
> photos that Velda's Aunty Maude had. This was a 1996. And these photos were
>
> from the late 1800s forward. Velda brought them home. And I just was so
>
> fascinated. So, from 1998 to 2019, was where I started gathering these

photographs. (I) eventually started scanning them, cleaning them up, and then

printing them.

 With those photos Pat created an exhibit at the Germantown School Museum.

Community members came together at the exhibit to share stories and experiences

connected to those photographs. That exhibit provided the Black community in Berlin a

chance to share their community expertise through the action of dialogue focused on the

stories represented in those photographs (Flower & Street, 2000). Viewing the photos

provided the Black community with an opportunity to engage in social literacy practices

where they co-constructed a collective sense of who they were.

Based on the photographs Pat created a series of painting that represented local

Black historical stories. As Pat stated: "That series really showed a people that was able

to, you know, once freedom started, they, they went into their various arenas of activities

and excelled at and it's something that I want to continue to research and to portray."

According to Pat, his life's work will now be focused on painting images of local Black

community members based on the original photos from Velda's Aunt Maude. Pat's

artwork showed that historical stories can be documented and shared in other ways

besides the spoken or written word (Saal & Gomez, 2019, p. 467). Although this action

research documented the actions of community members in sharing local Black historical

stories in Berlin, as is evident in Pat's experiences there have been previous opportunities

to share those stories in Berlin. This research helped to add other opportunities.

Spoken Voices

Storytellers and their voices have always had an important place in Black

American culture (Goss & Barnes, 1989 p. 9). Gregory, whose voice sets him apart, was

a storyteller in the Berlin community. He had "an idea of what needs to be remembered, what should be celebrated, what is important for residents to know" (Kammen, 2014, p. 1). Gregory shared his historical information in story form (Larson & Moses, 2018, p. xi), often combining biblical references with local history: "So we were known almost like by the 12 tribes [of Israel] And that's how the community began to spread out and so forth." He described himself this way:

> I've been fashioned as a local historian. Because I've delved into [local history] I'm a part of so many families, and I have always been a listener. After I became an adult, listening, tying all of these things together, Lord has blessed me with the good recall. And I've been able to stitch together a, a quilt of Berlin history…that I'm willing to share.

Gregory had a deep commitment to the community, believing that his gifts:

> Don't make me necessarily special, but because I'm the conduit by which all of this comes through, then I think it's important that I'm able to share what I have experienced and what I have on my mind. I don't try to go beyond that. You know, I stopped where uh, I know that there could be a question of facts or whatever in history that I've learned and so forth questionable things and so forth. But still, I've been able to experience them. So, sharing them in the group or with you, or however, it becomes my duty. I think of it as a duty, I think that my grandmother would have me to, to do that.

From the beginning stages of the Planning Committee, it was understood that any narration in the Rev. Tindley exhibit would be done by Gregory. As Terry stated:

> Greg has the voice for it. Yeah, he really has. We think of his [Rev. Tindley]
>
> stature. You can almost imagine what his voice would be like… Yeah, I can hear
>
> Greg going through and pulling out. His voice pulling up, I mean, just that
>
> passage hearing the passion that he would have with saying that.

As Gregory sees it, his voice allows him to "speak from my experience, and it just kind

of allows me to voice what I know to be the truth and try to put it into play." Gregory's

voice makes people stop talking and listen, as is evident in the following recording of a

sermon in the Taylor House Museum's exhibit on Rev Charles Albert Tindley:

https://www.taylorhousemuseum.org/sermons.

> Gregory acted as the voices of ancestors who had gone before us: he was the

weight of history (Fabius, 2016). At one point, Arnold was sharing information he knew

about Rev. Tindley and Terry lightheartedly remarked: "Arnold are you taking Greg's job

[as] the Berlin historian?" Gregory's gifts helped create a more emotive exhibit, with his

voice conveying emotions that the written word failed to convey. As one museum visitor

stated, "the narrator's cadence and intonation make him sound like a minister."

Singing Voices

> Music played an important role in Rev. Tindley's life (Tindley, 1942). The

sermons and hymns that he wrote were tightly intertwined. Therefore, the Planning

Committee felt strongly that his music be a part of the exhibit. As Brian explained:

> From an audio perspective, if we get if we get one to two voices to a few of these
>
> sermon excerpts, that's gonna be super powerful. Yeah, and I think if we can get
>
> two or three more songs to go with verse chorus…they don't even have to be full
>
> songs.

The Planning Committee reached out to Bonita, who is a great grandniece of Rev. Tindley. Bonita was instrumental in organizing the Tindley Family Choir, which played an essential part in sharing the history of Rev. Charles Albert Tindley in several different locations in Berlin.

The choir was originally formed in January of 2022 to sing as part of Local Black History Month Celebrations held at the elementary school located in Berlin. It consisted of family members who were all related in some way to Rev. Tindley. They came from New Jersey, Philadelphia, and parts of the Eastern Shore of Maryland. The choir recorded some excerpts from some of Rev. Tindley's most famous hymns, which were then edited into a video that described Rev. Tindley's music and his impact on the Black church. The video was shown to all students during the month of February to celebrate Black History Month. This celebration was another example of some places in Berlin where Black historical stories were told.

Because of that initial connection with Terry and Brian, the Tindley Family Choir became an integral part of the Tindley Mural Dedication. In an interview Bonita described how they felt about singing:

> But if you just keep singing it and singing it and singing it over and over, it penetrates your spirit, and it gets down and you really feel it. You feel what you're singing about. So, I think music is just, it's everything. We have several singers and songstress in our family, we really have a talented family. And this is just in our DNA.

It was important to Bonita that the music be grounded in the historical context of Black American history:

Music is so strong. And I mean any genre, but I know for sure, I feel that black

African American hymns Well, you know, back in slave days, they would sing

when they were in the field working. And that's what we like you said what you

play when you have a bad day. That's what they would sing when they would get

through, just to get through that day.

This presented Black hymns as more than just singing. In the Black culture the songs

were a form of social literacy; they connected and supported people, in a collective

shared experience (Goss, 1989). The songs represented a way of sharing information

among groups (Banks-Wallace, 2002). Bonita described how the family choir saw their

role:

But when you look back over some of these songs, and the words, they really,

really move you and I think the family is so appreciative of being there, they are

proud. You know, and that's their gift, just a way of giving back to him. He

doesn't know what we're doing. But we know what this is for you [Rev. Tindley].

We're doing this for you [Rev. Tindley] …We're singing your [Rev. Tindley]

songs. We're praising God for your [Rev. Tindley] songs.

The sharing of literacy gifts such as singing, within participants began to "build

connections between our everyday lives and the literacy practices that lead to change"

(Larson & Moses, 2018, p. 5).

 That change was connected to sharing Black historical stories, where sharing those

stories helped enlighten the Berlin community to the diverse history of the town. The

mural dedication was a tangible action of enlightenment. As Gregory stated, "putting a

Black man on a wall in downtown Berlin is a momentous occasion." The shared gifts of

focusing, collaboration, reassurance, visual images, spoken voices and singing voices all illustrated how community members collaborated to design and implement museum exhibits that demonstrated local Black multimodal historical storytelling. I leave you with the voices of the Tindley Family Choir singing at the Rev. Tindley mural dedication in downtown Berlin. (https://www.taylorhousemuseum.org/hymns)

Stitching Patches Together: Connecting Networks Utilized in Designing and Implementing Museum Exhibits

Upon opening the heavy front door of the Taylor House Museum, visitors entered the main hallway of the historic house. Just inside the door a stairway leads to exhibit space on the second floor. The wooden staircase is steep with a banister painted in a faux finish popular in the 1830s. At the top of the stairs, visitors can turn right into an exhibit space that was one of the original bedrooms of the house.

When the house was adapted as museum space, the decision was made to turn this secondary bedroom into exhibit space, rather than replicate another 1830s bedroom. Some original features remain, such as the wide plank wood floors and a large fireplace on one wall of the room, two windows look out over the side lawn of the museum. Some of the floorboards have been replaced and part of the floor creaks loudly, often startling visitors. The fireplace has an unusual cabinet built into the side of it, above the mantel piece, we have no idea of the purpose of the cabinet. The fireplace is located next to a narrow doorway that leads into a larger gallery space. The doorway was originally a window on the back wall of the bedroom. Track lighting dating from the late 1980s attached to the center of the ceiling illuminated the displays.

The room is a quirky space, which matches the quirky nature of previous exhibits in this space throughout the years. Displays in this space have focused on the town's Fire Department, local businesses, and the founder of the local bank and previous owner of the house: Calvin B. Taylor. Next to a previous exhibit on Rev. Tindley, there was an exhibit on Ned France, a local magician who owned a junk shop on Main Street in Berlin from the 1950s until the 1980s. One whole wall was taken up with an exhibit highlighting the 1938 horse race between War Admiral and Seabiscuit that had been called the Race of the Century. Many artifacts in this room were donated by local families, highlighting the community connection with the museum. But prior to 2018 the majority of artifacts and stories in this room were centered on white Berlin history. Within the last two years, the museum board and staff decided to focus on more diverse historical stories, creating an opening for other exhibits in the room like Isaiah Fassett, a Black civil war veteran who was manumitted to fight for the Union Army, and an expanded exhibit on Rev. Tindley. This room was dedicated to sharing the stories of important people of Berlin and is the space where the Planning Committee installed an expanded exhibit focused on the life of Rev. Charles Albert Tindley. If the Briddelltown exhibit illustrated meaning made with artifacts and narratives by collectively discussing ownership of artifacts and information, then the Tindley exhibit illustrates how connecting networks were critical to sharing local Black historical stories.

These networks are at heart a "story about relationships and how crucial they are to effecting any kind of change" (Larson & Moses, 2018, p. 1). They illustrate the way in which community members collaborated on museum exhibits. They also showed how family members made meaning with artifacts used in the exhibits. The connecting

networks were also used to create more access to local Black historical stories. They were

instrumental "in getting things done in groups, when finding out information, in

providing mutual support (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 16).

Community played a key role in the networks that participants created in the

actions of this study. The participants formed a community that was "a symbol for

egalitarianism, the quest for a place where every individual is recognized as an equal

member of the community with entitlements and responsibilities commensurate with their

ability to serve the greater good" (Hill-Collins, 2010, p. 25). This concept was supported

by Clara:

> It wasn't from one point of view; it was a collective point of view. People [came]
>
> together [to] talk about the issues and said, "Well, I heard such and such as my
>
> parents said such and such." And so, we compromised. And we found a way to
>
> work through it. That is the beauty of a community committed to making things
>
> better for everyone.

In this study, these everyday literacies of dialogue and collaboration were locally defined

and socially constructed (Larson & Moses 2018, p.38), therefore supporting the theory of

community literacy.

Community Literacy in Berlin

The community literacy documented in this study was an "intercultural dialogue

with others on issues that *they* identif(ied) as sites of struggle" (Flower, 2008, p. 19).

Flower's concept was supported by Shaneka's comment on the Briddelltown exhibit:

> First off, that we're even in the Taylor Museum [is a big step] because if you look
>
> upstairs, have any of you all been upstairs? Yeah. The only Black people upstairs

> is the man with the applecart and maybe one other person, and I can tell you that
>
> myself for at least the last 20 years, have thought so are you kidding me? Just the
>
> only Black man.

The Taylor House Museum has for most of its existence focused mainly on telling the

white history of Berlin. The Planning Committee and Briddell Family Committee's work,

in creating two new exhibits focused on telling Black historical stories, continued the

process of dispelling that idea. The creation of these exhibits allowed the committee

members to co-construct a public dialogue that cut across differences of culture, class,

race, and power (Flower, 2008, p. 19). They had the "explicit goals of discovery and

change" (Flower, 2008, p. 19).

As Arnold stated:

> I think it will bring certain people together that probably wouldn't walk in the
>
> same footsteps at the same time. Bringing people together, is always [an]
>
> important thing. Strengthening partnerships that already exist, is also very
>
> important, especially when you are always working with someone in a different
>
> setting…And now they get to see the other side of you. That's always about us.
>
> And a lot of it is going to be about us and how we can move forward.

Or as Terry put it: "I want to learn more; I want to learn more. History is something else"

This sense of exploration by the Planning Committee and Briddell Family Committee

could also be called a co-construction of meaning (Flower, 2008). Here, co-construction

of negotiated meaning was also grounded in speaking *for* something (p.83), not just

against something. Planning committee members and Briddell family members were

focused on sharing stories through the lens of empowerment, not oppression. As Harriette

stated: "I also think of this self-educated man, I was in education too, that always strikes me that he came from nothing and, and just used every ounce of potential in his body to become great." James echoed the same sentiment about his family's history:

> To me the most important thing about Briddell and Briddelltown like what
> Donnie is saying is that my, our ancestors were able to, I told you this before,
> were able to purchase land in Bridddelltown immediately after the Civil War,
> right. So, between 1865 when the war was declared over, our ancestors were able
> to purchase land as free black people in that area, and because of that, we still
> had… our heritage.

The actions of community literacy were grounded in empowerment and equity in historical storytelling in Berlin. Community literacy's success comes from a sense of connectedness with participants: they created networks of connection (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010). These connected networks were stitched together through Berlin's Black community, in the church, in family connections and in the multimodality of the Tindley exhibit.

The Evolution of the Rev. Tindley exhibit

In previous years, there was a small exhibit on Rev. Tindley located in the second-floor museum room described above. His exhibit was located next to a much larger exhibit dedicated to Ned France, the local magician and junk shop owner. The original Rev. Tindley exhibit had an outdated map, with limited information. It was heavily dependent on text with just the basic facts and no context of his life in the larger history of the town, region, or country. Figure 20 shows the space as it looked the first time the Planning Committee saw it.

Figure 20

View of the Exhibit Space Previously Showcasing a Local Magician and Junk Shop Owner. The Old Rev. Tindley Exhibit is On the Left Side of the Space.

Over the course of six months the Planning Committee worked together to create an exhibit that they felt would tell a more complete story of Rev. Tindley. The members of the committee had many connecting networks that were utilized in the process of creating the exhibit. For example, Arnold served as the historian at St. Paul United Methodist Church in Berlin. Through this connection he was able to loan the museum some contemporary copies of published sermons by Rev. Tindley. Velda also had connections with St. Paul that were useful for her idea for the physical layout of the exhibit: "Have a couple of stained-glass windows, or like a picture of that. And then other artifacts." Her idea led us to copy paintings her husband Pat had done of the stained-glass windows at St. Paul. Rev. Tindley was involved in the dedication service at St. Paul when it was expanded and rebuilt in the early 1900s. As Arnold explained, "when it was dedicated in 1915, he walked leading the congregation and ministers both Black and

white to this location and dedication of this church." The copies of sermons and the stained-glass windows provided local connections to the exhibit.

During the first Planning Committee meeting held at St. Paul's we saw the original painting that Pat had done of Rev. Tindley. Once we heard the back story behind the painting (described in the previous section on Sharing Gifts) the Planning Committee knew we wanted that image of Rev. Tindley to be the main image in the exhibit. As Arnold stated, "Well, one thing, you'll actually see the same image, which you see him over and over again, that Patrick Henry rendition, which is definitely comes from a photo that he does have, and that actually sees the bigger stature [of Rev. Tindley]." Gregory's connection to the museum ensured that his voice would be used to narrate excerpts of Rev. Tindley's sermons. All these connecting networks were utilized create a more personal exhibit, connecting Rev. Tindley to Berlin. As Velda said:

> I think the best part was coming up the stairs when it after it was finished, and seeing it for the first time, put together and be able, with technology, go up and be able to hear the sermons, Greg [reading] the sermons and things like that. Seeing it all come together, because we'd had meetings and we talked [about] this piece and that piece.

Figure 21 shows the expanded exhibit.

Figure 21

Annotated Photograph of the Completed Rev. Tindley Exhibit

A Tindley family member also commented on the expanded exhibit:

> I was at the museum. Maybe two years ago, I got started doing some research on
>
> Charles Albert Tindley and it was some, I won't say a micro exhibit, but it was a
>
> lot smaller than what it is now. So, when I was there a few months ago, I was like,
>
> wow, you know, they've expanded it so much. And they've added to even the
>
> technology part that's been added.

The expansion and meaning laden nature of the updated exhibit were rooted in

connections within the community.

Community Connections Within Berlin

The word community was used over 290 times in recorded interviews and conversations during this research project. Hill-Collins (2010) defined community as: "a principle of actual social organization and an idea that people use to make sense and shape of their everyday lived realities" (p. 8). That definition was brought to life by Gregory's words:

> My grandmother was a community person. And everybody knew her, and everybody used to come by the house and all that. And so I learned a lot about people about their relationships, their families, and…who's related. And then after you become, you know, older, you realize, whoa, it is this, everybody is kind of related, regardless of surname.

Community was the touchstone of the work done at the museum, on the mural, and at other events described in this study. "The local matters" (Carter & Conrad, 2012 p. 101) in the process of creating the museum exhibits and other events. The networks utilized by the participants could only have been created by people with authentic connections to their community (Larson & Moses, 2018, p. 6). The following quote from Kwanza represents the feeling shared by all the participants in this study:

> We have always been raised to give back to the community. [When I get asked] why do we have to give back? Well, I can use the examples of our forefathers, you know, my elders, to say, this is why we gave back, this is why it's important. This is what our family this is what we do, this is who we are, you know, we love and help each other. But we give back to the community. So, I just think it's my responsibility.

The idea of helping others was echoed by Arnold: "Well, wherever I'm a part of the committee out there I see partnership, working with other individuals for a common goal."

The actions taken in this research study created a space for a local public sphere, grounded in mutual intercultural inquiry (Flower, 2008, p. 5), inquiry that celebrates diversity while seeking common ground. Members of the Planning Committee from various segments of the Berlin community worked together to co-construct meaning around Black historical stories. In this public sphere no one person was the expert. Everyone brought their own area of expertise founded upon their own personal lived experience (Barton & Hamilton, 1996). As Terry stated:

> I see my role as being a bridge or a liaison for the Taylor [House] Museum to help gather information and resources from community members and from the African American community.

Her actions supported these words; when the Planning Committee felt strongly that church choir music should play a large role in telling the story of Rev. Tindley in the exhibit, Terry knew right away who to ask, "I spoke with Bertha Purnell at St. Paul's. She's just going to ask Ashley, and Larry Duffy …and Mary White at St. John Sinepauxent and Roxanne Rounds from St. John, they have agreed…They all are willing to do it." In that way she embodied the concept of finding "pathways through and between hubs" (Larson & Moses, 2018, p. 108). Terry also felt strongly that a member of the Tindley family be a part of the Planning Committee. She reached out to Bonita Tindley, who subsequently joined the Planning Committee. As Bonita said: "I think Terry Smith was one that contacted me, and she said, you know, Bonita, I thought about it, you

know, how can you have something of this magnitude and not have a Tindley family, you

know, Tindley family member, be a part of it." Bonita's family played a role in both the

Rev. Tindley exhibit and the mural dedication. The family choir also represented another

network of connection; the church as a cornerstone of Black community life.

The Way to Anything in the Black Community is Through the Church

The importance of the church, and of faith in the Black community established

itself from the very start of this action research. At the suggestion of Arnold and Gregory,

the first Planning Committee meeting was held at St. Paul United Methodist Church in

Berlin. The location of this first meeting helped ground the Planning Committee in the

significance of Rev. Tindley in both the Black church and Black culture (Carter-Black,

2007, p. 34).

Church connections also played a big part in the Briddell Family Committee

conversations. At one point the family was discussing what the title of the exhibit should

be and they spoke about the role that faith plays in their family. "We had a whole bunch

of shirts, but we had one shirt for our family [that said] the family that prays together

stays together, I will put it as a title."

The church has historically served many roles in the Black community, as

Woolford stated in Hesser & Ewers (2021) "the church was the center of the Black

community, a community center of sorts, where people knew that on at least one day a

week…everything would be alright…it represented healing from the pain and agony of

what happened to that group of people outside its church walls" (p. 95). The church was a

place that protected and nurtured Black culture, including aspects of literacy (Wynter-

Hoyte & Boutte, 2018, p. 376). They were places where learning took place, as Gregory explained:

> Arnold saying is that the churches were the schools and so forth… and before (the Rosenwald schools were built) it was almost illegal to learn to read and to write because if you learn to read and write you know what your rights were.

Church represented a place to engage in "literacy practices that embraced the community" (Wynter-Hoyte & Boutte, 2018, p. 383). Information was shared communally, as Velda stated:

> The way to [do] anything in the Black community is through the church. If you want to get something out, you talk to the pastor, and see if you have maybe five minutes to speak to the congregation and tell them what you're doing, when you're going to do it. And what are you looking for.

While the church had strong connections to Rev. Tindley, and the museum exhibit, family connections were the main focus of the Briddell family meetings that took place to decide what the Taylor House Museum's Briddelltown exhibit would look like.

Family Connections Among Briddells and Tindleys

The Briddelltown exhibit and the Rev. Tindley exhibit both had strong connections to family. The Briddelltown exhibit was created by family members, while the Rev. Tindley exhibit was enhanced by the video of the family choir performing. These actions involved participants in family literacy practices, where families were able to "to think and act more freely…thus creating potential for more democratic and innovative familial unions" (Lewis Ellison & Wang, 2018, p. 52). This freedom was evident in the interaction of the Briddell Family Committee during the planning meetings

for the exhibit. Their conversations were indicative of the support system necessary to

keep family ties going and to preserve family history (Rodgers, 2006) as evident in the

way Briddell Family Committee members worked together to help each other make

family history connections even when they disagreed. Their exchanges also provided

examples of family history stories they carried within them without even realizing it

(Fabius, 2016). These community based oral testimonies (Ravitch & Carl, 2021),

provided the Briddells the opportunity to "tell their own stories in their own words and

convey their understandings of how their lives, communities, and national contexts shape

their experiences" (p. 158). I observed that when they all would come in the museum for

the meetings, they greeted each other, they called each other "cuz". They laughed with

each other, they joked with each other, sometimes there was a little bit of tension, but the

family members would also call each other out a little bit, which showed that they didn't

take it all too seriously. These observations were supported by James's description of his

family connections:

> The biggest part of that strength is that we're connected in that we love, and we
>
> take care of each other. And the only way that I can take care of you is to know
>
> that you exist, and the only way we can know that we exist, is from us recording it
>
> [our history], from things like… you're trying to help us do.

Their caring for each other was evident in places other than the meetings. Carol, the

museum volunteer who was helping the family with some property searches asked me to

drive her out to Briddelltown one day to check some addresses. We had stopped on the

side of the road to try to figure out an address of a house, when a man came out to ask us

what we were doing. As soon as we told him we were looking up family information for

James and Kwanza, his face relaxed and he told us to take as long as we needed, that if

we were doing work for James and Kwanza then we were ok. As Kwanza said "you just

have to say your last name is Briddell. And it's like, oh, and then the question is, how are

you related to me? What can I do to help you? So, your family you know."

       Bonita explained how Tindley family connections played a role in the actions of

this research study as well:

> But I think the biggest thing was bringing family together. That is a gift
>
> everybody can't do. I just think that was really important for the mural dedication.
>
> And for the song at Buckingham, you know, I had to ask these people, hey, do
>
> you want to be a part of this? And then none of them declined. And they all
>
> showed up.

In this quote her mention of Buckingham is a reference to the local elementary school

where the choir played a role in sharing stories about Rev. Tindley. Without Bonita's

connecting network of family, we would not have had access to the family choir. As

explained in previous findings, the Tindley family choir was integral in sharing local

Black historical stories. Family literacies were also utilized by members of the Tindley

family during COVID lockdowns when Bonita organized family zoom meeting:

> So, what we started doing was we had each family do a presentation on their,
>
> whether it was their grandfather, or their mother, there's a couple others, so they
>
> did, so we could find out a little bit more about the siblings. So, we did that, and
>
> I'll tell you we had some PowerPoint presentations which were out of the water.
>
> But not only did it just bring us together from the outside, there was some internal
>
> stuff. So, you'd had brothers and sisters and siblings working together to put

together pieces about their parents and finding out information about their parents

they didn't know about."

These family zooms enacted literacy using a media platform to share information

(Chaney, 2014, p. 32). The Tindley family's use of digital storytelling played "a critical

role in how families can use stories to communicate, interact, and compose meaning with

each other…these practices can help families understand their histories, themselves, and

their world" (Lewis Ellison & Wang, 2018, p. 55). Their digital storytelling led to the

family getting together for their first family reunion. Family reunions play an important

role in the Briddell family as well. Family connections, including family reunions,

provide an example of connecting networks that were utilized in designing museum

exhibits.

Family Reunions

In Black culture, family reunions serve a similar purpose as the Church, they are

places of support and strength to help bolster Black families as they face everyday racism

in the United States (McCoy, 2011). As Gregory stated they have also been places to

share family histories through storytelling "Well, we see them [storytelling] at family

reunions, and all of that type of thing. But it's never really chronological, that always

goes by year by year, and who's telling them and all of that when history is recorded."

Family reunions played a role in both the Briddell family and the Tindley family. The

Briddell family reunions have been going on for about 40 years. Family members spent a

lot of time discussing when the reunions first began:

James: "Donnie, it was 78 when we had the one at Tyree, is that correct? "

Donald: "I was talking about where it really started."

Vick: "If You're talking about church, it was at Tyree, but the family reunion

started before the church."

Donald: "You are talking way over 40."

Kwanza: "What year did you start it?"

Vick: "My daughter's 44, she wasn't born when we started the family reunion."

Kwanza: "I thought Sugar was born when we started the reunion. Wasn't I born?"

Shaneka: "Well, yes, you and I were born, but it was shortly after we were."

Kwanza: "That's what I'm saying. I'm almost like 47. Yeah, it was in 1978

because that's when Pop Pop Cliff died."

Donald: "I said it had been over 40."

Shaneka: "So that was the first year that you all had it at Aunt Sarah's first?"

Their family now has upwards of 500 people, and the family reunion spreads over three

days. The reunion was a cornerstone of Briddell family life, and they made sure that a

photo of the whole family taken during a reunion was included in the Briddelltown

exhibit. See Figure 22.

Figure 22

Briddell Family Reunion Photograph on Display in the Museum Exhibit
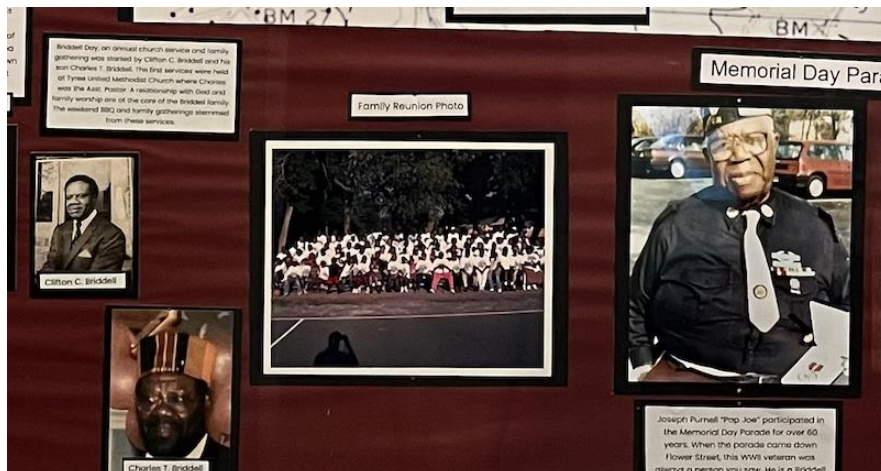
Including the photograph in the exhibit illustrated the meaning that the family co-constructed around artifacts during this action research. In this case the photo encapsulated the importance of family to the Briddell Family Committee. During the most recent Briddell family reunion weekend, about 25 family members came to see the Briddelltown exhibit. They stood in front of the exhibit for about twenty minutes or longer, sharing stories with each other based on family photos on display (Pahl & Rowsell, 2019). They repeatedly told the museum volunteers how much they appreciated the chance to see their family recognized in a museum. As one visitor said, "To see our family on display here is quite emotional, we feel proud of our heritage". James described his feeling of the family reunion: "And when we come together for family reunion, if you could see us at a family reunion. I don't think there's a movie made about a family reunion that has more fun than what we do." His thoughts were echoed by Bonita in her description of the Tindley family reunion: "You know, so I think reunions are just extremely important, bringing family together. And once again, not forgetting you know, your history, not forgetting your ancestry." The Tindley family reunion was a new tradition that resulted from the family zoom meetings held during COVID lockdowns.

Bonita invited several Planning Committee members to the reunion, which took place in Snow Hill about 15 miles south of Berlin. It was held in a local park along the edge of the river. There were about one hundred and fifty people there when we arrived. Barbeque grills were set up, along with a barbeque smoker that was presided over by a man chopping pork with a huge meat cleaver. Coolers of drinks were lined up next to a long table full of food including hot dogs, hamburgers, macaroni salad, baked beans, rolls

and coleslaw. Under a separate pavilion, tables were covered in brown paper waiting for

bushels of crabs.

A large poster was displayed on an easel with photos of family members. People

would walk up to look at the photos and share stories of the people pictured. The photos

and the resulting stories illustrated the use of "family events as teachable moments to

foster literacy and encourage intergenerational literacy between its members" (Chaney,

2014, p. 32). Music was playing on some speakers that had been set up. All the family

members had on white t-shirts that said #TeamTindley. One man was the emcee of the

event. He began by asking everyone to bow their heads for a benediction, then went on to

thank people and make family announcements. He specially thanked Bonita and another

woman, as the organizers of the event. At an interview held after the reunion, Bonita

described her role as organizer:

> And I call a couple of my closer family members that are here local. And I say
>
> look, I want to do this. I just, I just do not just want to walk away from this and
>
> wait until next year time is, you know, people are dying. And we don't want to be
>
> meeting up at a funeral. Let's just do this.

Bonita's role as organizer for her family reunion was mirrored in the Briddell family's

Aunt Sarah, who was the woman that organized the first Briddell reunion. "Aunt Sarah

was the one" James said "that had… contact with all of them. she was the one that kept

the family union intact." Both families utilized the support found in family connections

and their embodiment in family reunions. These connecting networks were instrumental

in the actions of this research study, where community members collaborated on

designing museum exhibits and planning the mural dedication.

Trying to Keep it Local: Multimodality of the Rev. Tindley Exhibit

Although community literacy was presented as the guiding literacy theory in this finding, multimodal literacies also played an important role in the creation of the Rev. Tindley exhibit. It was the actions grounded in the connections of community literacy that made the multimodality of the Tindley exhibit possible. All the parts of the exhibit had local connections specific to Berlin.

Throughout this section on connecting networks, I have described the ways participants constructed networks that helped create exhibits. These exhibits then provided access to local Black historical stories. In the case of the Rev. Tindley exhibit, the Planning Committee realized that utilizing multimodal material (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 1) would help tell his story in a more dynamic way. Multimodal materials included videos, audio recordings, drawings, a painting, photographs, and a map. These "semiotic modes" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 21) were able to tell the story of Rev. Tindley instead of relying solely on written words. Multimodal media worked "in constant interdependence with context, emotion, embodiment, and many other aspects of being human" (Heath & Street, 2008, p.11). Interdependence of media was evident in the final exhibit, with its use of tablets showcasing spoken and singing voices. All of the multimodal pieces of the exhibit were only possible because of the connecting networks of the Planning Committee.

Pahl and Rowsell (2011) define multimodality as "the understanding that we express meaning in different modes, that is, through gesture, visual media, oral media, and writing" (p. 5). The Planning Committee took up the possibilities afforded by multimodal sources when deciding what information would be shared in the exhibit and

how that information was shared. They worked with the understanding that "patterned

symbolic structure works in constant interdependence with context, emotion,

embodiment, and many other aspects of being human" (Heath & Street, 2008, p.11). The

connecting networks of the Planning Committee brought that human emotion to the

multimodal artifacts in the exhibit.

In the Rev. Tindley exhibit, these multimodal resources had their roots in

community connections. The recent rise of multimodality in how information is shared

has led to a shift in the hierarchy of that information sharing. That shift has opened

avenues for more people to be creators and presenters of content (Kress & Van Leeuwen,

2001). This shift was evident in this research project where community members were

the experts for the exhibits. Their funds of knowledge (González, 2006) and community

networks were used to find and assemble artifacts and content for the exhibit. The

community participants collaborated on the design choices to display those artifacts, and

content. As Arnold said:

> And then the end product was, it was awesome that everybody stood there and got
>
> a chance to move things and say, "this looks good here". And other people being
>
> smart enough to say "hey, you know, we defer, however you think [things should
>
> be]" at different times [during the creation of the exhibit].

Decisions were made about what to include in the exhibit but also how to exhibit the

information in a way that would convey the meaning the committee wanted (Kress &

Van Leeuwen, 2001). The Planning Committee asked the questions: What information

was available through our connecting networks? And what semiotic mode provided the

most effective way to present that information?

For example, including the images of the stained-glass windows "produces a different sensory response" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 34) than describing the windows using just written words. The fact that the images of the stained glass were done by Pat, and they were copies of the windows in the local Black church with connections to Rev. Tindley added another layer of meaning. Those added layers of meaning were only possible because of participant's connecting networks.

These choices of provenance (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001) played an important role in the content of the exhibit. The provenance of each part of the exhibit was intertwined with community connections. The Planning Committee wanted to include music, and there were a variety of videos available on-line of people singing hymns that Rev. Tindley wrote. But because Terry had a connection with a Tindley family member, we were able to include a video of the Tindley Family Choir singing his hymns. That video became an artifact in the exhibit that was layered with meanings. It conveyed the power of voices and song to convey meaning more deeply and more emotionally than the written word. It conveyed the importance of family and the importance that family members place on the Tindley name. This family pride was also evident during the family reunion that the Tindley family held in Snow Hill. They have pride in their heritage enough to come together from various places to create that video that was shared with the local public school, at the mural dedication, and in the exhibit.

The same pride and local knowledge were evident in the part of the exhibit highlighting Rev. Tindley's sermons. The Planning Committee could have printed the words or found an on-line recording of someone reading his sermons, but because of the technological expertise of local musician Brian, the oratorial skills of Gregory, and

Arnold's knowledge of the church, we were able to include audio of Gregory reading excerpts of some of Rev. Tindley's sermons chosen by the Planning Committee.

The Rev. Tindley exhibit illustrated the power of both community connections and multimodal discourse in sharing local Black historical stories. The Planning Committee that created this exhibit were the experts that provided content. They took the old exhibit and "dis-composed the narrative then re-composed it according to their own discourses and desires" (Schwartz, 2008, p. 31). Their connecting networks provided multimodal material that presented the content in a dynamic way. As Gregory stated:

> And so, the most people have learned has been what has been spoken to them. The Tindley thing, I was just I was so satisfied that when pushing that button, you will be able to stand back and kind of look at the pictures and all of this, rather than just trying to read what was on that paper, how that magnified the situation. I was happy about that. And I just think that's a great addition to here… It just, I think, it's going to open up a lot of inroads to other people that come because they'll be able to learn so much more, rather than trying to read all of these things.

The participants created a "new, changed, transformed arrangement, with effects on each of the contributing discourses, and on each realisational mode" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 32). This new arrangement showed visitors that the museum valued community connection and local knowledge.

Spreading The Quilt by Getting Those Stories Told

On a Saturday in early Spring 2022, at the Taylor House Museum, the rooms were all lit, and the final touches added to the two new exhibits on display. The museum stood ready to welcome guests to a special Thank You Day event. Food catered by the local

bakery was arranged on the table in the Harrison Room, along with drinks and fresh

flowers. Brian, a local musician and one of the participants in this research study set up in

one of the rooms, performing on his guitar.

Thank You Day was an opportunity to welcome all the members of the Planning

Committee as well as the Briddell Family Committee who had collaborated on the Rev.

Tindley and Briddelltown exhibits. The local press was also invited to see the new

exhibits, and to talk with the people that created them. Museum board members came as

well, and for many of them this was their first chance to see the finished exhibits.

Committee members, family members and others all mingled together in the Harrison

Room and the upstairs galleries to share stories about the exhibits and the process of

creating them (see Fig 23). These conversations which focused on displayed artifacts

illustrated artifactual critical literacy as theorized by Pahl and Roswell (2011), with their

focus on stories embedded in artifacts.

Figure 23

Museum Visitors at Thank You Day

A reporter interviewed several people for a story that ran in the local paper later that week (see Figure 24).

Figure 24

Local Newspaper Article About Thank You Day

The ultimate goal of all these actions undertaken was to get the local Black historical stories out into the public. Thank You Day was the beginning of that sharing with the public, but the actions for access have continued. Seeking access to Black historical stories was connected to critical literacy by its exploration of structures of power.

Social Justice and Critical Literacy in the Creation of Exhibits

Social justice has a connection with critical literacy as they both have a role examining structures of power with a goal of changing those existing power structures (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010, p. 58). That examination is a "literate action taken to support agency, understanding, and justice" (Flower, 2008, p. 7). In this research study, participants used their own lived experiences and narratives as a basis for critiquing and

analyzing their own community (Rogers & O'Daniels, 2015). They did this through dialogic engagement (Rogers & O'Daniels, 2015) focused on the creation of exhibits telling Black historical stories.

These stories were shared with the community through a variety of access points such as the local school, local museums, churches, and town spaces. They were shared through presentations and discussions led by community members. They were also shared through exhibits and displays, and musical events. Providing access to these stories was also a way to "resist power, challenge injustice, and insist on alternative images of social and self-development" (Flower, 2008, p. 17). Through the stories the participants reframed the historical narrative of Berlin.

The actions of this research study were opportunities where "reflecting on one's situation corresponds to reflecting on the space[s] one inhabits; acting on one's situation often corresponds to changing one's relationship to a place" (Gruenwald, 2003, p. 4). As Terry stated:

> Right now, it seems that the museum, I've been here for 46 years, and I just learned that the museum is here. So, I think when that the museum might want to take a look at would it be missed if it were no longer here? And what can they what can be done so that it's more than just a seasonal tourist attraction. They may need to explore ways to be more relevant with the resources that will reflect the entire community and draw others in because of what is being exhibited, and what is shown throughout the community.

Her comments voiced the theory of critical literacy in action, with her questions about community relevancy and examining power structures between the museum and the community.

Access to Black Historical Stories

The Planning Committee, Briddell Family Committee and museum staff utilized a variety of multimodal tools to get those stories told. One of the initial steps towards more access was a redesign of the museum's website. As soon as the Rev. Tindley exhibit was completed, all the information from the exhibit was posted on a page of the website (see Fig 25).

Figure 25

Museum Webpage Presenting Rev. Tindley
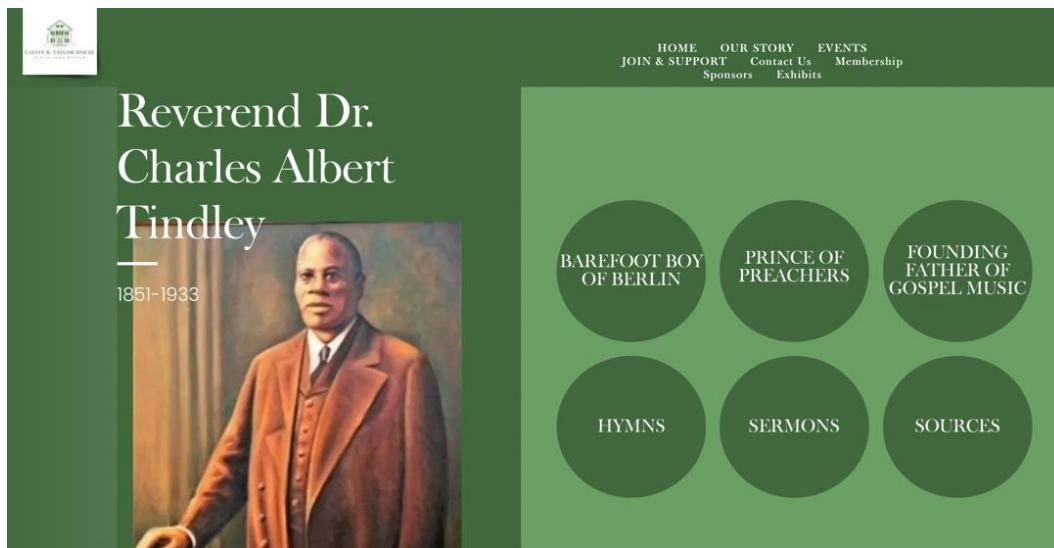
The Planning Committee wanted a separate tab for sources, because, as was described in the finding titled Stitching Patches Together, they had worked hard to negotiate accuracy and they wanted the public to be able to see from where the information came.

To provide another way to access the exhibit, Clara and the museum's curator collaborated on a brochure that was printed and placed alongside the exhibit. Copies of the brochure were taken to the Tindley mural dedication ceremony and passed out to all the audience members (see Fig 26).

Figure 26

Brochure of Rev. Charles Albert Tindley
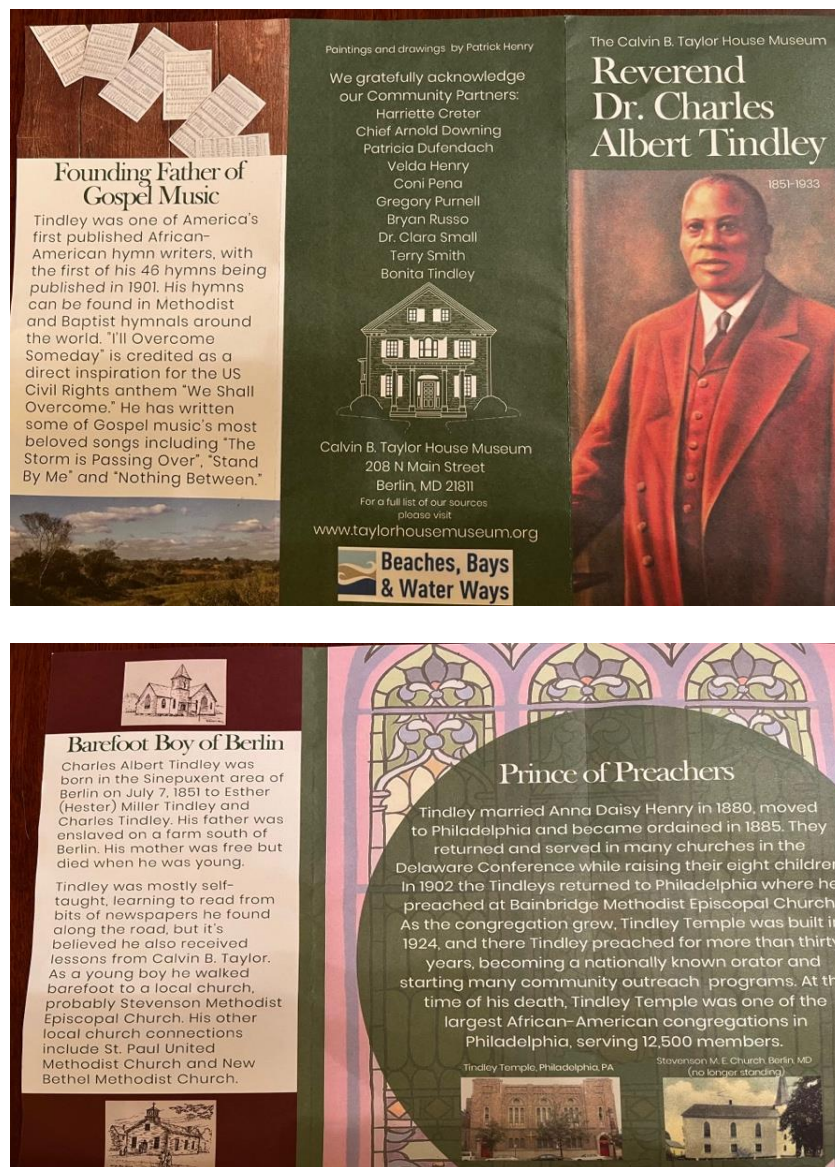
One audience member at the mural dedication appreciated all the work done to

share Black historical stories "I'm very impressed with the committee that put the event

together. It was probably not an easy thing to do. So, I'm very impressed. And I hope that

this is the beginning of more efforts [to share stories]". The mural provided another

opportunity for access to Black historical stories. Once the mural was completed, we

added a QR code to the wall next to the mural. See Figure 27. That QR code linked

directly to the museum's webpage on Rev. Tindley

(https://www.taylorhousemuseum.org/rev-t). See Figure 28.

Figure 27

QR Code on the Wall Next to the Rev. Tindley Mural

Figure 28

Actual QR Code

The same QR code was placed next to the original painting of Rev. Tindley at St Paul United Methodist Church. Velda had asked the museum to share the QR code so that children attending St Paul would have access to his story.

Access was also an important part of the Briddelltown Exhibit. A video of the exhibit was also created to be shared with people who were unable to go upstairs in the museum, where the exhibit was located. The museum has one set of very steep stairs that were original to the house. They are a barrier for access to the upstairs gallery space. We knew that many Briddell family members were elderly and had mobility issues, the video provided them an opportunity to see the exhibit. To ensure as many people as possible could view the exhibit, the museum was open longer hours on the Briddell Family Reunion weekend. Many family members came to view the exhibit during the season, and one of them expressed their feelings about what they saw:

> I appreciate that the museum was able to include such a rich history. If it hadn't
> been for that exhibit many people in Berlin may not even know about

Briddelltown and the contribution the Briddell family has made to the town of

Berlin.

Although the goal of the family meetings was to create the exhibit, the meetings

themselves became a rich resource of family history. Rather than keep those meeting

videos and minutes in the museum, all the recordings were put onto thumb drives and

given to two family members to copy and pass on to other family members.

Another way that participants in this action research provided access to Black

historical storytelling was through a partnership with the local elementary school in

Berlin. During the month of February, the Media Specialist, Music teacher and I hosted

speakers and shared photos and videos highlighting Black history specific to Berlin.

Based on the success of those presentations, the third grade scheduled a Spring visit to

the Taylor House Museum and Germantown School Museum. The field trip was another

opportunity for students to learn their own local history. It provided students access to

local Black historical stories through the exhibits at the Taylor House Museum and the

Germantown School Museum. One of the teachers shared this thought about the field

trip's impact on the students:

They were able to kind of go back in time like they did in the Taylor house

museum in the Germantown school I think that kind of put it into perspective, just

how historical their town is that they live in.

Her comment supports research that highlights the importance of creating

personal connections between students and concepts they learn in school (Jolliffe et al.,

2016). Creating personal connections can then lead to "Building learning communities

that offer a sense of safety, love, caring, and personal power that lead to transformative

education" (Larson & Moses, 2018, p. 59). Giving students access to diverse stories

provided local connections to their community and its history (Trimble et al., 2020). An

audience member at the mural dedication expressed her opinion of sharing local Black

historical stories "I work in a Title One school where I feel like kids would really benefit

from hearing those stories. I think it would build a lot of self-pride within them." Velda

made a broader connection "we all come together, and we continue the story because

every year another year passes and more stories [are created] … from, you know, little

kids on up to older people." This idea of "continuing on" was often discussed during

Planning Committee meetings. Once the exhibits were completed the group still had

things they wanted to accomplish.

This was evident during a Planning Committee meeting in late August. At that

meeting I shared the research findings with the participants. They politely listened to the

summary of the findings, and then moved right onto the purpose of the meeting, which

was to plan Tindley Day, a celebration of Rev. Tindley's music. Tindley Day was being

organized in partnership with the Germantown School Museum.

The Planning Committee wanted to make sure that people going to Tindley Day

would also learn about the exhibit at the museum, and the mural. As Terry asked:

> Would anything you do link it back to come to the mural and then make it back to
>
> come in up here [the museum]? … so that it can be that full circle going all the
>
> way around, seeing the mural on that day being a part of that of the site and then
>
> touring the museum to see what we have up here.

 To the participants, this research study took a back seat to the work that they thought

needed to be done and will continue to be done long after this dissertation has been

written. They have been doing the work of building community connections (Larson &

Moses, 2018) and sharing Black historical stories (Banks-Wallace, 2002) for many years

before this research study. For the participants, this particular moment was only one stop

on a long road.

Conclusion

This chapter has chronicled the findings of the participatory action research that

explored the ways local Black historical stories were shared in the town of Berlin. The

actions of this study showed the most important factors were the relationships between

the participants involved and their commitment to the community of Berlin. That

commitment was shown through the creation of the quilt of Belin, where participants'

actions resulted in:

1. Quilt of Berlin: Discussing Ownership and Truth of Information and Artifacts

2. A Patch in the Larger Quilt of Exhibits: The Action of Sharing of Gifts

3. Stitching Patches Together: Connecting Networks Utilized in Designing Museum
   Exhibits

4. Spreading the Quilt By Getting Those Stories Told

Participants utilized a variety of things to get the stories told throughout the town.

They stitched the patches together to reveal the whole quilt which was then spread out for

the community to see. The journey we were on together illustrated qualities of humanized

research involving "the building of relationships of care and dignity and dialogic

consciousness raising for both researcher and participants" (Paris & Winn, 2014, p. xvi).

The creation and presentation of the exhibits were acts of counter-storying (Gruen &

Lund, 2020), an opportunity to reframe and retell stories of their community. Counter-

storying situated the use of artifacts as an act of civic engagement; it had the power "to

shape personal and civic identities" (Gruen & Lund, p. 6) giving participants the tools to

see "their work as holding social import in the face of" (p. 6) negative stories regarding

their community. These exhibits helped the participants and the community see

themselves in a new and more positive way. The participants used their own literacies to

"serve their community" (Gruen & Lund, p. 1). Arnold puts that idea in his own words:

> Putting things together is very special. A lot of times somebody can be an expert
>
> in one part, and that one part is going to be good. But if you put a whole lot of
>
> things together, you end up saying something great.

The final chapter of this study discusses the implications of these findings and how they

are situated in larger conversations around empowerment in communities, museums, and

schools.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Significance of This Study

Don't be afraid to tell the story. Don't be afraid to tell the story of how African

Americans had an impact on the economic, industrial, and governmental, and

everyday life of the Berlin community. The stories that need to be told, I've just

been on this committee myself, I've learned a lot...So there are a lot of stories.

There's a lot of information that needs to be told. And I think if it starts with this

body, here, we can get that story out.

Terry

These words spoken by Terry summed up the significance of this participatory

action research (PAR), which documented the actions taken to share historical stories of

the Black community with the larger Berlin community. The research sought to answer

questions regarding meaning making with narratives and artifacts, as well as community

collaboration on museum exhibits, and ensuring access to local Black historical stories.

The journey to explore these questions was filled with the voices and actions of a

group of participants dedicated to supporting and strengthening their community. It was

evident during this research that participants sought to leave their community a better

place for their family and friends. Their actions brought to life community literacy as a

rhetorical practice by using the process of inquiry and intercultural dialogue. (Flower,

2008), which helps to further social change in the community. Community literacy

actions were grounded in the belief that literary encompasses many more practices than

just reading and writing. For these participants, literacy practices were also social

practices, intertwined with their cultural identity, sense of themselves and their world

view and knowledge (Flower, 2008). Storytelling, community based oral testimony

(Ravitch & Carl, 2021), and oral histories became the vehicle for social literacy practices

in this study. Those actions exemplified social and community literacies with their focus

on human connections and shared knowledge (Street, 1993). Both of these literacies

highlight the power of group knowledge and how a community can use social literacy to

convey their shared knowledge not only among themselves but also people outside the

community.

Socially situated literacy practices of storytelling and oral testimony were also

intertwined with artifacts and their role as sites of story, community building, and identity

performance (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011). In both the Rev. Tindley and Briddelltown exhibits

artifacts brought historical events and information to life. For me, seeing the faces of

George and Martha Briddell created a human connection with the stories of the family.

Hearing the Tindley family choir sing "By and By" brought to life for me the story of

Rev. Tindley, and his struggles. Their performance at the mural dedication was my

personal and professional highlight of the entire participatory action research.

Experiencing the audience singing with the choir underscored my belief in the power of

communal knowledge and collective experiences that were central to this research study.

The choir and audience were not just singing together during this event, they were co-

constructing meaning around the use of the song being sung under a mural depicting Rev.

Tindley. The mural's location in the town where Rev. Tindley was born added greater

significance to the song's theme of overcoming and understanding. Including a video of

their performance in the Rev. Tindley exhibit provided access of that experience to more

people.

Overall, my findings demonstrate that Planning Committee Members, Briddell

Family Committee Members and Community Partners:

1.   made meaning with artifacts and narratives by collectively discussing

ownership and accuracy of artifacts and information,

2.   had gifts they willingly shared with each other in the collaborative actions of

sharing local Black historical stories,

3.   had connecting networks they utilized to design museum exhibits,

4.   sought a variety of opportunities to ensure on-going access to stories.

These findings expand our understanding of how community members collaborate in

sharing stories and life experiences that tell the history of a local community. The

findings of this research study also highlight the importance of sharing, building

relationships and community connections. During this research study, the committee

members and community partners were providing a roadmap for authentic community

partnerships. Through sharing their gifts, participants worked together to co-construct

meaning with artifacts and information (Pahl & Rowsell, 2010). Each participant brough

their own special piece to the larger quilt of actions described in this study. Then

collectively they stitched the pieces together into a cohesive whole. The single most

important theme of my findings was human connection. And the actions of this study

were those stiches connecting us together.

The museum exhibits and events documented in this research study represent one

set of patches in the larger Berlin quilt of local historical storytelling. Community

members have been sharing stories in a variety of places in Berlin for generations, including many of the participants in this study. While these instances of sharing stories happened beyond the scope of this study, it is important for me to acknowledge that for all the people in Berlin trying to push progress back, there are also people working hard to push it forward, and they have been doing that work for years.

While this particular group of participants had not collaborated with the museum before, many of them knew each other and had played a role in gathering and sharing local history in the community prior to this research. Partnerships formed during the study have lasted beyond the actions described here, and participants felt strongly that the work of gathering, preserving, and sharing local Black historical stories must continue. And a renewed push for gathering local oral histories is underway.

The gifts of the committee members and community partners described in this research study illustrate the resources that are available in all communities if they are sought and nurtured. Just in this one community of Berlin there are singers, orators, artists, musicians, and historians. Think of the possibilities if we identify and support individual gifts and talents of all community members.

Human connections and relationships were essential in this study; the exhibits and events could only have happened because of the willingness of the participants to collectively explore options for exhibits and events. That collective exploration was undertaken with a sense of choosing group over self. In all of the meetings and interviews, no one individual ever told the group what should be done, as all decisions were made collectively by group consensus.

Participants' use of community, social, and artifactual literacies resulted in engaging displays at the Taylor House Museum where information was shared in a multimodal way, through voices and images from the community. The Briddell Family Committee meetings became oral history sessions, where complex family genealogy was shared and collectively examined. Listening to the Briddells discuss their family history and experiences allowed me to learn more about the town I grew up in. The participants' voices and images presented in the exhibits show visitors that the museum values community knowledge.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications for this research study have connections with work done in museums, communities, and schools (Claisse, et al., 2017, Gruenewald, 2003, Jolliffe, et al., 2016, Larson & Moses, 2018). The common theme among those research studies was the respect shown by the researcher to the participants. Whether it was museum volunteers in a historic house in England (Claisse, et al., 2017), or people living in poverty in the Arkansas Delta (Jolliffe, et al., 2016), or people in a marginalized neighborhood of Rochester, New York (Larson & Moses, 2018), the lived experiences of the participants had worth and were valued by the university researchers. Their local knowledge was integral to the study. The same was true for my feelings about the participants in this study. In many ways they were leading me, instructing me in what authentic equal community partnerships should look like.

The Importance of Community Literacy in Building Authentic, Trusting,

Community Partnerships with Museums

The impetus for this research was the lack of diverse stories in the Taylor House

Museum in Berlin. The museum volunteers and staff knew that Berlin has a rich Black

history dating back to prior to the Civil War. But the museum had not told that history in

a meaningful way, therefore the actions of this research worked to fill the gap. From the

beginning it was important to build equal partnerships where all participants were

respected, and their experiences valued.

Community literacy played a role in building those equal relationships. The

museum exhibits were created through "intercultural dialogue" (Flower, 2008, p. 19)

between community partners and the museum. During that intercultural dialogue,

information and artifacts were shared by participants. The dialogue, artifacts and

information were grounded in participant's local lived experiences. They provided the

local knowledge utilized in creating the exhbits and events.

The museum volunteers and staff did not just ask participants for information then

take it and make the exhibits ourselves. Instead, all participants were equal partners in

decision making. Over the course of the months when we met to design the exhibits, we

succeeded in making the museum a place where people felt empowered to share

information and opinions. In other words, to build authentic equal community

partnerships the museum didn't just "talk the talk" of wanting community input, we

"walked the walk" of having the community participants design the exhibits themselves.

Those participants drove the actions of sharing local historical stories. And the

partnership continues, once the exhibits were finished, the museum could have said

"Thank you, we don't need you anymore". Instead, the participants have still been

involved with the museum in searching for other ways to gather and share local Black

historical stories. Their ongoing involvement illustrates the positive effect of authentic

equal partnerships, where participants voices and lived experiences are valued.

Small local museums are uniquely situated to build authentic partnerships with

their community, because the museum is often run by volunteers from that same local

community. A museum should always be striving to make connections with the

community, either through events such as the Thank You Day held at the Taylor House

Museum, or by going out to local schools or libraries to share artifacts and stories from

the museum. These are opportunities for creating connections between the museum and

individuals who may have stories and or artifacts to share.

Museums as Places Where Local Knowledge is Valued as a Literacy Resource

Museums are places where we preserve artifacts and information that a culture

deems important. For small local museums, these artifacts and information often have a

very personal connection to the community or town where the museum is located. As

Coghlan (2018) explained, community members must be involved in content gathering

and presentations. The specific knowledge that community members possess should be

utilized in the museum. Museum directors need to be aware of who is in the community

around the museum, and they need to act on that awareness.

For small local museums seeking to engage their community, listening would be

an important first step, for example, going out into the community to gather oral histories.

The importance of gathering oral histories was a finding of my pilot study. Oral histories

often provide information about a town or community that may not be known outside a

small group of individuals. Listening to the oral histories could provide topics for the

museum to explore in partnership with community members who were involved in the

event or experience.

Another option for a museum would be to host roundtable discussions at the

museum itself. The discussion could focus on the communities' opinion of the museum,

and what suggestions they have for exhibits or programing. The listening actions could

help the museum identify what is meaningful in their local community. As this study

illustrated, volunteer's local knowledge could then be utilized to create exhibits, and

events that the community would find meaningful. They could be asked to share their

experiences with the museum collection and museum space (Claisse & Petrelli, 2017).

The community could provide artifacts based on a specific theme, then the museum could

record the community stories connected to the artifacts. As I stated earlier, small local

museums depend on the community for support and funding. In return, the community

should see the museum as a local community resource, a place they are welcomed and

valued. Local museums can provide us with an understanding of where we live and how

our local history impacts our lives today.

Historic house museums have a special opportunity to share stories with visitors,

utilizing the recreated interiors to present stories of people's lived experiencers. Museum

visitors want to see how people lived either in different time periods or geographic

locations. They are looking for authentic experiences that connect them to the people who

lived in the house (Vagnone & Ryan, 2016). Visitors expect a comprehensive telling of

all people involved in the life of the house (Modlin et al., 2011), owners as well as

servants and enslaved humans. To tell these stories the historic house museums must

provide access to as much of the collection as possible, including artifacts as well as oral

histories or recorded historical conversations (Carter & Conrad, 2012). In sharing stories

of all inhabitants, a historical house museum can play a role in furthering issues of social

justice and equity. The more we can learn about experiences of other humans in different

time periods and locations, the more we can gain empathy and understanding. Standing in

an attic space where markings made by enslaved humans still can be seen on the walls,

creates an immediate human connection that is not always evident when reading

information about enslaved human from a history book. Understanding the history of a

community helps us find solutions for problems we face now. Historic house museums

have the chance to literally bring history to life. That chance should be taken in

collaboration with local community members.

Before I began this study, I thought the Taylor House Museum just needed to tell

more stories focused on local Black history. But what I learned in the process of this

research is that community members bring knowledge we didn't even know was out

there. In other words, we didn't know what we didn't know. The museum exhibits

created by the Planning Committee and Briddell Family Committee went far beyond

what I had originally envisioned. Participants utilized their local knowledge and

community connections to create a multimodal exhibit alive with stories and voices of a

variety of people. Once the exhibits opened, we received positive feedback about the new

exhibits. People were appreciative of the diversity represented in the museum.

Throughout the planning process stories of the white community's support of the

Black community were interspersed with stories of overt and covert racism. As these

stories were shared it became clear that the participants chose to present Rev. Tindley and

the Briddell family as individuals empowered by these life experiences, not victimized by them. The participants were looking to tell a story of overcoming odds and rising above adversity. Their decisions elevated the exhibits from stories told *about* people of color to stories told *by* people of color.

Artifactual Literacy as a Support for Historical Storytelling

Artifacts provide connections to lived experiences (Pahl & Rowsell, 2019). Most of us have had experiences where we have been confronted with images or objects from our past that bring back a flood of memories. These could be a picture of what our neighborhood looked like when we were children, or a version of a toy we played with as a child. We are living history daily, and many experiences are connected to particular objects (Pahl, 2004). Museums have the opportunity to partner with their local communities to preserve these lived experiences but then present them back to the community in a meaningful way. The Rev. Tindley exhibit and the Briddelltown exhibit were examples of exhibits made more meaningful by the stories and artifacts provided by the community.

All aspects of both museum exhibits were layered with personal and local meaning. The artifacts were chosen by the community members to represent particular facets of larger historical stories, such as the hymns of Rev. Tindley, or the property owned by the Briddell family.   The creation of the exhibits and events required a collective agreement on, and understanding of, information and objects (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011). The Planning Committee and Briddell Family Committee spent hours verifying stories, working through sources of information and family folklore to try and ascertain accurate information. Participants then decided which artifacts would best represent the

stories being told in the exhibits and other events (Kim, 2016). These actions illustrated

artifactual literacy (Pahl & Rowsell, 2019) with its emphasis on artifacts as a repository

of a person's life experiences.

Museum directors and staff should find a way to invite community members to

share artifacts and the stories connected to them. For example, Open House Days could

be organized around themes that are relevant to the community, or specific dates that are

important locally. Community members could be invited bring artifacts based on those

themes or dates. Videos could be made of people sharing their stories about the artifacts,

which could be displayed in the museum.

CPAR and PAR as Research Design

As described in chapter 3, CPAR is grounded in sharing knowledge and

information to enact local change. For any researcher undertaking CPAR, issues of

respect and reciprocity are the key to a successful research study. By success I mean

actions based in change, and the building of community connections. I do not mean

success as represented by accolades about the researcher, or events controlled by the

researcher. PAR and CPAR are not research designs that center the researcher, rather

they center the participants. Ensuring a climate of respect and collective action must be

the intent of the researcher.

Reciprocity should also be an integral piece of CPAR and PAR. If the research

actions are truly grounded in a collective goal, then the participants benefit in a

meaningful way from the outcomes of the study. This research study focused on actions

creating exhibits and community events. The end result was exhibits sharing stories using

the participant's' own words and ideas. Committee members and community partners

saw the ability to share those stories in a museum setting as a mutual benefit of this study.

Anyone exploring CPAR and PAR as research designs needs to be prepared for the work

of collaboration and partnership.

Further Research on Museum and Community Partnerships

Authentic partnerships are key to any initiative involving groups of community

members. The relationship between university researchers and participants have changed

in recent times, with a focus on more equitable relationships (Paris et al., 2013). Further

research on the creation of authentic and collaborative partnerships between the

university and participants is needed. For example, how can participants ensure that

information they share with researchers is utilized in an equitable manner? How can

universities establish access to stories shared by participants? When participants share

information during research studies, they deserve access to their information. Issues of

ownership are changing as we grapple with human rights and social justice (Brydon-

Miller, 2008). The participants and I worked in partnership to tell Black historical stories

in the way the participants chose to tell them. They were the leaders of the design of the

exhibits, in some cases they shared artifacts they had, in some cases they shared

information they had. The participants had ownership of what was included in the

exhibits; therefore, access of the information was controlled by them. This action

research provides an example of the power of a group, and what can be accomplished by

a group of people working towards a common goal.

Further research could document work with museums in partnership with their

community. Researchers could explore how historical stories are collected, and how the

community responds to the way stories, and artifacts connected to those stories are

exhibited in museums. Access to stories is also important, how do small local museums ensure access to historical stories in the museum itself? Do museums take the stories out into the community, if so, how do they do that? Further research would provide insight into how historical stories are shared, and how access to those stories is provided.

Museums of any size play a role in this country as civic institutions that can tell the story of our democracy (Russell-Ciardi, 2008), both the highlights and lowlights of our American journey. How can artifacts help tell our American story? Can they help us examining our history with a critical eye? More research on the connection between artifactual literacy, historical stories and the role museums play is needed. Observing the Briddell family utilize their oral family histories to create a map of Briddelltown provided a framework for meaning making centered around artifacts. Only by telling more diverse and inclusive historical stories can we hope to move forward and make this country more equitable.

Further research could be done to document collaborations between white community members and community members of color. The research could focus on how to show the value of Black community member's historical funds of knowledge. As stated earlier, museums can convey the worth of artifacts and stories just by having them on display, therefore highlighting diverse stories illustrates their value.

It must be state that participatory action research, and critical participatory action research will only be successful if the researcher grounds all of their actions in respectful listening. The central focus of the work must be on the participants not the researcher.

Every Community and Community Member Has a Story to Tell

The actions of the participants documented in this study were intertwined with people and places in our local community. The participants held many roles in that community, such as police chief, retired teacher, musician, and volunteer in a variety of community groups.

As stated in the introduction, our world is working through a period of change and social reckoning. At times, for me, it has felt overwhelming and daunting. But effective change is possible with actions taken on a local level (Larson & Moses, 2018). This research study documented such actions undertaken by local community members, such as creating two museum exhibits, planning the mural dedication and sharing stories at the local elementary school. The study proved that every community has a story to tell, in fact every community has several stories to tell. But to gain a full telling of all stories, all community members must feel that their stories are worth preserving, and they must feel empowered to preserve these stories.

Berlin has a mixed history of racial equity mirroring the rest of the United States, with opportunities for Black Americans growing after the Civil War and shrinking through the early to mid-twentieth century. This trajectory was illustrated in the stories and artifacts shared by the Briddell family. The Town of Berlin still deals with the negative effects of the highway dividing the majority white section from the majority Black section of town. To combat that divide, we as a community must build connections, one way is to tell our stories and make sure as many people as possible have access to the stories we tell. A local museum could provide a framework for gathering and preserving those stories, by hosting events and opportunities for storytelling. As a

county, we must strive to tell a more complete history of all our towns, cities, and

neighborhoods, not just stories of the group with the most power. Community based oral

testimony (Ravitch & Carl, 2021) could be adapted for a variety of uses connected to

equitable storytelling. For example, as a way to collectively work through difficult

subjects, or for community members to learn more about a particular group within the

community.

      This research study has strengthened my belief in the power of community

connection, and what people are capable of when given a framework for respectful,

supportive collaboration. During my teaching career I have taught hundreds of classes

and I have seen how groups of kids react to each other depending on how their classroom

teacher views collaboration and teamwork. In my art room, I have seen classes where

kids work together to solve problems and support each other. I have then seen the same

kids the following year, with a different teacher, actively demean and undermine each

other. I use this example because it illustrates the power of a group, and its leadership. If

a respectful and supportive framework is built then people will thrive, if that framework

is missing people struggle.

      Exhibits in a museum can be used to illustrate this concept. For example, the

study by Modlin et al. (2011) highlighted how enslaved humans living, working, and

dying on plantations have been rendered invisible by tour guides of those plantations in

the American deep south. In contrast the study by Black and Reynolds (2020) showed

how respectfully sharing difficult stories of the Troubles in Northern Ireland helped

transform community relationships and became a framework for presenting difficult

stories around the world.

A first step is for a community to decide where their stories can be archived and easily accessed (Carter & Conrad, 2012). Berlin is fortunate enough to have at least two museums to preserve and share those stories. But not all areas have museums so the community must find the most appropriate location to archive their stories. These places could be the local library, the schools, a community center, a courthouse, or local town hall. All these sites, and others not identified here, could be places to record, preserve, and share local historical stories (Carter & Conrad, 2012). Fostering relationships between younger community members and community elders could help create opportunities for elders to share their lived experiences. Existing networks of connection could be utilized such as churches, family reunions and civic organizations like Lions Club, Gardening Clubs and American Legions. In my experience as a teacher and a resident in Berlin, I see people searching for connections, they want to be a part of something larger than themselves. Hill-Collin's (2010) definition of community as a group of people bound together by a common thread highlights people's need for connection and a sense of community. The need for connection could be utilized in sharing local historical stories. Previous studies describing community work with local history have illustrated the power of stories, either to work through difficult subjects (Black & Reynolds, 2020), or to revive communities devastated by poverty and lack of opportunity (Jolliffe et al., 2016). This study also illustrated the power of sharing community stories.

In this research study community members reached out to people they knew to gather information and resources regarding historical stories. Participants made connections to people who had never been in the Taylor House Museum and showed

them that their experience could play a role in telling Berlin history. Because of these

community connections the stories were told through a rich quilt of written text, spoken

words, songs and visual images which tapped into funds of knowledge (Moll, et al.,

1992) of community members, artists, storytellers, musicians, singers. If support systems

could be put in place to nurture individual gifts that could be used in communities, we

could build local resiliency that could solve place-specific problems (Donehower et al.,

2007). These support systems could include building and staffing community centers, or

adding more programing to local libraries, or public schools. All of these actions make

use of New Literacies (Gee, 2015), such as social literacy (Street, 1995) with its emphasis

on co-construction of meaning. Community literacy's emphasis on collaborative inquiry

and dialogue (Flower, 2008) would be crucial in identifying and implementing support

systems. The New Literacies showed us that people learn and share information in a

variety of ways, not just through reading and writing. This study provides affirmation of

that belief, participants shared and learned using stories, images, and music. They took

what they learned and presented it back to museum and event visitors through those same

stories, images, and songs.

Further Research in How Communities Gather and Preserve Stories

Further research needs to be done that documents how communities gather and

preserve stories, how groups within the community are identified to tell those stories, and

how to provide access to stories. Another avenue for research would be if there is a

correlation between a community firmly grounded in their own historical understanding

and their resiliency as we move into a time of dramatic climate change. In other words, if

a community understands their roots, does this understanding support a greater ability to

solve local problems created by climate change and societal shifts? And as climate

change and other shifts takes a greater toll on our communities what do they do with their

collective history? How do they preserve it, and provide access to it?

Connections Between School Life and Community Life Help Students Value Their

Own Experiences as Forms of Literacy

While the majority of the actions in this Participatory Action Research took place

in the Taylor House Museum and other community locations, there are also implications

for local schools. Local schools are ideal places to share local historical stories (Jolliffe,

et al., 2016). In many cases the students have some connection to people or places

described in local historical stories. Making connections with those stories helps student

feel their own worth and find their own place in the larger community. Students can see

that their own experiences are a form of literacy just as important as traditional literacies,

such as reading and writing.

In my own school I see the connection being made when we talk about and look

at images of our town. Students have funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) they tap into

when we discuss places and people they know. Utilizing those funds of knowledge allows

the students to be the expert on a particular topic, therefore creating more meaningful

connections with the concepts they are learning.

In many public-school classrooms right now, the curriculum is rigid, and prescriptive

(Olsen & Sexton, 2009). Yet research studies have shown that creating personal

connections with the material helps students comprehend concepts taught in the

classroom. (Donehower, et al., 2007). Teachers must find way to integrate local stories at

every opportunity. Currently, most Black history is only shared in February, during Black

History Month. This point was brought up repeatedly by participants in the pilot study for

this research. They felt, and I agree that schools need to integrate diverse stories

throughout the school year.

As Erica, a community partner in this research study said, when teachers share

stories and images of real places that students know, the students themselves feel valued.

After students from the local elementary school visited the two museums in Berlin, many

of them shared with me stories of photos and objects they connected with during their

visit. Many told me they wanted to visit again and bring their family, they found

relevance in what was shared in the museum spaces. These connections between their

school life and community life help students value their own experiences. Similar to the

continued work of the Planning Committee, telling local stories in the elementary schools

goes on. As this dissertation was being written, plans were being made for the second

year of telling local Black historical stories in the school. Local authors, illustrators and

musicians have been invited to share their storytelling experiences with students,

expanding on the program that was begun last year.

Further Research on Sharing Local History in Schools

Schools are places where we send our future on a daily basis for approximately 16

years. At school our children learn to navigate the world that adults have created for

them. They learn about society and their place in it. Those lessons can be positive and

supporting or those lessons can be harsh and exclusionary. Further research on student's

school experiences is always needed. Studies on sharing local history in schools could

provide frameworks for school systems to follow. Research could be done on student's

attitudes about school when local stories and history are used to teach universal concepts.

Reflections and Limitations

On reflecting back on this participatory action research a few thoughts have come to mind regarding potential limitations. Every research study has limitations, qualitative research's focus on thick, rich, descriptions of human actions and interactions makes the work hard to replicate in other studies. And yet, all research can be improved upon. In this study location was both a strength and a limitation. Actions documented in this participatory action research happened in one small town with a specific group of people. The participants had strong and long-lasting connections to the town, and I had known most of them for many years prior to this action research. There are other ethnic groups living in Berlin, specifically a growing Latino population. This research did not include any stories from that particular community group. To honor their lived experiences in Berlin, this should be an area of further actions of the museum, both for research and community support.

Time and resources were also limitations. This dissertation covers only a part of all of the actions being done to share local Black historical stories in Berlin. They are shared every day in Black churches and local Black organizations like the American Legion, and during family reunions. And, as I described in the findings chapter, these actions have continued past the ending point for data collection for this study.

Conclusion

The stories we tell ourselves and our community matter. They matter because they represent our beliefs and values. Historical stories showcase the lived experiences of those that have gone before us (Jolliffe et al., 2016,). Documenting, preserving, understanding, and sharing those stories is important because they allow us to see what

the past was like, and how decisions and actions taken in that past affect where we are

today and help us form a better future (Rogers & Charlton, 2006). Even the act of

sharing this work through the dissertation defense was a community experience, with the

event being held at that museum. The participants were invited to attend and share their

thoughts at the end of the defense.

It has been an honor for me to walk with the research participants on part of their

lifelong journey to make their communities a better place. They have been illustrations of

lives lived in service to others, and I am honored to call them colleagues and friends. The

lessons I have learned from them I will stive to pass onto my students and my

community.

I hope that the stories told in this research study will inspire others to go out into

their own communities and find their own historical stories. The final words in this

dissertation were spoken by Velda in her final interview at the end of the pilot project,

when she said "you should end the project with the words, "The human story

continues…"

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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Support from The Taylor House Museum

CALVIN B. TAYLOR HOUSE
BERLIN TOWN MUSEUM

October 19, 2021

To Whom It May Concern,

  The board of directors of the Taylor House Museum agrees to partner with Melissa Reid, in her research study focusing on creating opportunities for sharing local Black historical stories with the community. Information gathered during this research study will be shared between Melissa, the museum and any other identified participants and locations.

Sincerely,

Hope Palmer

Hope Palmer
Vice President of the Board of Directors

Appendix B: Consent form Flesch-Kincaid Reading Level: 10.9

INFORMED CONSENT
Sharing Local Black Historical Stories in Berlin
Melissa Reid, a doctoral student at Salisbury University, is doing a research study to explore the ways to share local Black historical stories in Berlin. You are being asked to take part in these group discussions because you have been identified as an important voice in the Black community in Berlin.

 Participation is up to you, and you are free to stop participating at any time during the project. The research has one Community Committee that will meet once a month from February until September. We will not be using pseudonyms in this research because we will be sharing the lived experiences of people living in Berlin and creating exhibits for the Taylor House Museum and other community locations.
You must be at least 18 years old to take part in these conversations.

 If you join this group, you will get a chance to share stories with other people. Information shared in these meetings will be used in my university research, and possibly in some presentations and magazines.

 If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact Melissa Reid at mr13603@gulls.salisbury.edu or 443-365-0014

If you have any adverse effects or concerns about the research, please contact the primary investigator Dr. Judi Franzak at JKFRANZAK@salisbury.edu or the Office of Graduate Studies and Research at Salisbury University at 410-548-3549 or toll free 1-888-543-0148. This research is approved by the Salisbury University's IRB under protocol number 29

_____

_____

Participant name (please print)   Participant signature   Date

_____ Researcher signature _____ Date

Appendix C: Email invitation   Flesch-Kincaid Reading Level: 10.2

Dear_____,

As a local teacher and community member I am very interested in local historical storytelling. I am currently a doctoral student at Salisbury University, working towards my doctorate in literacy. For this project I am exploring ways to share Black historical stories in Berlin.

I am emailing to invite you to take part in the research to share those stories.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to join a Community Committee. The committee will meet once or twice a month from February until September, with the meetings lasting about 1 hour. This committee will create an exhibit at the Taylor House Museum and explore other opportunities to share Black historical stories in Berlin.

If you have any question, please email me at

mr13603@salisbury.gulls.edu

Thank you so much for your time.

Melissa Reid

Appendix D: Museum Visitor Interview Protocol

Hello, thank you for agreeing to participate in this research process and interview. If you are ready, I will go ahead and begin recording this interview. Thank you.

Why did you visit the Taylor House Museum today?

You have three images here that you took of various parts of the museum. Briefly share why you chose these particular parts of the museum.

Which one do you like the best?

Whose story were you most interested in?

Whose stories would you like to know more about?

Would you mind leaving the images you took? We would like to incorporate them in an exhibit of visitor's impressions of the Taylor House Museum.

Thank you so much for you time and for visiting the museum today. I will stop recording now.

Appendix E: Museum Visitor Written Response Sheet

Why did you visit the Taylor House Museum today?

You have three images here that you took of various parts of the museum. Briefly share why you chose these particular parts of the museum.

Which one do you like the best?

Whose story were you most interested in?

Whose stories would you like to know more about?

Would you mind leaving the images you took? We would like to incorporate them in an exhibit of visitor's impressions of the Taylor House Museum.

Appendix F: Community Event Visitor Interview Protocol

Hello, thank you for agreeing to participate in this research process and interview. If you are ready, I will go ahead and begin recording this interview. Thank you.

Why are you here today?

What are your expectations of this event?

Whose story are you most interested in?

Are there stories that are missing from this space?

Thank you so much for your time, I will stop recording now.

Appendix G: Community Event Visitor Written Response Sheet

Why are you here today?

What are your expectations of this event?

Whose story are you most interested in?

Are there stories that are missing from this space?

Thank you so much for your time.

Appendix H: Final Planning Committee Member Reflection Meeting Protocol

Hello and thank you all so much for being a part of this research study! If you all are ready, I will begin to record this conversation.

For this final meeting of this committee under this research study, I thought we could just talk about how this process went. Some of you were a part of the original interviews that began in February 2020. I want to share my deepest and most sincere thank you for your participation in this study. I have learned so much more about Berlin, and my appreciation of the community has grown tenfold.

Let's begin by sharing your favorite part of this process.

Please share a photograph you took some time during this process and explain why you chose that particular photograph.

Share something you learned that you did not know before.

Were there any disappointments in this process?

Do you feel we did what we set out to do?
Did we share more stories throughout our community?

Although we have reached the end of this particular research study, what do you all hope happens next?

Thank you so much for being a part of this process, it's been an honor to take this journey with you all. I will stop recording now.

Appendix I: Initial Individual Planning Committee Member Interview Protocol

Hello, thank you for agreeing to participate in this research process and interview. If you are ready, I will go ahead and begin recording this conversation. Thank you.

Why did you want to be a part of this action research study?

What do you see your role as, as a member of the Community Committee?

What do you see as my role in this action research study?

What are your hopes for this study?

What would be some outcomes you expect to see by September?

What is your perception of the place of the Taylor House Museum in the larger Berlin community?

What are your perceptions of how the Taylor House Museum has shared African American historical stories in the past?

What would you like to see happening with African American historical storytelling in Berlin 5 years from now, 10 years from now?

What is something you think I should know as we continue this work together?

Thank you so much for taking part in this conversation. I will stop recording now. Thanks.

Appendix J: Final Individual Community Committee Member Interview Protocol

Hello, thank you for agreeing to participate in this research process and interview. If you are ready, I will go ahead and begin recording this interview. Thank you.

Now that we have reached a pause in opportunities to share African American historical stories in Berlin, what are your general impression of the process?

When you were asked in the initial interview what your hopes were for this study, here is what you said…
How do you feel about those words now?

When you were asked in the initial interview what were some expected outcomes you wanted to see here is what you said…
How do you feel about those words now?

What is your favorite memory of this experience?

What is something unexpected that happened?

How could we have improved this experience?

What do you see happening going forward?

Thank you so much for taking part in this conversation. I will stop recording now. Thanks.

Appendix K: Protocol for Photovoice Use by Committee members and Museum Visitors

Hello, thank you for agreeing to participate in this research process using images. The photos you will take using the cameras owned by the Taylor House Museum will be used for the purpose of data gathering by the Taylor House Museum. If you choose to leave them at the museum or at an event, they will become property of the museum.

Please take up to three photos using the camera. If you would like to leave them, please place them on the large cork board in the Harrison room as you leave the museum. You are welcome to add your name to the photos, but you are not required to do so.

Thank you for being a part of sharing stories at the Taylor House Museum