

Empowerment of “Books” in the Human Library: Challenges for Ongoing Support and Engagement

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Research Aim

This study investigates how “Books” in the Human Library gain empowerment and identifies key factors behind this process.

Elements of Empowerment

- Increased self-esteem
- Reconstruction of identity
- Development of agency
- Growing awareness of social change

Also Examine

Challenges and strategies to further support “Books” empowerment.

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Positive Impacts Observed in the Three Practices

Book List Creation

- Interviews with “Librarians” → Self-understanding & sense of safety
- Seen as part of student education → Feeling of social contribution

Dialogue with Readers

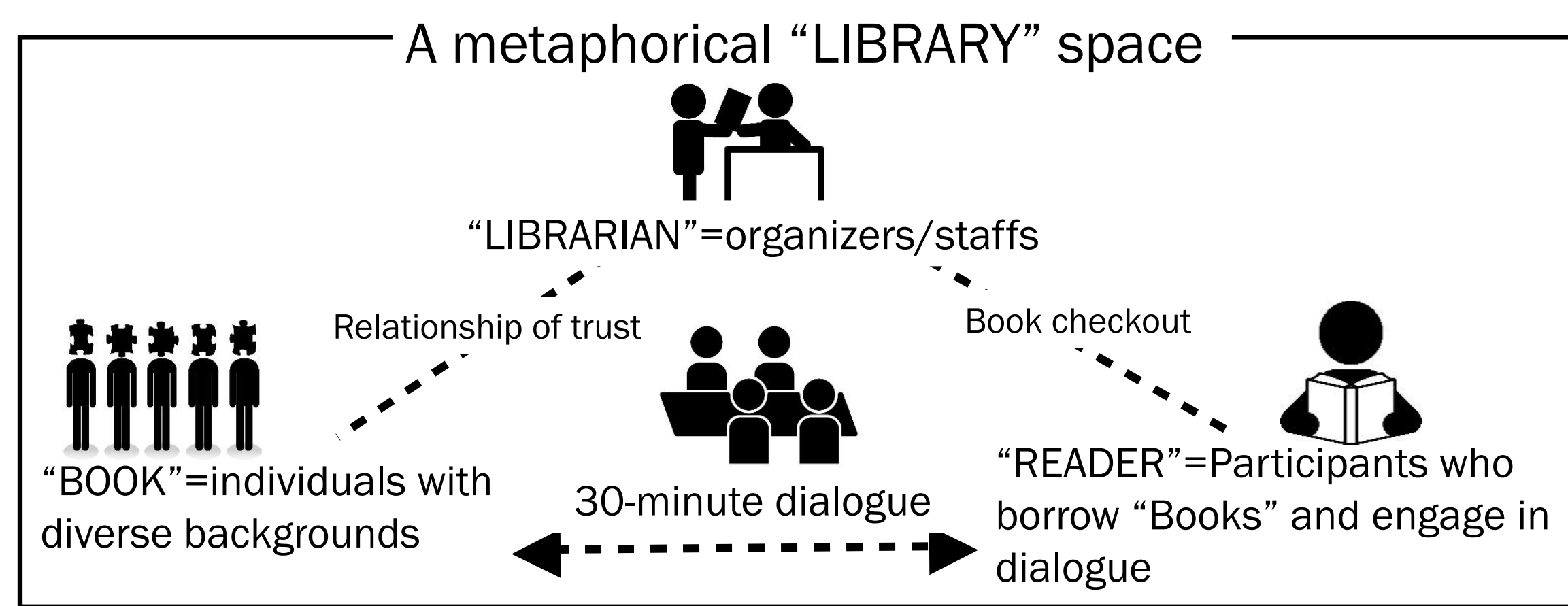
- Empathy & positive reactions → Confidence and self-esteem restored
- “Readers” benefit from stories → Pride & contribution to society
- “Readers” questions → New insights & positive identity

Post-Dialogue Reflection

- Desire to improve storytelling → Deeper self-understanding
- With child “Readers” → More intentional, audience-focused sharing

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What is HUMAN LIBRARY (HL)?



- Originated in Denmark (2000) to address violence and prejudice
- Aim: Reduce bias and foster understanding of diversity in society
- Individuals who face discrimination become “Books” and share their personal stories
- “Readers” select a “Book” from a “Book List”
- Engage in one-on-one or small group conversations (~30 minutes)
- “Librarians” ensure a safe and respectful environment
- Sharing stories helps “Books” gain self-awareness and confidence

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Negative Impacts Observed in the Three Practices

Book List Creation

- Re-experiencing painful memories / flashbacks (Sakae, 2018)
- Feeling misunderstood by “Student Librarians,” or shocking “Student Librarians”
- Need to review “Book” – “Librarian” relationship

Dialogue with Readers

- Q&A style only
- Dialogue sometimes lacks depth

Post-Dialogue Reflection

- Limited relationships among “Books”
- Need for more peer connection and support

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What is HUMAN LIBRARY (HL)?

Types of Human Library (Kudo, 2018)

- Public: Open to the general public.
- Customized/Training: Designed around specific themes or target audiences to facilitate deeper understanding.

Key Characteristics of HL Practice by Sakae & Seki

	Sakae (since 2015)	Seki (Since 2018)
Types and Host	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public HL (community events) Customized HL (school programs) in cooperation with Community Support Center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainly, Public HL hosted by Niigata Seiryu Univ. Social Collaboration Center. Customized and Training HL (e.g. for children, teachers) in cooperation with outside organizations
“Librarians”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteer staff & welfare facility staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student staff, alumni, general volunteers
“Books”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mostly people with mental illnesses: Sch, Bipolar, ASD, AUD, etc. (facility users) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For Public HL: about 20 per event: disability, LGBTQ+, mental health, trauma, etc.
Unique Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly “Book” meetings for editing and narrative training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study sessions with “Books” and “Student Librarians” + “Book” tea gatherings

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Discussion: What Makes “Books” Come Alive

Practical Structure of the Human Library

Role reversal: From “being helped” to respected storytellers/teachers

- experiences become learning for others
- social value & participant-centeredness

EMPOWERMENT

Self-Understanding through Narrative Construction

Reorganizing experiences
→ deeper self-understanding, giving meaning to pain

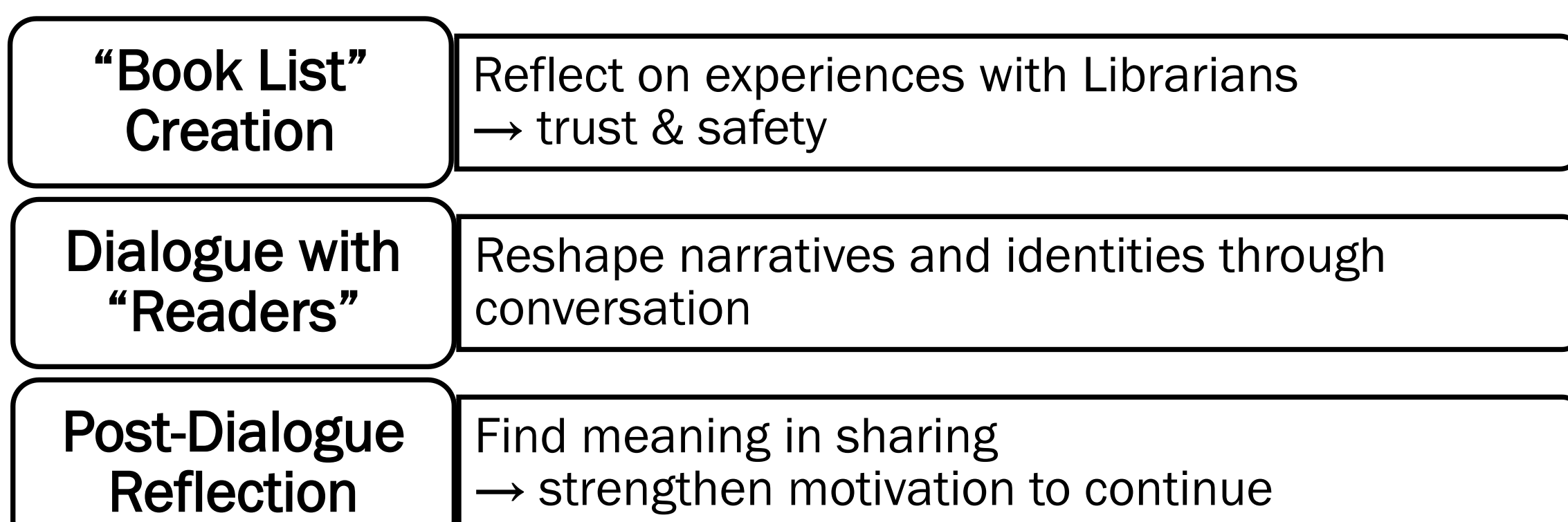
Self-Efficacy & Identity Reconstruction

Recognition & dialogue
→ feeling useful, stronger social connection

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Method

This study is based on the authors’ HL practices and focuses on three key practices:



“Book List”= a profile list introducing each “Book”



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Challenges: Toward Greater Empowerment of “Books”

Connection among “Books”

- Build solidarity & peer support

Improving “Readers” Literacy

- Foster sincere questioning & deep dialogue

Role of “Librarians”

- Support storytelling and foster long-term relationships

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Kudo, K. (2018). Tayouka suru HL no affordance [Affordances of diversifying Human Libraries]. In K. Tsuboi, M. Yokota, & K. Kudo (Eds.), Human Library: Tayousei o hagukumu "hito o kashidasu toshokan" no jissen to kenkyu [The Human Library: Practices and research of a "library that lends people" to nurture diversity] (pp. 272–293). Akashi Shoten.
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