

On Space, On Place: Emerging Tamaraw Identity – The Lived Experience Journey of Communication Students

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Abstract

The FEU Learning Journey provides a more formal structure that will capacitate students to navigate their academic lifecycle and prepare for career and life goals. It also integrates selected curricular and co-curricular activities as critical components of the students' holistic development. The Student Life Cycle Model (Lizzio & Wilson, 2010) framed the analysis, where purpose (goal after university; capability (curriculum, co-curriculum), culture (school pride and system), and connected (relationships) were examined. Using multiple methods of qualitative inquiry of concept maps and narrative analysis of the lived experiences of FEU students, this paper focused on identifying the Emerging Identity of the Tamaraw highlighting conceived space, spatial practices and experiences that provided sources of insights to be valued and examined closely. Findings of the study indicated that academic policies (conceived space), practices (spatial practices) and experiences (lived space) are realized as comprehensive components of space (Lefebvre, 1991). The Tamaraw identity – optimistic and confident with a strong sense of self, is techno-literate, a team player with a sense of civic duty resonates with the FEU core values of Fortitude, Excellence and Uprightness. This identity were reinforced in certain spaces where the sense of belongingness to the community is evidently felt. Interactions and communication exchanges in these spaces also contributed to the acculturation process. The narrative accounts and concept maps offered "unique sources of insight to be valued and examined" (Tillmann-Healy & Kiesinger, 2001, p. 82).

Keywords: Narratives on Lived Experiences, Student Life Cycle Model, Emerging Tamaraw Identity

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Introduction

Academic identity, defined by Clegg (2008), is “part of the lived complexity of a person’s project and their ways of being in those sites which are constituted as being part of the academic” (p. 329). McAlpine and Asghar (2010) suggest that the notion can be generally understood as the sense of being and becoming academic that one feels when one participates in collective academic practices. Pursuing the same line of reasoning, Mahlomaholo (2009) agrees that the term indicates values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and other responsibilities required by the role of an academic who presumably works in higher education and carries out duties including research, teaching, and community service.

In higher education in general, and education in particular, space matters in the construction of academic identity (Madikizela-Madiya & Le Roux, 2017). Yet, while prior literature on the construction of academic identity among students tends to focus on the what and the how, and employs sociocultural, social network, socialization, or identities theories to investigate the issue, space, or the where, seems to be less problematized. In other words, not much prior literature has considered the significance of space and place, I would argue, in shaping local and international students’ identity, even though identities are formed and “continually reworked, contested and reproduced” in and through space (Shome, 2003, p. 43).

At the Far Eastern University, The Communication students’ Learning Journey provides a more formal structure that will capacitate students to navigate their academic lifecycle and prepare for career and life goals. It also integrates selected curricular and co-curricular activities as critical components of the students’ holistic development. The rationale for the FLJ is guided by the following:

1. Support the students’ constellation of evolving identities, needs and purposes.
2. Engage in learning opportunities , support services and intervention programs towards holistic development.
3. Provide inclusive, collaborative, capacitating and transformative school environment.

The Statement of the Problem

GENERAL: The study investigated how the Tamaraw Identity emerged on space and on place in the lived experiences of the Communication student Learning Journey.

SPECIFIC: Research Question # 1: What are the commonalities in conceived spaces (academic policies) in the categorized themes of students’ lived experiences within the inclusive period of AY 2020-2021 and 2021-2022?

Research Question # 2: How do they understand the meanings behind capability (curriculum and co-curriculum) in the lived experiences of students from AY 2020-2022?

Research Question # 3: What is the distinction in culture (school pride and system) evident in the meanings of the students’ lived experiences from 2011-2021?

Research Question # 4: How do they understand these distinctions in terms of connected (relationships)?

Significance of the Study

The study is significant to these stakeholders:

- The FEU Administrators: The study is relevant in understanding perspectives of the students in your learning journey that may provide inputs to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the learning processes.
- The Communication majors: The study is relevant in terms of developing their character aligned to the core values of Fortitude, Excellence and Uprightness to better equip them for gainful employment, not as followers but as leaders.
- The Communication scholars of Space and Place: The study situates its mixed qualitative analysis correlated with space and place and shall add to the scholarship in its examination of the study's variables.

Literature Review

Zucker (1959: 3), refers to space here is generally going to be used in relation to a 'three-dimensional expansion of any kind' and more specifically, as a scene for social life, formed by physical factors with their different dimensions, proportions and special features (monuments, fountains etc.). This is what Hillier (2008: 217) refers to as real space, meaning the shaped and interconnected spaces that people occupy in their everyday lives, as this is the level at which the relationship between the physical environment and social behavior and outcomes can be tested. Therefore, the container theory of space is adopted, according to which space is the scene on which the world proceeds, rather than relational one, that views space as a product of the relations between objects (Thrift 2009: 96).

What begins as an undifferentiated space becomes a place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.' (Tuan 1977: 6)

It is not an easy task to pinpoint the meaning of a word that is actually a definition in itself. However, understanding the concept of place, as well as how places are created or redefined in order to serve a specific social purpose, is crucial for city planning, management and even communication scholars.

Human geographers are generally in agreement that place exists in the context of space. While place is abstract, 'amorphous and intangible' (Relph 1980: 2), the concept of place is more concrete, charged with emotions and beliefs. The social practices of a particular society, the meaning that people assign to different objects and the way these objects are symbolized 'beyond their basic presence' (Madanipour et al. 2001: 158), is what gives places a certain meaning and turns them into 'centers of felt value' (Tuan 1977:4). Friedmann (2010: 154) argues for a more inside-out perspective on place, using the viewpoint of those who exploit and transform it. A place, according to him, is a 'small, three-dimensional space that is cherished by the people who inhabit it'. His definition also implies a distinguishment between space and place as between abstract and concrete, unemotional and emotional. Despite their opposing natures, it is clear that defining place would be impossible without using the concept of space.

The Role of place for everyday life and identity

Often when discussing place, the issue of everyday life comes up, as a place consists of ‘daily rhythms of being’ and is an important part of the process of interaction between people (Thrift 2009: 103). In the words of Relph (1976: 34), ‘people are their place and place is its people’, pointing out the mutual dependence between people and their environment, how they influence and create each other and the way in which places are deeply embedded in our everyday lives. As Sztompka (2008: 1) puts it, everyday life is a ‘seemingly trivial phenomenon’ and would have not been regarded as a scientific issue a couple of decades ago. However, today everyday life, together with the influence that places have on people and their identity, is of considerable interest to planners, architects, designers etc. Even though everyday life comprises both the private and the public domain, here it is discussed in the context of public spaces.

Despite the fact that we live in a highly mobile, technological and constantly changing world, Perkins and Thorns (2012: 2) argue that place and the local context continue to play an important role for designing everyday life. Places, according to them, cannot be regarded just as locations, but rather as ‘the center of everyday life’ (ibid: 14) that people gradually endow with value and form a close relationship with. This bond is described by Tuan (1976: 56) with the term ‘topophilia’, referring to the way everyday activities form a close connection with the physical environment. In more concrete terms, such activities include shopping and running different errands, having close access to work and school, as well as a well-functioning transport system, while at the same time feeling safe and having the opportunity to influence one’s closest environment (Boverket 1999: 32). As argued by Lilja (2000: 2), apart from improving living conditions and facilitating everyday activities, the built environment can also worsen and hinder them. She expresses a concern that surrounds the notion of everyday life today, as it cannot successfully manage to assert its position in the planning process. What is needed, especially in the context of the suburbs, is filling the gap between planners’ intentions and actions on the one hand, and knowledge on everyday life.

As far as identity is concerned, following the example of Relph (1976: 45), a distinction should be made between ‘identity of’ and ‘identity with’. The identity of a place refers to the features that distinguish it from other places, but what is more important for the current discussion is the identity that a person or a group has with a place, to what degree they are attached to it and how they experience it (for example, as an outsider or an insider). Identity, according to Lilja (1995: 54), can exist in an ethical, space and time dimension; it is something that arises as a result of our search for meaning in everyday life and establishes a connection between past, present and future, as well as a relation between a person and the physical environment, both built and natural.

Identity, she continues, is shaped in connection to everyday events; our appropriation of places and the relations we establish with other people in the context of the physical environment results in a process of ‘meaning creation’. In their study on Hökarängen square, Borén and Koch (2009: 8,9) also touch upon the issue and point out that the degree to which people identify and connect themselves with places vary, but can be strengthened by improving the functions of the place and its usefulness.

Identity refers to “abiding qualities [that] individuate and allow us to recognize individuals, categories, [and] groups” (Wiley, 1994, p.130). It is constituted through an amalgamation of experiences, memories, perceptions, and actions (Marginson, 2014). While identities

encompass a “feeling of biographical continuity” (Giddens, 1991, p. 54), they are also malleable over time and negotiated across contexts (Stewart, 2008). Indeed, sociologists and psychologists have highlighted how identity negotiation is enacted in and through social interactions, as well as through processes of self-presentation (Lawler, 2013; Swann & Bosson, 2008).

The study investigates how the Tamaraw Identity emerged on space and on place in the lived experiences of the Communication students’ Learning Journey.

The Theoretical Framework

The Student Life Cycle Model (Lizzio & Wilson, 2010) describes the five aspects of student success. The lifecycle model suggests that successful transition into university is predicted by five core aspects: capability, purpose, resourcefulness, connectedness & culture.



Figure 1: The Five Senses of Successful Transition

Source: <https://www.csusm.edu.com>

This model has a strong evidence base and has been used to predict first year retention and academic performance (Lizzio & Wilson. 2010). The TiTo project used the model as a framework for understanding both the transition of first year students into the program and third year students as they transition out and prepare for further work or study. Focus was on the five senses as presented in the table below:

Five senses	First year mentees	Third year mentors
Connectedness	develop connection with colleagues through facilitated small group activities	develop connection with other third year colleagues, helping facilitate an alumni community
Capability	build capability (course knowledge) by guiding students through the first assessment task	build capability by enhancing not only academic skills, but the graduate attributes identified as important by employers, industry groups, and our professional body
Purpose	explore their sense of purpose, helping first year students work out why they are university and articulate their personal goals	explore their sense of purpose, helping third year students articulate their career goals and clarify their commitment to further study after graduation
Resourcefulness	develop resourcefulness by learning effective time management, interdependent learning and help seeking skills	develop resourcefulness, learning effective time management, interdependent learning and help seeking skills
Academic culture	learn about academic culture, including academic integrity, from a later year colleague who has successfully navigated the terrain	embed themselves in the academic culture by connecting more meaningfully with the staff and students of the discipline and develop a sense of professional identity

Figure 2 The TiTo Project
Source: <https://www.csusm.edu.com>

The Conceptual Framework

From the theoretical framework presented above, the following conceptual model was adopted to frame the analysis of the study.

The Student Life Cycle Model (Lizzio & Wilson, 2010) framed the analysis, where purpose (goal after university; capability (curriculum, co-curriculum), culture (school pride and system), and connected (relationships) were examined.

In this model, surveys and FGDs with student leaders, non-student leaders, scholars, students with failing grades, students from the LGBT group, and alumni were conducted. The results were merged with the Student Lifecycle Model focusing on these components:

- (1) Purpose (goal after the university),
- (2) Capability (curriculum, co-curriculum),
- (3) Resourcefulness (handling changes and challenges),
- (4) Connectedness (relationships in and outside the university), and
- (5) Culture (school pride and system).

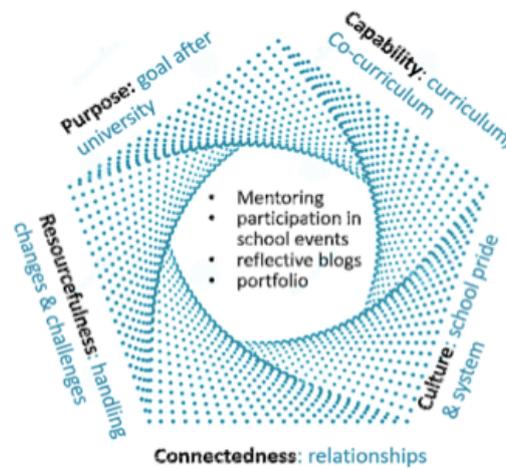


Figure 3. FEU Learning Journey Model based on Lizzio and Wilson, 2010

Design and Methodology

This study adopts a phenomenological perspective to understand the internal meaning of being a Tamaraw student. A phenomenological perspective gives participants a chance to present the shared meanings of their experiences (Creswell, 2002), by telling their stories freely and explaining their lived experiences deeply (Moustakas, 1994). The history of phenomenology started with Edmund Husserl, a German mathematician. In his extensive writings, Husserl emphasized many points of philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology. “Researchers search for the essential or central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image, and meaning” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the purpose of this study is to explore and understand the lived experiences of communication students in a university, a phenomenological design is the most appropriate method because it allows researcher to describe the lived experiences of participants in depth through the narrative analysis.

Participants

One Hundred participants were selected with a snowball sampling method. The students narratives were coordinated through the Office of the Assistant Vice-President for Students services, as they had repository of all FLJ learning journals. Participants in the study were mostly First Year students. Far eastern University, is one of the prominent universities in the University belt area and commonly known as Tamaraws.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a link sent by the Student Services Division of the University using semi-structured questions to be answered in narrative writing format which comprises data about academic policies, curriculum and co-curriculum and school pride and system.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis are interrelated processes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), so it is critical to make coherent arrangements. An inductive narrative analysis approach, which moves from the specific to the general by emerging themes or categories from the data

(Patton, 2002). Technically, Six steps to analyze and interpret the data as Smith et al. (2009) . After the verification and confirmation of transcripts, data was shared into NVivo 8, (QSR International Inc., United States) to create initial codes and make patterns visible with free and tree modes. In Step 2, important parts of the text were highlighted and examined to find connections and patterns by assigning to the modes in the third step. By doing so, the package program allowed me to organize codes and themes by seeking connections across them in the fourth step. A colleague was invited to check codes and themes generated in the analysis. After member checking, The list of themes and formed categories, which were clustered around themes, corresponding to the literature review and the research purpose. Then, I chose quotations that demonstrated the themes based on participants' lived experiences to help readers understand the whole context. Finally, Identified key themes in the whole data and explored connections between emergent findings and existing literature.

Results

These themes were identified from the narratives of the participants' lived experiences through the process: (a) lived experiences relating to academic policies (b) meanings behind capability (curriculum and co-curriculum) in the lived experiences of students, (c) distinction in culture (school pride and system) evident in the meanings of the students' lived experiences and (d) how they understand these distinction in terms of connected relationships. These themes reflect what participants lived socially and academically through their first or second year of study at that city and university. Table 2 presents the main and subthemes of the data.

Table 1 Data Themes and Sub-themes

Main themes	Sub Themes
Lived experiences relating to academic policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sense of familiarity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic
Meanings behind capability (curriculum and co-curriculum)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for student engagement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coherent
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived relevance to future career
School pride and system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowering
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership
Connected relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enriching
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complimentary

Lived Experiences relating to academic policy

Within the theme of lived experiences, most of the participants had positive experiences, while there were narratives that pointed to some negative ones. Indeed, the pandemic altered learning processes from face-to-face modality to virtual online classes. This too affected the student life' journey.

In terms of your academics, you should focus more on how you can study effectively. Knowing your own study pacing and schedule may be hard as there are many possibilities but after finding it out, I am telling you, your life will be put at ease. It will take a lot of trial and error, and attempts to find out during what time you are most productive but after finding it on your study habit will be more effective as you become efficient. Most especially that studying and working on your requirement is in different terms. I suggest that you do your task in the times that you are effectively working while for the free time on waiting for that time to pass/get to is to study. Weekly exams are inevitable in your course so having a schedule for it may help in following your lessons.

It's been one year and one semester has passed when I enter the school far eastern university. College life always has many challenges both physically and mentally. I hope to experience going to school in manila and be like other college students are doing but when the pandemic happened our life become messy. The normal way of studying and living has changed to cope with the pandemic. Many challenges arise and some solutions open up to continue our study.

(Respondent # 24)

Meaning behind Capability (curriculum and Co-curriculum)

Abstracting the meanings behind capability where capability here refers to the educational institutions' physical assets and manpower to offer quality education.

FEU offers lots of opportunities for students to join to, however, you must not forget that the university also promotes a healthy environment for us to work to. Moreover, if ever you needed help regarding your mental health, I am here to tell you that it's totally okay to seek help from FEU Guidance and Counseling, as they offer help enhance the students' holistic development by offering counselling services. Remember, it's okay to seek help. You are not alone. It's definitely much better for you to have someone to talk to, rather than using academics to distract you from feeling sad. It's okay not to be okay, and I hope that despite the hardships that you will go through, you will continue to find the joy of college life.

(Respondent # 85)

School Pride and System

This theme school pride and system in particular, refers to the culture in FEU where career pathing of its students become a priority.

College is where you will meet new faces that some of them you will only meet once and others are for forever. In here, you will experience a lot more advance that you had during your younger academic years but with hard work, I know you will get through it. Any coping advice would start with you being ready mentally and physically as freshmen year is where you build yourself and go beyond your zone with not only meeting other people but collaborating with them to, there's a saying from way back 17th century by poet John Donne, "no man is an island" that this quote is very relevant when you go start university as there would be a time that you really had to and would be thankful to be with someone or a group of people to share your

sentiments and rants with. Having strong support system helps as well for easily coping with new environment and incoming stress and work load as a freshman. Based on my experience so far, I have been in our university grounds for 2 years, physically when there was still face to face classes, since my Senior high school classrooms were located at the Accounting (IABF) and Nursing (NB). I can say that my SHS was a blast and I did not regret coming in FEU. Our university has a very welcoming vibe and what I like about it, since I was born and raised in the province, is that outside the school there are a lot of things like traffic, pollution and more but when you go inside the campus, you are welcomed with trees that gives you relaxing vibes.

(Respondent # 69)

Connected Relationships

As regard the theme connected relationships, this is both within and outside the academic institution.

There will be people both your classmates and professors who will bring you down and want you to give up please do not run away. I know that there have been a lot of events that have happened but I do want you to take your time before making a decision. Take some time to settle down and calm yourself first, then contemplate on your next step as this will be the future that you are planning. During these situations it is better to let all your frustration out– knowing you first take a day or 2 contemplating personally, not talking to anyone and is not in a mood to converse then after settling sharing how you are at your lowest and that of your experience. Sharing it with your friends actually helps in organizing and seeing from a perspective that you cannot see. Upon talking to your friends always seek advice on your decisions and opinion but the final decision is always yours.

(Respondent # 37)

Discussion

A ‘sense of familiarity’, refers to experiences recalled in recognition that we know something. Familiar things can make it easier to access and understand new knowledge, if things are completely unfamiliar the task of learning may become very difficult or potentially impossible. The students in this study revealed that familiar aspects of the first-year curriculum supported their experiences of learning. Features similar to students’ experiences of schooling enhanced familiarity as did smaller class sizes. The opportunity to focus on one subject and make friends was also recognized.

The inclusion of familiar people such as family and a welcome from the Colleges and other social activities were seen by the students to be integral to their learning journey. It helped them to ‘settle in’. The intentional involvement of mentor students was also welcome.

Mentors supported students to navigate the library, so they could become familiar with the physical environment of the university. Other students also purposefully assisted in the learning process.

When talking about their experiences of curriculum the students recognized the contribution that leadership played in their learning. This was evident in course coordination and the

knowledge required to structure a course. When asked to consider the extent to which the structure and management of their course supported experiences of learning, many responded with most likely.

This idea is reinforced by Kinchin (2011), who comments that revealing, ‘the “big picture” of the subject [course], as well as the details within it’ are important for student learning and the extent to which they can move, ‘between these perspectives is an indicator of depth of understanding and developing expertise’ (p. 186). With regard to coherence between subjects in a course, Schmidt et al. (2005) suggests that there is a structure to different disciplines that should be respected. Muller and Young (2019, p. 10) also comment that if the course does not, ‘signal these different conceptual logics clearly enough, incoherence will be the result...coherence is critical for understanding and learning’ and when grasped by learners they feel empowered. Deng (2015).

School pride and system is “culture” prevalent in the university. The Far Eastern University has been recognized World Universities with Real Impact (WURI) Ranking for 2020, placing 91st in the Global Top 100 Innovative Universities. Complementary activities, support staff and extra-curricular activities enabled the students to make the most of the opportunities for learning in their first year of study. Students in possession of a Scholarship indicated that while participation in extra-curricular activities was a requirement of their scholarship they too found the experience to be beneficial and positive.

Conclusion

The rationale of the FLJ learning journey is to support students’ constellation of evolving identities, needs and purposes. Hence, students have learning opportunities to engage in, support services and intervention programs towards holistic development The university provides inclusive, collaborative, capacitating and transformative school environment.

From this study, following the various themes and sub-themes arrived, one can surmise that the Tamaraw identity is marked by purpose, driven by capability and supported by resourcefulness in handling challenges. Connectedness or relationships develop as one navigates their 4 year stay in the university – their curricular, co-curricular, the academic support and services, career and counselling, all contributes to shaping the Tamaraw as brave, resilient, with fortitude and excellence.

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