

IGNITING THE HEARTH:

Fostering Agency and Autonomy through Narrative-Based, Community-Driven Learning

Older Adults, Second Language Learning, and
the Power of Shared Stories

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Why older adults? Why stories?

Older Adults

- 1 in 4 language learners 55 years +
- Underrepresented in research
- Rich life experiences – high potential agency, autonomy

Narrative & Myth

- Myth = shared language (Harari)
- Stories help make sense of the world
- Socratic discussion encourages deep understanding and insight

Learners are not passive recipients, but active participants in creating meaning and community.



Clarifying Agency and Autonomy

Autonomy

- the ability to manage one's learning (in and beyond the classroom)

Agency

- learner confidence, context, opportunity
- meaningful engagement

Autonomy is structure.

Agency is voice.



Research Framework

SLA theory

- Agency, Autonomy, Self Efficacy, Spatial Theory (Benson, Little, van Lier, Bandura)

Educational Gerontology

(Gabrys Barker, Ramires Gomez, Pfenninger, Singleton)

Ecological & Developmental Models of Learning

(Bronfenbrenner, Erikson, Elder)

Agency is an emergent process



Course Overview

10 week course

- explored myth through
 - Socratic discussion
 - storytelling
 - group led analysis & discussion

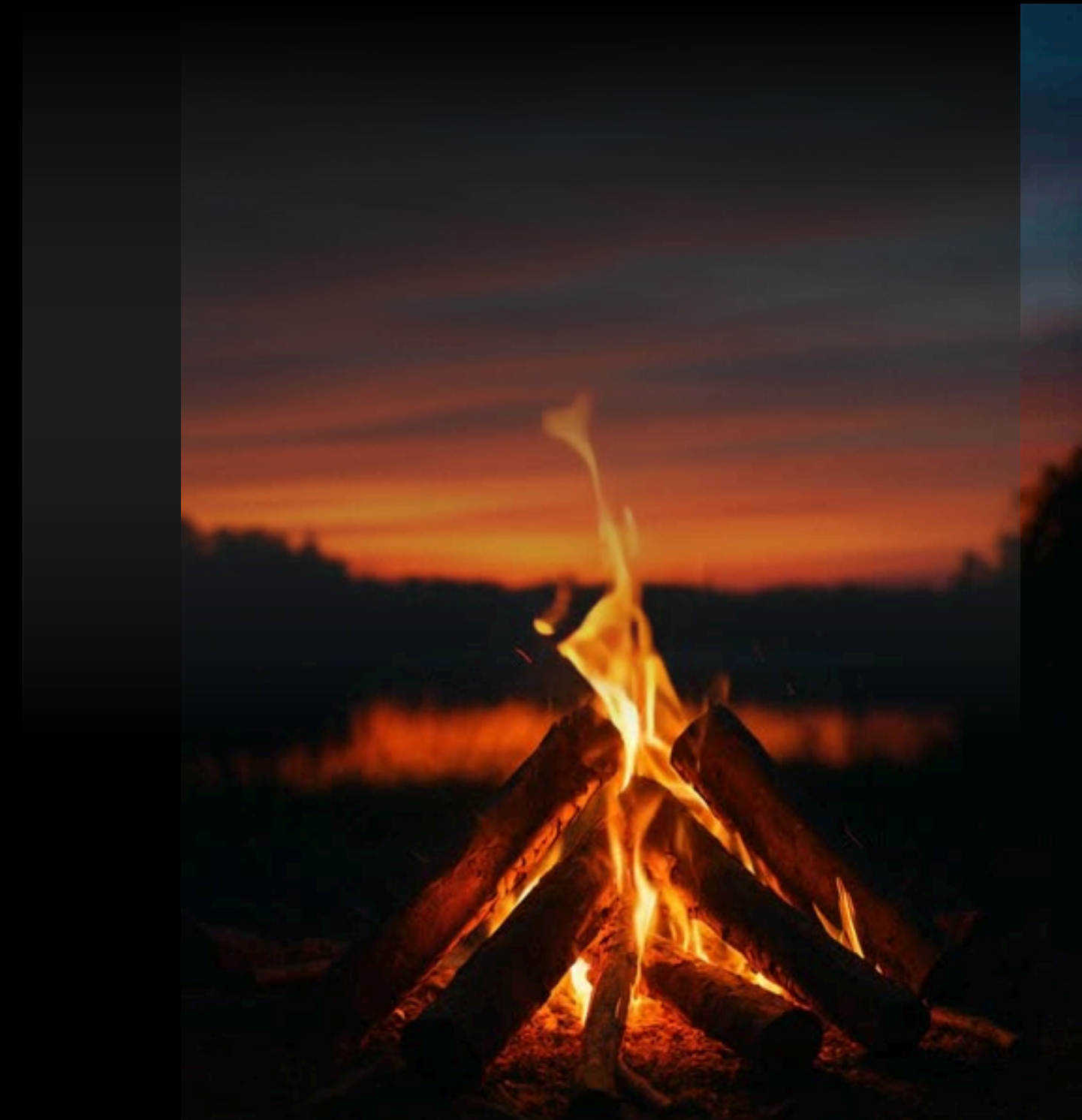


Hestia's Hearth – a ritual of contribution

Hestia

- Share a story, add wood to the fire

Visual record of student voice
– symbol of developing agency



Emergent stories & Cultural integration

- Start with examples and foundation exercises
- Base of class = support & materials to discuss

Next, over to class members

- allow for agency & autonomy to emerge through student ownership and trust of the process

Agency is collaborative and dynamic



Tracing Learner Agency

- Observed clear arc of agency development
 - initially responding
 - started contributing & collaborating
 - negotiating meaning
 - shaping the course themselves

Agency in action



Socratic Discussion Examples

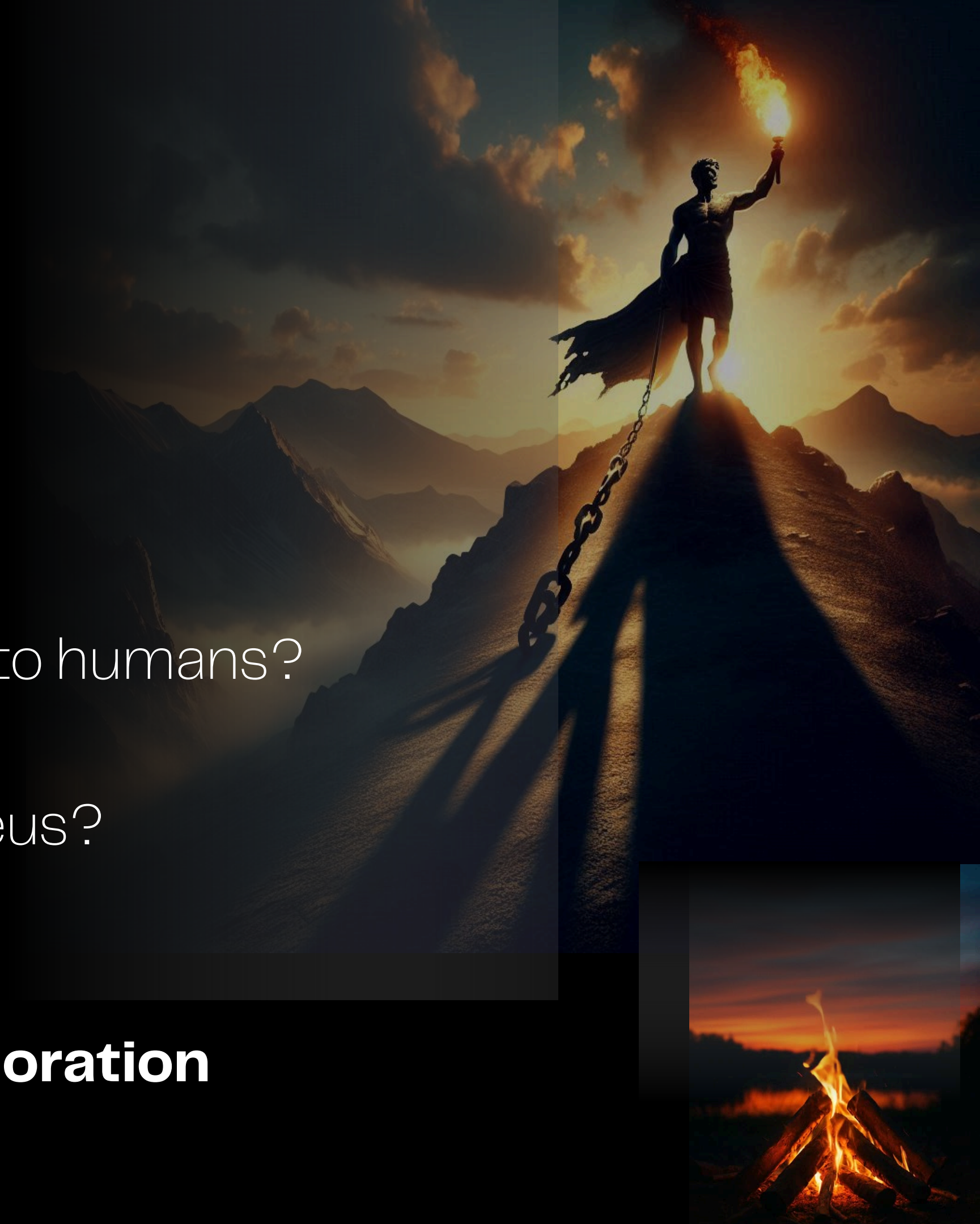
Prometheus – Socratic prompts

- What did Prometheus see?

Student led Socratic discussion

- What was the fire Prometheus gave to humans?
- What is the duality of humans?
- Why was Zeus so strict on Prometheus?

Discussion encouraged exploration



Socratic Discussion Examples

Perseus & Medusa – Socratic prompts

- What is a hero? What is a villain?
- Who is the hero in this story?

Student led Socratic discussion results

- Perseus is a pawn
- Medusa as victim
- Athena's strength
- Poseidon's complex character but high position
- The idea of deference in modern society

What is good? What is closer to truth?



Student discussion insight example



She should be holding Poseidon's head...

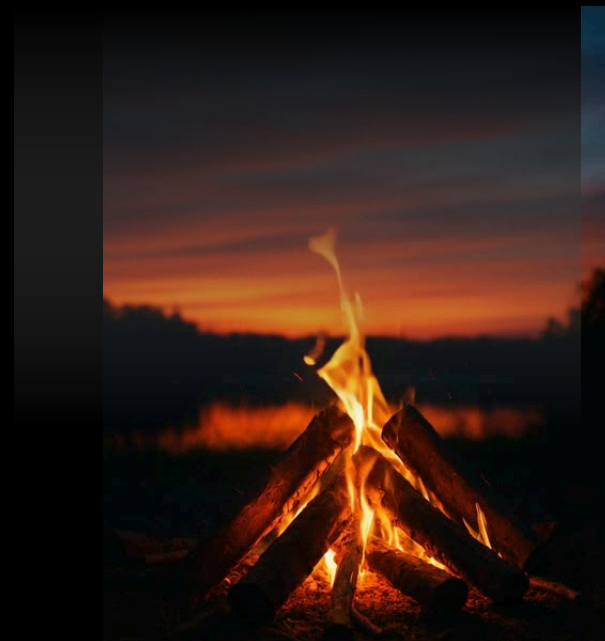


Framing for Teachers and Researchers

How can we support agency?

- create spaces for contribution that recognize the value of learner experience
- allow the course to grow as a response

**It's less about controlling content,
and more about curating context.**



Today: our Digital Hearth



Final reflection

“We’re not just learning English –
we are building something together.”

Essence of agency – it is not assigned, it is grown.



The fire of the hearth

Let's keep the fire burning in our classrooms and communities.

What can we do to keep the fire going?

Thank you!!

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