There cannot be a single standard of humanness or attainment or propriety when it comes to taking a perspective on the world. There can only be an ongoing, collaborative decoding of many texts. There can only be a conversation drawing on voices kept inaudible over the generations, a dialogue involving more and more living persons. There can only be—there ought to be—a wider and deeper sharing of beliefs, an enhanced capacity to articulate them, to justify them, to persuade others as the heteroglossic conversation moves on, never reaching a final conclusion, always incomplete, but richer and more densely woven, even as it moves through time.

Maxine Greene (1993)

University of Alberta

A Narrative Inquiry Into
Thai Families' Lived Experiences in Canadian Early Childhood Settings

by

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For my wonderful family, thank you for your unconditional love and support.

ABSTRACT

This narrative inquiry explores the educational experiences of two immigrated Thai families in Alberta. For these families, their children's early childhood classrooms are their first encounter with schooling in Canada. My teaching position at a multicultural school led to wonderings surrounding immigrant families' experiences, which shaped my research puzzle: What are Thai immigrant parents' lived experiences with their children's early childhood educational programs in Alberta? How do these experiences bump up against their stories of school?

Dewey's (1981) notion of experience informed my understanding of how early school experiences impact current expectations for children's schooling. This inquiry included the use of participants' photographs, school artifacts, annals (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and field notes based on conversations as field texts. As my participants and I co-composed their narrative accounts, we became aware of tensions between lived experiences and their expectations. This study highlights the necessity of viewing children in the context of their familial stories.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 1: Narrative Beginnings

It is mid-October during my first year teaching and my principal tells me I will be getting a new student. His name is Chet[1] *and he has just arrived from Thailand with his mother, father, and baby sister. My heart leaps with joy when he tells me this, as I have been to Thailand twice now and feel a strong connection to this beautiful country. I am excited about teaching this child, simply because I am drawn to Thai culture and cannot believe it has found me in this small city in southern Alberta.*

In anticipation of meeting Chet and his family I practice saying sawatdee kha[2] *over and over to get the pronunciation just right. I find myself thinking about our first meeting: Will we wai*[3] *to each other in traditional Thai fashion? Will his parents appreciate that I am familiar with their home country? Will Chet be excited that I am able to speak a few Thai words? I decide, undoubtedly, that I am the best teacher for him, since I am the only staff member familiar with Thai culture and Buddhist ways.*[4] *For example, I know to never touch Chet's head as*

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[1] All names in this thesis have been changed to respect the privacy of individuals.

[2] *Sawatdee* means hello in Thailand. Females add *kha* to the end of words and males and *khrap* as a sign of politeness.

[3] A traditional Thai greeting where your hands are held palms together in front of your chest and your head bows slightly.

[4] Since approximately 94% of Thais are Buddhist (Cummings et al., 2005; Khemmani, Tantiwong, & Vidhayasirinun, 1995), I assume Chet and his family associate with this religion before I meet them.

Buddhists consider this the holiest part of the body. The other kindergarten teacher would not know this, or other aspects of life in Thailand. I imagine the strong relationship I will have with this student and his family based on my 'inside knowledge' of their culture.

A couple of days later, our first meeting does not go as I had imagined. There is a knock at my door and I turn to see a family crowded around the entryway of our classroom. A Thai woman holds a small baby in her arms, a little boy stands between her and her husband—who is a White Canadian and not the Thai man I had in mind. Chet's mother is from Thailand and I learn that his father grew up in this city, which is why they have decided to move here. The secretary quickly introduces us and then walks away, back to the office. I stand there, not really knowing what to do: should I wai to the parents or shake their hands? I decide to do neither and simply say, "Hi, it is so nice to meet you". I bend down and say my practiced "Sawatdee kha" to the little boy; he looks at me and then shies away, hiding behind his mother's leg. The parents laugh, but I feel disappointed, I thought he would be excited that I knew Thai. Chet's mother says something to him in Thai as she nudges him forward, towards me and the classroom door. His family waves goodbye and turns and walks down the hall as he begins to cry. I try my best to console this small sobbing child who does not understand what I am saying, as I slowly lead him to the carpet where the other children await.

Chet is labeled an English Language Learner (E.L.L.) by the school district I work for, which is why he is bused across the city to our school, the only

elementary school with an E.L.L. pullout program. Because Chet takes the bus I rarely see his family so communicate with his parents through handwritten notes in his "Communication Book". I realize, with disappointment, that this is not the close home-school relationship I had envisioned. In one of the handwritten notes from Chet's mother, she asks me if I can send home more homework for him to complete. I am surprised by her request and respond with what I believe to be a fairly standard message in early childhood education: the best thing she can do is read with him everyday. Chet's mother does not ask me for more homework again, and I do not think about her request until years later.

One month after Chet began school it is time for parent-teacher interviews. I sit down with his mother and his Canadian grandmother, as his father is working out of town. Chet's grandmother tells me that he does not want to read books when he gets home from school because he complains of too much homework. This statement confuses me because I have not sent any work home with him. His mother then explains that Chet does Thai worksheets for one to two hours each night, after coming home from our full-day kindergarten program. This response startles me and I wonder if this homework replaces what I did not send home, or if it would be an addition to anything I had sent home.

Tensions on the School Landscape

Reflecting back on this experience, I realize it is one of the first times that, as a teacher, my stories of school have bumped up against a parent's stories of school. I recall feeling uneasy when Chet's mother told me he was completing hours of Thai worksheets each night. I wanted to tell her that it is not developmentally appropriate for young children to be sitting for long hours completing paperwork.[5] I wanted to tell her—again—that the best thing she can do for her son is read with him each night. I wanted her to realize that I, with my four-year degree in education, know what is best for her child. Thankfully, I did not say any of these things. Instead, I swallowed my words and arguments that were waiting to burst forth, and told her that Chet is a very hard worker and is making great progress learning English.

At the time of this conversation I realized that Chet's mother had different expectations for her son than I did. I felt, and still do, that we both wanted her son to be successful, but had different ideas of how this goal could be achieved. For her, Chet's success would come from practicing his printing, math, and reading skills by completing worksheets in his first language. Although I cannot be sure, I suspect he most likely had a book of worksheets in English as well. What I realize now, is that these practices most likely arise from her stories of school in Thailand. I, on the other hand, felt that Chet would be successful by engaging in

[5] Through my coursework, I have come to understand that what is considered developmentally appropriate in one culture may not be considered so in another (Kağitçibaşi, 2007).

play-based learning activities with his peers—as these activities are part of my stories of school growing up in Canada. As a first-year teacher, I lacked the experience to know how to bridge this gap between our different stories of school. In actuality, I was blind to the idea that there are multiple stories of school for the families I work with.

For the next three years I continued to teach kindergarten at this elementary school. Each year my classroom became more diverse as families from around the globe immigrated to Canada. I began to feel more and more uncomfortable in my classroom, not because the student population was multicultural, but because I didn't feel confident in my ability to teach these students. I didn't know how to connect school in Canada with their prior life experiences from diverse settings around the world.

At the end of each day the children would go home on the bus, and the next morning they would come back. I didn't know much about their home lives or their families; I only knew what our immigration settlement worker had told me. Her support was invaluable as she offered as much information as she was allowed about new students and their families. However, not all families had access to these services, it depended upon their immigration category—labels from the government which I still do not understand.

When families entered the classroom landscape without the settlement worker I was left with many questions. I often did not know where these families originated from or what language they spoke at home, questions the children did not know the answers to either. My students could speak other languages, but

they did not know what they were called, only that they spoke this way with their families. I felt a tension between my wonderings about their histories and being caught in the dominant story of a politically correct culture: I wasn't sure if it were acceptable to ask the parents where they were from, so I never did, afraid I would offend. As Phillion (2002) inquired into the stories of a diverse Toronto inner-city school, she and Connelly (2002) wondered about lives of the students and teachers being composed there. I too, began to have these same wonderings about the families in my school:

> Why are they here, and what do they want for the education of their children? How aware are [the] teachers, administrators, and others of the lives and hopes, the ambitions and dreams, of those who send their children to school? Do they know what parents want? (Connelly, 2002, vii)

I realized slowly, painfully, that I was not aware of the hopes and dreams of the families in my classroom; I did not know what these parents wanted. The following stories of Mubarak and his family illustrate these moments of recognition. These stories occurred during my fourth year of teaching, my last before beginning graduate studies.

Moments of Awakening

Story Fragment 1

Mubarak, a child too young for kindergarten, is a student in my classroom. His E.L.L. label has allowed him to receive funding for two years of kindergarten, despite his birthday being beyond the "cut off date" for this school year.[6] *He is a very quiet child, a personality trait that somehow surprises me because he towers over the other children in height. Mubarak loves to play with a small group of classmates, especially the other dark skinned boys. He laughs while he plays with them, but speaks so quietly to me I often cannot hear his voice. I wonder about this child, who I feel I cannot reach. What does he laugh about with the other boys? This child seems to live on the margins of our classroom because he will not let me, or many of his peers, in on his thoughts, conversations, or play. He keeps us at a distance.*

Mubarak is one of the children who arrives and departs on the school bus each day. His older brother in grade two usually comes to get him for the bus at the end of the school day. But today, when I opened the classroom door as the dismissal bell rang, his parents were there to pick him up. They waited for the

[6] The "cut off date" for this school district was the last day in February. This meant that children had to turn five on or before this day in order to be eligible for kindergarten. If they turned five on or after March 1st they would have to wait until the following school year to begin kindergarten. In the four years that I taught at this school, I saw the school district make an exception to this rule twice; Mubarak was on of these exceptions.

flood of small bodies to squeeze through the doorway out into the hall before they entered the room. They smiled at me and then asked how their son was doing. I smiled back and answered, "He's doing great, he's talking more every day" and I then busily helped the remaining children get on their backpacks and head out the door.

Mubarak is one of the children who I asked repeatedly where his family was from and what language he spoke at home, but he did not know the answers to these questions. To this day I still think about his family: where they were from, why they came to Canada, and the stories they hold of their previous country. I have thought about this very short exchange with his parents since I began graduate school. It bothers me that I answered these parents so quickly, with very little detail about their son. At the time, it never occurred to me that language and cultural barriers may have caused them to feel uncomfortable about coming to the school and asking me questions. When they asked me how Mubarak was doing, I understood their question as a general one, almost like how North Americans greet one another with "How are you?" and then don't wait to hear the answer. Knowing what I do now, I think about their question differently. I wish I would have sat down with them and asked about their hopes for their son, what they would like him to learn this year, and if they had any questions for me. I am reminded of the question Steeves (2006) poses: "What if those living on educational landscapes truly listened to the voices of parents and wondered about the silent ones?" (p. 109). I wish I had heard the voices of my students' parents.

Story Fragment 2

Mubarak's classmates loved to sing and at the end of each day, if time permitted, I would pull a name out of the jar and invite that child to sing for us. The children would squeal with delight as their peer walked to the front of the carpet area and assumed position 'on stage'. The children would sing a variety of songs: nursery rhymes most of us were familiar with, top hits they heard on the radio, or invented songs describing a play-by-play of our day together.

I never made the children sing, as I myself am not comfortable singing outside the safety of our classroom walls. The children knew that they could 'pass' on this task, and there were a few who consistently did; Mubarak was one of these children. However, when I pulled his name out of the jar one day in early spring, he said that he wanted to sing and came to the front of the carpet. The class grew very still and quiet, excited to hear their peer who so often opted out of this activity. It was almost as though we were afraid we'd miss it if we were to look away for a moment. The song sounded beautiful as he sang in his low and quiet voice. I believe it was some sort of African lullaby, although I will never truly know, as he sang in his first language. When he finished, all he did was look at me and return to his spot on the carpet. I felt myself unable to move on, struck by the beauty of his voice and this unknown language—this part of his story I rarely saw. Again, I asked him if he knew what language he had just sang in, but he did not. I thanked him for sharing that song with us and continued to pull names out of the jar so the other students could have a turn.

I was touched by the beauty of his song and felt elated that he shared a part of his identity with us. At this moment in time, Mubarak found his voice and his teacher and classmates sat mesmerized by the story he began composing for himself. The following week I asked him if he would sing the song for us again, but he told me he didn't know which song I was talking about. Mubarak had once again closed the door, shutting us out on this part of his identity. Thinking back, I wonder if he wanted to compose a story similar to the other children in the class: stories of soccer, top hits on the radio, and traditional English nursery rhymes. I wonder if Mubarak felt there was no place for his 'stories to live by'[7] (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) on our classroom landscape.[8]

This story represents an awakening within myself. As Mubarak sang for us it became loudly apparent that I did not know who this child truly was. After spending eight months together, this was the first time Mubarak spoke in his first language, revealing a part of his identity that the school landscape had silenced. This realization makes me uncomfortable, for what if I was the one silencing his

[7] 'Stories to live by' is a term Connelly and Clandinin (1999) use to describe how context and knowledge shape one's identity. Identity is seen as fluid, changing as one encounters new experiences and enters new landscapes.

[8] "Landscapes" are to be considered as more than a physical construct, as they are "shaped by social, cultural, institutional, family, and linguistic narratives" (Clandinin, 2010, p. 2). Thus, schools are storied landscapes that are shaped by individuals and reciprocally shape those same individuals (Clandinin, 2010).

voice? Greene (1990) reminds me that students and their families have diverse worldviews shaped by their experiences:

> Our viewing of what surrounds us is always perspectival, from the place of our particular location in the world, we must always recognize that there is more to be grasped and to be known. That being so, there are always possibilities of new developments, not only in ourselves and in our thinking, but in the lived world itself. (p. 69)

When Mubarak sang for us, I realized I was failing to incorporate my students' understandings from their locations, their vantage points. I was presenting the world to them as I saw it. I was blind to the "possibilities of new developments" that could have been.

My Location in the World

Being awakened to the diverse plotlines being lived out in my kindergarten classroom made me realize that I was presenting the world from *my* perspective. This realization caused me to feel tension within myself as I spent day after day with my diverse group of kindergarten students. My 'personal practical knowledge' was built upon school experiences situated within a White, middle-class worldview. Growing up in a small city meant that almost all of my previous teachers and classmates, and current colleagues were also from this background. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) describe personal practical knowledge as:

> Teacher's past experience, in the teacher's present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions. Personal practical knowledge is found in the

> teacher's practice. It is, for any teacher, a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of present situation. (p. 25)

As I lived alongside my students who were from around the world, I became aware of the tensions between my stories of school and their families' stories of school, which caused a shift in my personal practical knowledge. This knowledge guided daily interactions with students and their families as our stories to live by bumped against each other in our multicultural classroom.

I recognized that my immigrant students brought their diverse backgrounds to the classroom each day, and being a traveller meant that I had already experienced many different cultures around the world. My travel experiences have stayed with me, they have shaped my outlook and expectations, have changed how I interact with others and how I see the world. I relate to Phillion (2002) when she writes:

> Every extended stay in another place, every encounter with another person in another place, puts my values, my beliefs, my ways of thinking, and my everyday way of engaging in life under scrutiny and throws them into question. Encounters with other cultures raise issues of who I am, and what it means to be wife, . . . woman, teacher, learner, Canadian, world citizen. Encounters with other cultures are, for me, more than simply learning experiences at the time they take place. (pp. 4-5)

The counties of Southeast Asia have had the greatest impact on my life. Year after year I am drawn back to these places, and each time I return to Canada

slightly changed, having grown from my recent travels. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) describe Dewey's (1981) concept of experience as a "changing stream that is characterized by continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, social, and material environment" (p. 39). Rather than seeing one's identity as preconceived and static, Dewey recognizes that our past experiences shape our current and future experiences. In this way, my encounters in other countries have impacted my current location in the world.

From these travels I have come to understand some of the differences between the cultures I have experienced, yet as a teacher, I had trouble incorporating diverse worldviews in my classroom. I didn't understand how to incorporate my students' cultures into the curricular activities I had planned, perhaps because I was not familiar with their life stories. I have since come to understand that 'culture' is how one sees and interprets the world, and that it cannot be deduced to food, clothing, and customs (Kağitçibaşi, 2007). I believe this is why I struggled with incorporating my students' 'cultures' as a beginning teacher: I was looking for ways to include the tangible aspects of their culture (from what I understood culture to be at that time) rather than trying to understand their families' worldviews. As Greene (1995) writes, "The world perceived from one place is not *the world*" (p. 20). Thinking back, I wonder if it is possible that I felt uneasy because I did not understand the true meaning of culture. And therefore, I was failing to recognize that each student, each family saw the world from a slightly (and sometimes significantly) different place than I did.

Stories to Leave By

When I decided to leave teaching, I could not name the tensions I felt on the school landscape, I only knew I was unhappy and felt uneasy about teaching children I did not truly know. My 'cover story'[9] was, and often still is, that I wanted to return to university to obtain my master's degree so I would feel prepared for the multicultural classroom I had experienced. I desperately desired for someone wiser than me to tell me exactly how I should be teaching kindergarten. I told this story in out-of-classroom spaces to other teachers, administrators and parents because leaving teaching to pursue graduate studies was viewed as an acceptable way of leaving the profession. Out-of-classroom spaces are those shared teacher places, such as the staffroom and school hallways, where teachers are seen as having expert knowledge (Clandinin et al., 2006). While my cover story was true, it was not my entire story of leaving. My 'secret story'[10] was that I didn't know if I would ever return to the classroom. I wondered if I was 'cut out' for teaching—a career that seemed to exist on a tension filled landscape. At my time of leaving, I only told this to my close

[9] Clandinin and Connelly (1995) describe 'cover stories' as the stories that teachers tell in out-of-classroom places that "portray themselves as characters who are certain, expert people" (p. 15).

[10] Clandinin and Connelly (1995) use the term 'secret stories' to describe the stories that teachers tell other teachers in safe places, such as their classroom or an after school gathering. Secret stories are often composed of daily classroom life, teaching practices, and personal struggles.

teacher friends. I felt ashamed of this story, because it did not coincide with the acceptable stories of leaving.

Coming to Narrative Inquiry

As I searched online for classes to enroll in for my first semester of graduate studies, I came across a course entitled "Life in the Elementary Classroom" taught by Dr. Jean Clandinin. Based on the course title, I felt confident about this course: kindergarten teachers have seen, heard, and done almost everything. I enrolled in it without knowing much about the course syllabus or the professor.

I recall how surprised I felt when I walked into the room on the first night of class: the students and professor were sitting around a large rectangular table, not in rows of desks as I had experienced as an undergraduate student. I remember wondering where the notes would be projected for me to copy, for the room before me was not what I had imagined. It was comfortable and felt welcoming and we began our first class by going around the table introducing ourselves to the group. During my undergraduate degree, I had not had any classes where time was taken to learn about our peers. The professor simply introduced her/himself and the students began taking lecture notes. This class was different; Dr. Clandinin allotted time for relationships to form as we introduced ourselves on that first evening and throughout the course as we discussed assigned readings in small groups.

Throughout the course we also worked in other small groups, called 'Works in Progress'. These groups remained constant over the course of the semester, resulting in close relationships being formed among group members as we came

to know one another's stories. Each week we would bring our written stories of school, school stories, stories of teachers, and teacher stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) to our Works in Progress group. The four of us would take turns reading our stories and then inquire further into them using Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) notion of narrative commonplaces, which offer a conceptual framework for narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2010).

Three Commonplaces of Narrative Inquiry

The first commonplace is temporality, which suggests that experiences are temporal and can be thought of as "in process, as always in transition" (Clandinin, 2010, p. 3). Thus, daily experiences are viewed as taking place on a continuum, which allows one to contextualize them within the larger narrative history of a person or place. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain: "Any event, or thing, has a past, a present as it appears to us, and an implied future" (p. 29). Viewing people, places, and events in a temporal way has shifted how I view the world around me. I now seek to understand the past as a way of interpreting present events and experiences, and reflecting on how these current experiences will shape future ones.

The second commonplace is sociality, which focuses on the personal and social conditions surrounding a story. Personal conditions reflect "the feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480) of individuals, while social conditions include "the existential conditions, the environment, surrounding factors and forces, people and otherwise, that form each individual's context" (Clandinin, 2010, p. 4). This

commonplace draws my attention to the inner: feelings surrounding the stories told, and the outer: the context in which one tells their stories. The social conditions include the relationships with the people present, which greatly influences which stories are told and how they are told.

The third, and last commonplace is place, which draws attention to the physical setting. As stories are shared and inquired into, place includes both the place where a story is told and also the place within the story. My Works in Progress group met each week at the same round table in an office attached to the main classroom where our course took place. This space became comfortable to us and we felt safe to share our stories with one another. In our written stories, we also described the setting where the story took place, which allowed group members to envision the physical context of places past.

As my Works in Progress group inquired into our weekly written stories of school, stories of teachers, school stories, and teacher stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996) we began to see how threads had woven their way through each of our stories. A thread running throughout each of my stories was of the value I place on relationships, both on and off the school landscape. I used a photograph from my wedding day in Thailand to inquire into the relationships and stories connected with the people within the photo that have impacted my classroom practices. The following section includes excerpts from this autobiographical

narrative inquiry to give you, the reader, a deeper understanding of my location in the world and how it impacts my classroom practices.[11]

An Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry into Relationships

 [12]

Figure 1.1 Photograph from my wedding in Thailand (July 18, 2010).

This photograph is taken with the ocean in the background, what you cannot see is the guesthouse behind the photographer. A guesthouse is different from a hotel in that a family (or a small group of people) lives on site and runs it. Almost all accommodation in Thailand comes in this form, unless you stay at a foreign owned and operated hotel. At a guesthouse, you are treated like family as you are staying with a family in, what they consider, their home.

Before and after our island wedding, our group of friends travelled throughout Thailand. I wanted to show them my favorite places; I wanted them to love this country as much as I did. While sitting in a guesthouse restaurant one

[11] The original autobiographical narrative was submitted as my final paper for the course "Life in the Elementary Classroom" in December 2010.

[12] Photo courtesy of Thomas Pickard / My Wedding Photographer Ltd.

day, my friend asked me, "Jenny, do you always learn the names of the people?" He had noticed that I knew most guesthouse workers by name in each guesthouse we stayed at. His question caught me by surprise, I had to think about it for a moment and then responded, "Yes, don't you?" To which the majority of my friends answered "No". This got me thinking about the value I place on relationships, both old and new. While I have collected numerous friends over the years I always make time to get to know new people, especially when traveling. If these people are taking us into their home and treating us like family, then shouldn't I make an effort to at least know their names?

I suppose that being treated like family means something different to each person, and perhaps not everyone likes being treated this way. I love that the Thai people I have stayed with have asked me about myself: where I am from, where I have been, where I am going next, what I want to do while I'm here, and most importantly what I think of their country. They take their time to get to know a little bit about the travellers staying with them. So I think it's important to be friendly and do the same for them. I don't like treating them like workers, I try to treat them as equals, and I am honored to be staying with them. I have had families drive me to the train station, pick me up from the airport, bring tea to my room when I was feeling ill, and offer me advice on numerous occasions. In this way, they make me feel like I am a part of their family and perhaps they genuinely care about my well-being.

Growing up, my family was always extremely important to me. While I cannot attribute this closeness to one single event, I think it is for a variety of

reasons. Being the oldest meant I looked out for my two younger brothers, always trying to protect them from the neighborhood bully or getting hurt somehow. We are close in age (each of us two years apart from the next) and I think that has played an important role in our relationships. While both of my parents worked full-time, they always made time for us and I feel lucky to have had such a wonderful childhood. I think it is the culmination of these experiences that has created the family-orientated person I am today.

I try to transfer this sense of family from my life to my classroom. I often wonder if my students feel as strong a connection to their families, as I do to mine. Kindergarten is a year of transition for families. Most children are excited to finally be in school, some are sad, and almost all children miss their families. The first couple of weeks in September are especially hard and many tears are shed. I find that it is especially difficult on the oldest sibling, as this thing called 'school' is foreign to them. The younger siblings seem to embrace kindergarten, feeling excited to finally be included in the place their older siblings talk about so often. Yet, I sense their disappointment when they realize they do not get to see or spend time with their older loved ones for the majority of the day. I feel it is important that children feel connected to their families while they are at school, and also feel like they are a part of their new classroom family.

If you could look around my old classroom, you would see family photos stuck to the whiteboard with various magnets. The children used to rearrange the photographs on a daily basis. While I am unsure of their reasoning behind this, it became an end of the day ritual while they waited for their loved ones to arrive

and take them home. Some days, friends would move their family photos from across the board so they could be closer, other days they would compete to see who could push their family's photo the highest. These photos were the center of informal conversations about our families, homes, and interests. They served as a connection to the outside world that made learning relevant and meaningful.

We have no choice over the family we are born into, much like we have little choice about who our classmates are. Like a family, students spend hours together playing, learning, eating, and occasionally fighting. Kindergarten is an interesting time for children; for a few it's their earliest experience interacting with other children. While some children have been in daycare or attended Sunday school at church, others have little to no experience being part of a group. In kindergarten we spend a great deal of time on social skills: being a kind friend, taking turns, actively listening to one another, and showing our appreciation for one another. We begin to learn about our classmates, and share things about ourselves. We are creating friendships and forming connections so that each person may feel valued and loved within our classroom community.

I feel it is my job to ensure these relationships are established in a positive environment, so that each child feels like they belong to our classroom community. We get to know about our commonalities and differences, and learn to accept one another's faults. Midway through the year the children begin telling their peers and teachers that they love each other, and I know they do. We have accomplished many things together and spend a large part of the day in each other's company. We have come to love one another like family.

When I first got my teaching position I sent my first practicum mentor teacher an email telling her the good news. Her response to me is something that has greatly influenced how I treat the children in my classroom. She said, "Jenny, just love them. You are their first teacher and their first school experience, you can make them love school." I have never forgotten her words, and I doubt she knew the impact they would have on me. So everyday I try to make sure that my students know that I love them.

The relationships in this photo—family, friends, and nature—are very important to me.[13] They have molded me into the person, and teacher I am today. I have come to realize that teaching really is an art form because each person does it differently; there is no guidebook that tells you how to handle different situations. It is the relationships that are important to me that influence my teaching style and the values I try to instill in my students. They guide my decisions about what is best for my students and our classroom community. While each teacher holds a different teaching philosophy, mine would be grounded in the need to feel connected to loved ones and to nature while my students know that I "just love them".

[13] In the full paper I also discussed the value I place on relationships with nature and the outdoors and how this influences my teaching practices.

Thinking Back, Thinking Narratively

Being awakened to the value I place on establishing and maintaining relationships helped me name the tensions I felt when I left teaching. I struggled to know my students' stories to live by, because their life experiences were so different from mine. I am still uncertain if I was the sole contributor, or just one of many factors that led to silencing the voices of my multicultural students and their families. Phillion (2002) describes multiculturalism as "understanding that there are multiple ways to interact and relate, there are multiple ways to view the world; it is about respecting, honoring, and learning from these differences" (p. 21). Although I had traveled and respectfully experienced other cultures, I did not understand how the world could be viewed in multiple ways. I wondered about the life experiences of the immigrant families in my classroom, what the parents thought about the kindergarten program I was delivering, and if I was respecting their cultural beliefs. The tensions I felt when I left teaching have stayed with me during my graduate studies. They have been my catalyst for personal growth and have driven this research study.

Awakening to a Research Puzzle

> Human lives are not pieces of string that can be separated out from a knot of others and laid out straight. Families are webs. Impossible to touch one part of it without seeing the rest vibrating. Impossible to understand one part without having the sense of the whole. (Setterfield, 2006, p. 59)

I came across this quotation in Chung and Clandinin's (2009) article "The Interwoven Stories of Teachers, Families, and Children in Curriculum Making",

an assigned reading for the course Life in the Elementary Classroom. Chung and Clandinin (2009) inquire into the relationship between home and school:

> We imagine a child and her family as a web, and we realize that when we touch one part of a child's life, we set off vibrations in the rest of the family. By the same token, when the family touches its child, the child's life vibrates into classroom curriculum making. (p. 181)

Reflecting upon this article created a shift in my thinking about my previous teaching assignment and classroom experiences. I began to wonder how classroom life vibrated into the home lives of my students. Like other educators before me, I knew from my preservice teacher training that children's home experiences influenced their ability to learn each day: "We cannot fully understand a child without listening to the interconnected vibrations of her life in the context of her family" (Chung & Clandinin, 2009, p. 186). Vivian Paley (1997) also acknowledges the importance of understanding a child's context when she writes: "We need real people, real family members to tell us this part of who we are" (p. 85). What I had not thought about was the impact classroom experiences might have on my students' home lives. I now see school and home as having a reciprocal connection, like the web that Chung and Clandinin (2009) refer to, which is stronger than I previously understood it to be.

Awakening to the idea that students' lived curriculum at school ripples outward and touches their families' home lives created a sense of urgency for me to understand these experiences for the multicultural families in Alberta's classrooms. It is through the process of naming the tensions I felt surrounding my

teaching experiences, recognizing the importance I place on relationships, and becoming aware of how deeply home and school are connected that shaped my research puzzle: What are Thai immigrant parents' lived experiences with their children's early childhood educational programs in Alberta? How do these experiences bump up against the parents' stories of school?

Chapter 2: Coming to the Research

In recent years Canada has seen a steady growth in immigration, resulting in an increasingly diverse student population in schools across the country. For many of these families, early childhood settings are their first experience with Canadian schooling. Therefore, it may be the first time that their cultural values bump up against, and possibly conflict with, the values underlying the early childhood education system in Canada. One of the main roles of education is the enculturation of children, both immigrated and Canadian-born students. Egan (1978) further elaborates on this concept:

> In all human societies, children are initiated into particular modes of making sense of their experience and the world about them, and also into a set of norms, knowledge, and skills which the society requires for its continuance. In most societies most of the time, this "curriculum" of initiation is not questioned; frequently it is enshrined in myths, rituals, and immemorial practices, which have absolute authority. (p. 65)

Despite this important role, there has been little research conducted in the area of early childhood that focuses on the perspectives of immigrant parents' experiences (Tobin & Kurban, 2010). Further, little research explores specific cultural groups' perspectives. The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to understand the lived experiences of Thai immigrant families in early childhood education settings in Alberta.

Reviewing the Literature

I believe that almost all educators would state they attempt to establish a positive relationship with their students' families. This is viewed as extremely important in the early years, when children are beginning school and parental involvement is strongly encouraged. Open communication and partnering with parents becomes even more pertinent when students, such as English language learners, have specific needs that require a greater amount of support. Numerous studies have shown the importance of creating and maintaining a positive relationship between immigrant parents and their children's school (Harper & Pelletier, 2010; Lahaie, 2008; McWayne, Campos, & Owsianik, 2008; Seifert, 1992). Pelletier and Brent (2002) list parental involvement as an influential factor in contributing to a child's development, transition into school, and future success. However, a positive relationship with families who are English language learners may be harder to establish and maintain due to language and cultural barriers.

Pelletier and Brent (2002) conducted a study on parent participation in Head Start programs in Toronto. They found that parents who were English language learners were less likely to approach the teacher with questions than were the parents who were native English-speakers. To enhance home-school communication, Bang (2009) provides several suggestions for teachers working with culturally diverse families. First, teachers should recognize that not all families are familiar with the school system or school events. Second, various methods for communicating with parents should be utilized, such as phone calls, written letters, or sending surveys home for parents to complete anonymously, as

some parents may not feel comfortable expressing their questions or concerns in person. Third, both parents should be encouraged to participate in school activities as some cultures (Korean, Japanese, and Indian for example) designate school to be the woman's (mother's) concern. Therefore, although men (fathers) would like to be involved in school activities, cultural expectations limit their involvement. Fourth, Bang would like to see schools offering English classes for parents to learn vocabulary used in the school environment. For example, typical questions parents could ask the teacher at a parent-teacher interview would be a suitable topic. Lastly, schools could offer an information night about school policies and procedures to help parents understand the school system. Based on the research available, it is evident that both educators and scholars agree on the necessity of parental involvement.

Some scholars suggest that the lack of communication between parents and schools is for reasons other than limited English ability. Moss (2002) argues that early childhood ideologies of developmentally appropriate practice are dominated by "an Anglo-American narrative spoken in the English language, located in a [neo]liberal political and economic context, and dominated by certain disciplinary perspectives" (p. 437). The grand narrative[14] of the early childhood education landscape is a Westernized notion of 'developmentally appropriate practice,' which does not consider other cultural values or practices. Lewis,

[14] Clandinin and Connelly (2000) use the term *grand narrative* to describe "an unquestioned way of looking at things" (p. 22). A grand narrative is accepted as *the* way of doing or understanding something.

Macfarlane, Nobel and Stephenson (2006) discuss the shift in thinking one Australian practicum student experienced when she completed a student teaching experience in Cambodia, where the idea of developmentally appropriate practice is not supported. Substantiating this notion, Adair's (2010) policy brief created for the Early Learning Office in the United States' Department of Education, recognizes there are tensions between schools and immigrant communities resulting from differing views on what and how children should learn.

Tobin and Kurban (2010) compared teachers' beliefs with immigrant parents' beliefs about whether academics or play should be the focus in early childhood classrooms. This international study was conducted in France, Italy, Germany, the United States, and England. The researchers interviewed immigrant parents from a variety of cultural backgrounds and found that these parents typically place a greater emphasis on academic work than their children's teachers. Another example of this incongruent belief system is a mixed-methods study of the relationships between immigrant parents and teachers in early care settings in Canada (Bernhard, Chud, Kilbride, Lange, & Lefebvre, 1998). The study took place in three cities (Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver) with diverse immigrant populations and concluded that parents and teachers were unaware of their differing views about the goals of early childhood education.

With an increasingly multicultural student population in early childhood programs in Alberta, one can predict friction between teachers' views and families' views on education here as well. While there have been studies looking at specific cultural groups' experiences in early childhood settings, the majority of

these are not situated in Canada. For example, Agbenyega and Peers (2010) explore sub-Saharan African immigrant parents' perceptions of their children's care experience in Australia; and Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Metindogan, and Evans (2006) examine the influence of parenting style, parent-child interaction, and parent-school interaction on young children's social and academic skills development in Caribbean immigrants in the United States.

Some of the available literature describes the common educational experiences of immigrant families in Canadian schools; however, it does not seem fitting to classify all immigrants as having the same experiences as cultural groups have distinct differences from one another. I believe in honoring the voices of individuals from diverse backgrounds. One study that does this is Wubie's (2001) doctoral research, which explores immigrated first generation Ethiopian parents' perceptions of their children's transition into early childhood programs. She concludes that "understanding the experiences of children at home and at ECES [early childhood education settings] can help to facilitate better care and education for young children in general and for children of diverse cultures and languages in particular" (Wubie, 2002, p. iii). Chung's (2008) master's research inquired into the curriculum meaning making of a Korean child and her mother in a Canadian classroom. Her study emphasized the reciprocal influence between students' lived curriculum at school and their families' lives outside of school. There are few studies similar to these; the gap in the literature leaves me wondering about the lived experiences of individuals from other cultural groups.

According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2009) the number of temporary and permanent residents from Thailand has steadily increased over the past decade, resulting in a total of 5,828 temporary Thai residents and 7,636 permanent Thai residents coming to Canada between 2000 and 2009. However, the literature surrounding Thai's lived experiences with the Canadian education system is sparse and limited mainly to post-secondary environments. As such, I turned to literature situated in Thailand to further my knowledge of the potential experiences and belief systems of my participants.

Thai Early Childhood Education

There have been a few studies in the area of early childhood education in Thailand. Dunn and Dasananda (1995) studied parents' beliefs about the importance of different aspects of kindergarten programs in Bangkok, the capital of Thailand. These researchers found that highly educated parents placed value on care and developmentally appropriate practice, while parents with less education placed a higher emphasis on direct academic instruction. Bloch and Wichaidit (1986) concluded that kindergarten teachers in Bangkok valued a play-based learning environment to a greater degree than their students' parents. A study conducted by Khemmani, Tantiwong, and Vidhayasirinun (1995) focused on Thai child rearing practices and their implications for early childhood program development in Thailand. Their findings stressed the importance of incorporating local culture and dialect in program planning, and providing similar models of

teaching and learning in both the home and school. These studies offer insight into the early childhood education programs in Thailand.[15]

Thai Parenting Style and Family Relations

Family relations are unique to each family, just as they vary both within and between cultures. Kağitçibaşi (2007) explains the complexity of family dynamics: "Family is an integral part of society and is inherently tied to its social structure, values, and norms" (p. 126). Within every culture, families are influenced by their specific circumstances: socio-economic status, location, health, and religion for example. Differences between cultures occur in the values, traditions, and beliefs adults hold and pass on to the newer generations. Societies are not to be seen as static, Kağitçibaşi (2007) argues they are ever changing:

> Social change and societal development impact the family with resultant changes in the family structure and the family system. Such changes may, in turn, feed back into the context, modifying some of the living conditions. This kind of feedback loop would occur mainly through changes in family structure. Thus, a dynamic interaction takes place between the context and the family system through time. (p. 135)

In Thailand, family relations change through the influence of Western media and tourism, and as the population migrates from rural to urban settings.

In rural Thailand, children in families of low socio-economic status assist their parents with household work tasks (Liamputtong & Naksook, 2003).

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[15] For more information on early childhood programs in Thailand see de Los Angeles-Bantista (2004) and UNESCO International Bureau of Education (2006).

Relating this to Kağitçibaşi's (2007) Value of Children study (pp. 125-163), it is evident these parents stress the economic or utilitarian value of children, as they assist their families with work in the home and fields. Kağitçibaşi (2007) explains: "utilitarian values are basically concerned with the economic/material benefits of children, both while they are young and when they become adults" (p. 130). As parents age and are eventually unable to work, they rely on their adult children to care for them. Majority World countries, such as Thailand, often do not have social assistance programs. In Kağitçibaşi's (2007) study, 79% of Thai women rated old-age security as a very important reason for having children. Gillen et al. (2007) suggest similar results in their study, stating that Thai parents' idea of a strong child includes "obedience [and] staying with the family" (p. 212). Children are taught to be loyal to their families and care for their parents as they age. For this reason, families often prefer sons to daughters, as they are typically the ones to provide for their aging parents (Kağitçibaşi, 2007; Liamputtong & Naksook, 2003).[16]

Traditionally, in rural areas of Thailand extended families lived together. When the eldest child married, their spouse would move in with the family as a way to save money. When a younger sibling was ready to marry, they would often have to wait for the older, married sibling and her/his spouse to move out (Pinyuchon & Gray, 1997). Thus, an extended family structure was a temporary

[16] Tulananda and Roopnarine (2001) and Tulananda, Young, and Roopnarine (1994) offer further insights on Thai parental interactions with their preschool-age children in Thailand.

living arrangement. Pinyuchon and Gray (1997) further explain: "As Thai society gradually becomes less agricultural and more industrialized and urbanized, the family is being transformed from an extended to a nuclear structure. This trend applies to both rural and urban families" (p. 210). However, as Thai families shift from an extended to nuclear structure, they maintain a culture of relatedness. Extended family and neighbors often share childrearing responsibilities and serve as social and emotional support for one another (Liamputtong & Naksook, 2003). Kağitçibaşi (2007) labels this type of family structure as a 'functionally extended family' because while the household is nuclear, the family "functions as if it were extended when carrying out tasks" (p. 137). As families move from rural areas to large urban centres, such as Bangkok, they increasingly rely on their neighbors for this type of support.

Family structures and relations change over time, as industrialization and rural to urban shifts occur in Thailand. Traditional Thai customs and values are also challenged as mass media and tourism introduces Western ideologies. However, Thais have maintained their culture of relatedness. When Thais immigrant to new countries they face "social and cultural norms [that] are markedly different from Thai ways"; mothers feel this "has a profound impact on the perceptions and behaviours of their children" (Liamputtong & Naksook, 2003, p. 661). Many Thai women marry outside of their culture, and immigrate to their husband's home country. Their childrearing beliefs are often conflicting with their non-Thai spouse's, which can cause friction in their relationships. Liamputtong and Naksook (2003) found that Thai-Australian women still wished

to instill a sense of loyalty and deep respect for others in their children, although they felt these values were not prevalent in their new society. These parents struggle to merge two very different belief systems as they raise their children.

Methodology

Narrative Inquiry

> Narrative is about understanding the complexities of experience, honoring the subtleties of experience and understanding the dynamics between individual experience and contexts that shape experience. Narrative reaches out to the past, is rooted in the present, and turns an eye to the future; narrative evolves with changes and shifts in time, place, and interactions. Narrative, as both phenomenon and form of inquiry, is a perspective that provides illuminating ways of viewing the world.
>
> (Phillion, 2002, p. 20)

Narrative inquiry is based on the idea that "people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). The three narrative inquiry commonplaces[17] (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) guided my participants and I as we inquired into our shared stories. As conversations unfolded, the notion of collaborative meaning making and multiple ways of being in the world became evident. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) further explain:

> People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which

[17] The three commonplaces of narrative inquiry were discussed in chapter one.

his or her experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. (p. 477)

Narrative inquiry is often described as "both phenomenon under study and method of study" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 4), as the shared stories we inquired into were later co-composed into narrative accounts based on both of our understandings of these events.

Phillion (2002) uses the term *narrative multiculturalism* to describe her narrative inquiry work in a multicultural school in Toronto. The following excerpt is taken from a poem in her book, *Narrative Inquiry in a Multicultural Landscape: Multicultural Teaching and Learning:*

Narrative multiculturalism is
person-centered, experiential, reflective.
It opens up new possibilities for understanding;
possibilities founded in the experiences
of those studied,
derived from the contexts
in which they live and learn,
entangled with the lives
of those engaged in the research.

Narrative multiculturalism is
about understanding
the daily experiences of people in this world,

in schools, in classrooms.

It is about immersion

in the lives and experiences of people,

learning from this immersion

and learning from all life experiences.

Narrative multiculturalism

thrives on relationships,

and learning from being in the relationships.

(Phillion, 2002, p. 157)

I am drawn to her description of narrative as I feel it captures the essence of living alongside participants, the importance of relationships, and highlights the complexity of narrative inquiry.

Uncovering My Expectations

As I reviewed the available literature, I wondered about Thai-Canadian families' untold stories of school. I hoped to find two Thai families living in Alberta who would want to share and inquire into their experiences. Although we had not yet met, I began to imagine who they might be. Thinking back, I now see that I was storying them to be like the Thais I have previously met through teaching and travel. I made assumptions before even meeting them, based on my current knowledge of Thailand and Thai culture. This section, written in April, 2011 contains some of my expectations and wonderings about the study before it began.

I am drawn to study these families' experiences with early childhood programs for a number of reasons. First, as a result of having visited Thailand on numerous occasions I am familiar with the culture. I am aware of some of the differences between mainstream Canadian culture and Thai culture. For example, most Thais are non-confrontational and would not want to cause any conflict. For this reason, I believe that Thai parents who have concerns or questions about their children's education may not feel comfortable speaking with the teacher. Although most teachers would not consider this a confrontational act, a Thai parent may view it as one.

Will there be a lack of communication between Thai families and their children's school? The participants in my study will be people who were born in Thailand and have immigrated to Canada. How does this impact their communication with teachers? The school? They are fairly new to Canada, and may not want to offend a Canadian teacher, a person in a position of power. As well, a language barrier between the English-speaking teacher and Thai-speaking parent exists. Therefore, I believe there may be numerous sources of tension contributing to Thai families' experiences.

I am entering this study with the belief that there *are* tensions between Thai parents' expectations and their experiences with early childhood programs. Perhaps I will be pleasantly surprised by their stories and find they are satisfied with their experiences. The realist in me is saying this is not so; the Eurocentric *Programs of Study* (Alberta Education, 2012) and the Western ideals promoted in

our education system cannot possibly make all cultural groups feel represented, valued, or empowered.

The second reason I am interested in hearing Thai families' stories of early childhood programs is because of my experiences as a kindergarten teacher. I thoroughly enjoyed teaching kindergarten and strongly feel it is one of the most important times for children and their families because, for most children, this is their first experience with school. I believe the role of the early childhood educator is to help children feel successful and excited about being in school. Kindergarten is a time for children to learn both social and academic skills; it is a time for basic, foundational skills to be established to ensure future success in school. When the classroom is a place where children *want* to be, I feel I have successfully done my job. I intentionally used the term "the classroom" instead of "my classroom" because I feel the classroom is a space that is negotiated and created by all members of a class. Students need to see themselves in the room, to feel they are represented and that the space is just as much theirs as it is mine. I am hoping this study will provide further knowledge about how I, and other teachers, can ensure Thai students feel like they are represented in their learning spaces.

Third, while I realize that Thai students are not a large percentage of the student population in Alberta it upsets me when people from Southeast Asia are lumped together in studies and labeled "Asian" (For example, Han, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2009). This "Asian" label suggests that the people from numerous countries are so similar they can be placed in one category. I do not believe

Canadian culture could be represented if Americans, Canadians, and Mexicans were grouped together as "North Americans". Our cultures are too different to be placed under one label, and Southeast Asia is no different.[18]

Lastly, I have a fondness for Thailand and Thai culture. I enjoy the beautiful and diverse landscape of the country; I enjoy Thai food and how Thais gather around a table to eat and visit for hours in the evenings; I appreciate how Thais are not concerned with time or rush to complete tasks quickly; and I have witnessed on numerous occasions what I interpret to be the importance Thai's place on family and community. These aspects of Thailand remind me to slow down and enjoy the beauty of my surroundings and the time I spend with friends and family. These experiences contribute to my bias towards Thai culture: I hold it in high regard and cannot help but daydream about an early childhood program that incorporates these values.

Through this study I hope to make teachers aware of some of the incongruities between mainstream Canadian culture and Thai culture, particularly as it concerns early schooling. I hope that teachers will become informed about how our early childhood practices are both congruent and incongruent with Thai beliefs about childhood. I believe that "best practice" can never be fully achieved, as it is our professional obligation to continue to learn, expand our understandings, and evolve our teaching practice. Based on this belief, teachers should consider

[18] I am not assuming that everyone in a cultural group is identical. Rather, that members of a cultural group are similar when compared to members of other cultural groups.

what different immigrant groups—in this case Thai immigrants—value in early childhood programs.

Coming to the Research Participants

> Experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences. Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum—the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future—each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2)

Based upon the idea that experiences take place on a continuum, I wanted to seek out Thai parents who went through the Thai school system. I felt that these parents would imagine, and perhaps want, their children's school experiences to be similar to theirs. I was seeking participants who had a child currently enrolled in school, from pre-kindergarten up to grade three, as these grades are considered early childhood according to the Early Childhood Education Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association. I began my search for participants by contacting different Thai Associations in Alberta.

Coming to Know Son and Moon

I came to be introduced to Son and Moon through a Thai Students' Association at a university in Alberta. Son and I corresponded through email and arranged to meet on the university campus so I could tell him about my research. I remember feeling anxious as I waited for him to arrive at our agreed upon meeting place in a busy food court area. Although I wore the red shirt I had told him to look for, I worried he wouldn't find me or that I wouldn't know who he

was. I had no reason to worry though, a few minutes later I saw a smiling Thai man walking towards me. Son was not like the other Thai people that I knew as he seemed very conscious of the time and I sensed that he had a busy day planned. I told him about my research and he agreed to participate, informing me his wife, Moon, would also like to take part. We agreed to keep in touch via email until we would meet again in late August.

Son and Moon had moved to Canada so that he could attend university and complete a doctoral degree. Son could have gone to school in Thailand, but had met a Canadian professor who encouraged him to apply to his university, and Son liked the idea of studying in English. Moon took a leave from her career as a doctor in Thailand so the family could move here together. Their son, Thum, attended full-day kindergarten in Thailand and would begin grade one once they came to Canada. They have now lived here for three years and will soon be leaving to return to their home in Thailand.

As I look back over my field notes, I recall how anxious I felt about meeting Son and Moon for our first research conversation. The night before our scheduled meeting, I wrote:

> I feel nervous and excited; I've been visualizing and anticipating our meeting for so long—it's hard to believe the time has finally come. I wonder about the stories you will tell me tomorrow. I hope I can understand and relate to your childhood in Thailand. I imagine it was much different then, before the influence of tourists and Western media.
>
> (Field Notes, August 30, 2011)

Son and Moon's stories of school and stories of teachers are told in Chapter 3: *"His Real Life is in Thailand"*.

Coming to Know Jintana

A member of the Alberta Thai Association met me for tea at a local café on a sunny afternoon. I recall feeling anxious about the meeting, would she see that I had my future participants' best interests at the centre of my study? I told her about my research—why it was important to me, my experiences in Thailand, and how I felt my research would be beneficial for other early childhood teachers. As she told me about her life here in Canada, I wondered whether she missed her home country. She seemed excited about my research and told me she wished she could participate but her children had already finished school. We parted having agreed that she would contact families that met my participant criteria to let them know about my study. If they were interested in participating she would pass their contact information on to me.

A couple of weeks later, she gave me Jintana's name and email address. I sent her a letter introducing the research study and myself. Through our email communication, I came to know bits and pieces of Jintana's life. Jintana did not live in the same city as me, so our meetings would be limited to the weekends. We made arrangements to meet on a Saturday in early September.

Over the following months, I met with Jintana on a monthly basis. We would often spend the day together, recording only our formal conversation we had planned around her stories of schools and teachers. My field texts from our

conversations included four recorded and transcribed conversations, an annal[19] which Jintana created during our first meeting, family photographs, school artifacts, emails sent to one another, and field notes of our time spent together. The following co-composed narrative account tells the story of our first meeting and Jintana's story of coming to Canada. More of Jintana's stories are told in Chapter Four: *Stories of a Future Professional Dancer.*

Our First Meeting

I leave my hotel and drive to the restaurant where Jintana and I have arranged to meet. I get there early as being late for appointments always makes me feel anxious, and I already feel nervous about meeting Jintana for the first time. I look at the people immersed in conversations at the tables, and not seeing anyone alone, I take a seat in the waiting area. I keep glancing at my watch and grow more restless as each minute passes. I worry that she has decided not to come, that she no longer wants to share her stories and experiences with me.

It is now ten minutes after we said we would meet, I decide to call Jintana incase she has decided not to come me after all. She answers the phone on the second ring, her voice sounds cheerful and she informs me that she is on her way. I instantly feel relieved, and then regret washes over me—why did I call? I know that most Thai people live on what I call 'Thai time'. The whole country of Thailand seems to run on its own time, its own rhythm: trains and buses leave

[19] An annal is like a timeline, created by the participant, to chronicle major life events. It acts as a framework for participants to shape and narrate their social and personal histories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

when they are ready and arrive when they arrive, not when the schedule says they should, and Thai people are the same way. In Thailand, life is not as rushed as it is here in Canada, and I worry that I have made Jintana feel rushed to get to the restaurant to meet me. I should have known she would be late, that she would come on her own time.

Fifteen minutes after the time we said we would meet, a woman with dark brown hair and deep colored eyes walks through the door. She smiles at me, and my heart feels at ease: she has come after all. We sit at a table on the far side of the restaurant, one that will allow us some privacy. We order coffee and begin to tell each other about ourselves. I immediately feel comfortable around Jintana, we chat as though we are old friends, catching up after not seeing each other for a while (Field Notes, September 10, 2011).

After having consumed numerous cups of coffee and finishing our breakfast, Jintana and I talk about the research project. She tells me that she hopes she can help me, and I assure her that she will be able to. We push our half-filled coffee cups and empty plates to the other side of the table and I ask Jintana to create an annal, to document the important events in her life.[20] *I place a pen, sheets of white paper, pencils, and the felt pens I have brought with me in front of her. She picks up the pen and draws her timeline, placing the following events on it: "high school", "work in Thailand" (tutoring school), "Canada", "Family, Husband", and "Now". I notice her timeline ends at "Now" and does*

[20] Jintana's annal can be found in Appendix A, Son's in Appendix B, and Moon's in Appendix C.

not extend into the future. The following story emerged as Jintana talked about the events she plotted on her timeline.[21]

Jintana's Tutoring School and Coming to Canada

Jintana explained to me that when she completed university in Thailand with a Bachelor of Applied Science and Mathematics degree, the country was in a recession. She was unable to find a job in her field, so she withdrew all of her savings and opened a tutoring school. When she told me this, I marveled at how brave she was to take a risk like that, a risk that I'm not sure I would be willing to take. Jintana was confident in her decision, knowing the dedication parents have towards their children's education in Thailand. She explained to me:

> *In Thailand we are so concerned parents, always concerned, all the money they put for children's school. Yeah, and lots of government schools over there, teachers are not that good sometimes. They don't really care. Sometimes the kids don't learn too much with some subjects and they have to go out to tutoring schools. It's a big business over there…and in Thailand it's easy to find money. If you have an education, it's good. It depends what you advertise, what cost you create you always will have kids to come. Especially English. Yeah, it's no matter how expensive; you will always have kids come to pay to learn. (Recorded Conversation, September 10, 2011)*

[21] The stories that emerged from Jintana's timeline were often discussed during our later conversations as well.

Jintana beamed as she told me about her school's success. How she began by renting a building and had only one desk and one chair in a large empty room. She worked hard to get her school known: volunteering in classrooms and forming close relationships with teachers in the government schools. Summer break was coming to an end and she had only one student registered for her school, she felt a little worried and then, one week later, had a rush of students come to register. With their tuition money she was able to purchase the rest of her supplies and furniture. After that, her school was always full of students and she was able to hire friends, family, and farangs[22] to teach for her.

It was in her tutoring school where she met Jim, a Canadian looking for a position as an English teacher. Although Jintana and Jim began their relationship as friends, they soon started dating and married a couple of years later. Jim wanted to return to Canada and assured Jintana that she would be able to get a good job here because she has a university degree, perhaps, he thought, she could work for the government. Jintana laughed as she told me, "He had no clue how hard it is for immigrants. He just thought, 'Okay you have an education, it's okay'" (Recorded Conversation, September 10, 2011). Like many people who immigrate to Canada (Li, Gervais, & Duval, 2006), Jintana was unable to find work using her degree; instead she found herself working long hours at McDonalds, Wal-Mart, and a 7-11 convenience store. My heart ached for her as she told me this, because I knew what she left behind in Thailand: a

[22] *Farang* is an affectionate Thai word for a Western foreigner. The 'r' is pronounced as an 'l' in Thai, so this word is pronounced as 'falang'.

successful tutoring school that provided her with enough money to travel around the United States.[23] *Curious, I ask her if she sold her tutoring school, she looks at me and replies, "That was a big mistake" (Recorded Conversation, September 10, 2011). Jintana left her successful business for a life of struggle in Canada: her and Jim struggled to pay their rent and buy groceries during their first few years in Alberta. Coming to Canada disrupted the story of a successful businesswoman that Jintana was composing for herself in Thailand.*

When Jintana and Jim first arrived in Canada, they did not immediately settle in Alberta. First, they lived in a small town on the East Coast, where Jim's family lives. Jintana felt very homesick there because there were not many young people in the area. She spent her time with Jim's mother, helping her in the bakery she owned. Jintana tells me that she felt like an alien, as people in the town would come to the bakery just to see what Jim's Thai bride looked like. I can't imagine the culture shock and isolation she must have felt when she arrived in that small town on the East Coast, where she was the only visible minority.

Understandably, Jintana felt very lonely there, despite having Jim's parents live just down the street. She convinced Jim that they should try living in British Columbia; since she enjoyed the few days they had spent there after the flight over from Thailand. While Jintana loved living in the Vancouver area, they found it to be too expensive and only stayed for a short while. Jim and Jintana decided to move to a mid-sized Albertan city to look for work and a more

[23] For many Thais, the idea of traveling to other countries is an unattainable dream, as they cannot afford to travel.

affordable lifestyle. It is here that they now reside, where their daughter Mew was born and now attends grade one; however, they both feel this city is not ideal. Through Jintana's "small stories" (Georgakopoulou, 2006) she tells me that the people in the area seem rude and unfriendly (Recorded Conversation, September 10, 2011). I can see how Canadian culture would be a difficult adjustment for Thais, as Thailand is famously known as the 'Land of Smiles' because the people are so friendly. Jintana also tells me how expensive this city is and how her and Jim long to buy a home but cannot afford one here. Jintana and Jim plan to leave this city, leave behind the unfriendly strangers, and relocate to another city in Alberta—one where they hope to find happiness, a home for their family, and end their financial struggles.

After this conversation, Jintana looks down at her timeline and extends the line that ends just after "Now", upwards. She tells me, " Yeah, just now, like my life, just steady and yeah, and I can feel…" (Recorded Conversation, August 31, 2011) her voice trails off as her finger follows the line up the page.

Jintana imagined a better life in Canada for her and Jim. Yet, her lived story is one of struggle, of the food bank and feeling like an alien. When I left our conversation that day, I felt deeply troubled by her struggles. I thought about her as I drove home to Edmonton and wrote this poem later that evening.

As I walk away in the parking lot
I begin to cry.
I have waited,
until you can no longer see me.

I cry for you

and the struggles you've had,

in this land you came to.

You say you are a bad daughter

for not going home.

Yet, you hide your anguish

from your parents when they call,

so that they will not worry.

You tell me of depression,

the food bank, and borrowing money from friends.

You tell me things are getting better

and smile through your tears.

I think you are brave,

a good daughter, wife, and mother.

I think you are optimistic and kind,

and wonder if I could be the same.

I hope you did not cry as I walked away.

(Field Notes, September 10, 2011)

Negotiating Relationships and Ethical Considerations

"Relationship is key to what it is that narrative inquirers do" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 189), which is part of the reason I am drawn to narrative inquiry. In narrative studies, the participant-researcher relationship typically becomes very close as sharing and co-composing stories is more personal than asking participants a list of predetermined questions. Prior to beginning the study, I thought about our future relationships:

> I am wondering what our relationships will look like. How much will you let me into your lives? How much of your time will you want to share with me? I feel greedy asking for much of it, so I will take whatever you are willing to share. (Field Notes, August 30, 2011)

Narrative researchers acknowledge that relationships do not end when the research does, referring to narrative inquiry as relational inquiry for this reason. Clandinin (2006) asks researchers:

> To consider our long term responsibilities, responsibilities that may not end when we negotiate that final research text but that may linger and reappear, may, in some sense, haunt us, for neither our lives nor the lives of our participants end when we hand in our dissertations or write our final research texts. Lives continue. (p. 5)

My relationship looked different with each of my families. Son and Moon met me once a month for four months to talk about their school experiences. Our one-hour conversations were recorded and later transcribed. Our relationship felt very formal—they had busy lives and made time to meet me for these

conversations. I am very grateful for their time, as their stories contained profound insights about Canadian culture and school practices. Although I only spent a short time with Son and Moon they have touched my life and have forever impacted my teaching practices.

My relationship with Jintana felt quite different from my relationship with Son and Moon. Jintana and I also met only four times; however, we would often spend the entire day together, recording only for an hour or two while we discussed stories of school I had asked her to think about. I felt at ease around her, as though I had reconnected with a life long friend. Jintana and I also communicated through email and text messages between the times we were not together. I have come to understand that relationships looks different with each participant in a narrative inquiry, there is not one way of living alongside participants.

After only knowing my participants for a short while, I wrote the following letter to them in my field notes on October 22, 2011:

> Dear families,
>
> I want you to know that I care deeply about you—about your well-being and your futures. I didn't expect to feel such a strong bond with you. I often think about you through my day.
>
> To Son, Moon, and Thum:
>
> I wonder what life is like in your apartment. I wonder if it is hard on your family with Dad working so hard at his schoolwork. Moon, I worry about

you being sad. This city is so different from Thailand and I know you miss working with patients. Lastly, and probably my greatest worry, is your son's education. I know he is in a good school and I am not worried about him now. I worry about him when you return to Thailand. Next year he'll be back in a traditional Thai classroom spending all day reading textbooks. Will he be able to make this transition? Will he like school? Will he be excited about learning?

To Jim, Jintana, and Mew:

I worry about your daughter at school. She keeps getting picked on and this makes me very sad, sad because I know she thinks school is just okay: 'thumbs middle', and sad because these are your early experiences with school in Canada. Unfortunately, many families have these stories of school. What makes children so mean? They are so young and they have already become mean, tainted, and hurtful. Does this sort of thing happen everywhere or just in North America? Jintana, I worry about you too. I really hope you find happiness when you build a new home in another city. I hope you can connect with other Thai women and maintain your Thai culture.

While I worry about all of you I am so thankful you have entered my life. I have learned so much from you in this short time. I feel relieved that not all of your feelings about school are negative (as I was expecting). It's so

interesting how you have changed most of my preconceived notions. That's why this research is so important—your stories don't fit into the large-scale studies I've read. Your voices are lost in those studies and it's time your stories are heard.

Yours,

Jenny

Coming to Final Research Texts

As noted above, I met with each family on four occasions and recorded a one to two hour conversation with them each time. Our conversations surrounded stories of schools and stories of teachers; school artifacts they selected; personal annals; and photographs they had brought with them. I particularly enjoyed the photographs as they are meant to capture a moment in time, a moment that will tell a story without saying any words. Yet stories are taking place before and after the click of the camera and these stories cannot be fully understood from looking at a photograph, the captured image is merely a glimpse into the life of a person, a life that is full of stories waiting to be shared. In the words of Clandinin and Connelly (2000): "Each photograph marks a special memory in our time, a memory around which we construct stories" (p. 114). These recorded conversations were then transcribed and sent to participants to ensure accuracy.

The process of analyzing this data included searching for themes, patterns, tensions, and narrative threads (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and organizing the data in order to "restory" my participants' experiences. As interim texts were written I attended to both the "big stories" (Freeman, 2006) discussed during our

conversation-style interviews as well as the "small stories" (Georgakopoulou, 2007) participants shared during our time together. Chase (2011) describes small stories as "a constant and natural feature of every life" (p. 245), they are the details that emerge about one's day, or plans for tomorrow. The interim texts consisted of my participants' retold stories along with my thoughts and reflections as a teacher and researcher. These interim texts were then sent to my participants so they could add their thoughts and understandings, which became woven into the final research texts.

Chapter 3: "His Real Life is in Thailand"

When I think about stories, I am reminded of the notion that they must have a beginning, middle, and end. Somewhere in my childhood, or perhaps it is a culmination of my early education, this has become entrenched in my idea of what a story must have for it be a 'good story'. Yet, in reality, the stories we live by have no concrete beginnings or endings. Each person's story begins before she or he is born: our stories are connected to our parents' stories, and their parents' stories before them. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) acknowledge this when they write:

> As researchers, we come to each new inquiry field living our stories. Our participants also enter the inquiry field in the midst of living their stories. Their lives do not begin the day we arrive nor do they end as we leave. Their lives continue. (p. 63-64)

Anticipating meeting my research participants for the first time, this concept weighed heavily upon me. Keeping in mind Dewey's (1981) notion that experience occurs along a temporal, personal, and existential continuum (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006), I wondered where in time this inquiry should begin. Greene (1995) further explains the importance of the past:

> A reflective grasp of our own life stories and of our ongoing quests, that reaches beyond where we have been, depends on our ability to remember things past. It is against the backdrop of those remembered things and the funded meanings to which they gave rise, that we grasp and understand what is now going on around us. (p. 20)

Acknowledging that our pasts greatly influence our present and future experiences, I felt that beginning with the parents' school memories might provide insight about their current expectations for their children. They would serve as the 'backdrop' for inquiring into their stories of school in Canada.

Stories of Childhood School Experiences

We are sitting around a circular table in a meeting room at the university. This room isn't what I had mind, I was hoping for something cozier, something like a living room, but my participants want to meet here so I found this small room that will have to do. It is the late afternoon, and since the windows face north, there isn't much natural light. The florescent lights shine down on us as we sip our tea and munch on store bought cookies.

Moon and Son tell me about their family's recent trip to Eastern Canada; they visited Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Niagara Falls over the summer break. They flew there and then rented a vehicle to see the region. Son laughs as he tells me the story of following the vehicle's GPS to Niagara Falls: it unknowingly lead them to the United States border, where they had to turn around because they did not have their passports. Later in our conversation, Moon tells me that this trip has made her feel happy again. She explains to me that she has been sad since arriving in Canada, as she is no longer able to work with patients as she did in Thailand (Recorded Conversation, August 31, 2011). I imagine that she feels a loss of identity as she went from working as an anesthesiologist in Thailand to staying at home in Canada, and then later getting part time work to edit a textbook at the nearby university hospital.

In an effort to understand Moon and Son's experiences of their son's education, I ask them to think back to their childhood. I would like each of them to tell me a story from their elementary school experiences. Moon and Son both look reflectively at the paper and pen I have given them, Son thinks for a minute and then begins to write. Moon picks up her pen, but continues to look at the paper, for a moment I am afraid she won't be able to think of anything. Moon felt her childhood was very ordinary; most of her time was dedicated to learning. Her family was supportive of her and she always felt wrapped in their love, for Moon there is no story that stands out waiting to be told. She decides on one and begins jotting down bulleted notes and I feel relieved that she is able to think of something. The silence that has filled the room makes me feel uncomfortable so I continue to eat my cookie and drink tea while they work. I long for the comfort of background noise.

Son finishes his story first; Moon continues to write for another minute and then puts her pen down. I ask if she is finished, and she says yes; but I wonder if she felt pressured to finish as Son and I sat in silence waiting for her. In a later meeting I ask her about this, and she confirms my suspicions: she did feel rushed, but reassures me that even if she had more time she would not have thought of more details (Field Notes, February 17, 2012).

I ask the couple who would like to share first; Son quickly responds, "Ladies first", and Moon and I begin to laugh. But Moon does not want to go; she insists "Husbands first" and we laugh again (Recorded Conversation, August

31, 2011). The following two stories are what Son and Moon shared with me that afternoon.

Story 1: Corporal Punishment: "It Means They Love You"

> *I think the most important experience when I was in elementary school was punishment from my teacher. When I was in grade one, two, or three—I'm not really sure my age—I could not pronounce the word 'teacher', in Thai we say 'krue', so you have to "rrrr…". When I was a child I could not pronounce this word. I pronounced it like 'koo', so I got hit on the hand with a ruler each time I did not pronounce the word correctly. (Recorded Conversation, August 31, 2011)*

When Son says the word "krue" I try to pronounce it. It takes me a couple of tries before Son nods to indicate I am saying it correctly. I am sure my pronunciation is not up to Thai standards, but for a farang with an English accent, I am close enough. I find myself wondering how many times his teacher would hit me on the hand with my pronunciation.[24]

When Son told me this story, I thought he said 'military school' and not 'elementary school' and ask him to tell me more about military school. Son has an extensive English vocabulary, yet I have trouble understanding his accent at times. I ask him "if everyone goes to military school and what was it like?" (Recorded Conversation, August 31, 2011). He looks at me and clarifies his

[24] Thai is a tonal language, which means that one word can have several different meanings just by changing the part of the word that is stressed or by altering your intonations.

message, "Military school? Elementary School…" However, I again fail to distinguish which word he is saying, I do not realize this mistake until a couple of days later when I am listening to the recorded conversation. I laugh when I realize the mistake I have made: I thought perhaps corporal punishment was only used in military schools, and then am saddened by the realization that it occurred in elementary schools. Son continues on in his usual calm and quiet manner:

> *When I was young, I think in Thailand it was acceptable for physical punishment. Teachers are like parents, so if they hit you or punish you it means they love you, they want you to be a good person, and they want you to learn. So if they hit, that means they want you to improve or to be a good student, a good learner. (Recorded Conversation, August 31, 2011)*

Story 2: The King Room

Moon has not said much during our conversation thus far and I am a little worried that she will not want to share her story. In a gentle voice she begins by telling me that in grade six she was placed in the 'King Room'. I must have looked puzzled when she told me this, because after she said it she asked me if I knew what a king room was. I had never heard of such a place, but it sounded wonderful so I leaned towards her, waiting to hear more. There was a new school director the year Moon began grade six, so the King Room had not previously existed. The students were told they would be placed in classes based on last year's marks so they could be taught more effectively. Moon and Son explained that in Thailand standardized test marks or grade point averages are used to place students in classes. The students with the top marks are placed together, in

room one, but known amongst the children as the King Room.[25] *The second highest group of students are placed in room two, which the children call the Queen Room. The rest of the classes do not have nicknames, but the children know their rank based on the room number.*[26]

Moon nonchalantly told me that she didn't feel excited about being placed in the King Room; she merely felt that it was the best place for her. It shocked me how such a competitive system could elicit such little emotion. Son and Moon could both sense my confusion as I continued to ask questions surrounding their feelings towards this hierarchical system. They calmly insisted that they both feel every child has a place that is best for her/him, whether it be in the King Room or the lowest level room. Since Moon was in the King Room I can understand her perspective, but it was Son who surprised me because he was always placed in the lower level classes.

Moon and Son both felt their parents supported them without being too pushy about their academics. While there were very good schools in Bangkok, Moon's father believed it was important the family stay together, so would not

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[25] The Thai monarchy plays an important role in Thailand. There is usually a photo of the King and Queen adorning a wall in each home and restaurant. Thai people have great respect for the royal family, and this is most likely why the classrooms have been labeled the King and Queen rooms instead of by some other name.

[26] For example, grade two classes would be labeled: 2-1 (King Room), 2-2 (Queen Room), 2-3, 2-4, 2-5, and so on.

allow his children to attend school there. When Moon was young there were not any libraries or bookstores in her hometown, so her father would take the bus to Bangkok to purchase textbooks for the children. Moon's parents used to tell her if she studied hard she could get any job she wanted. Her father would take time to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the different occupations her siblings were interested in (Field Notes, February 17, 2012). This shifted my view of her childhood as one of opportunity, rather than pressure to succeed in school. Moon's parents were a source of inspiration for her, not a source of stress.

One thing we could all agree on is that this system is extremely competitive and once a student reaches the King Room she/he has to work extremely hard to stay there. Students strived to become the best in the school so that they could have their pick of the best high schools for the next year. Unlike most areas of Canada, students had to apply to high schools and admissions were based on grades, not by location. I wonder about what happens if your grades fall. Moon informs me that you will stay in the King Room for the remainder of the year, but next year you will not be allowed back, you will be placed in a lower-ranked room.

In grade six, Moon decided to join the school volleyball team, despite the fact that she would be the only person from the King Room playing on a sports team. At first she thought she could do both jobs well, but soon came to realize that she was not a very good player and accepted that, because "nobody can do everything well at the same time" (Recorded Conversation, August 31, 2011).

Moon was only able to play with her team for one game, after that she quit to focus on her studies:

> *In that time I think it's okay because I think that my major job is learning. Not to be in sports. Everyone in the King Room is smart, so if I can be number one in this room, I will be number one in my school. But I don't worry, I don't want to be number one because I want to be more than number one. There were many, many schools in my area, so I want to be number one in my area. (Recorded Conversation, August 31, 2011)*

Moon never found out if she was number one in her area, but she got into the school she wanted.

Stories of Childhood School Bump up Against Mine

Reflecting back on Son's story of school punishment, I realize it rubs against my stories of school punishment. I was surprised to find that in his story, corporal punishment was used as a learning tool, not only to deter unwanted behavior. I suspected that corporal punishment was used in Thai schools, but I assumed it was for discipline, as 'the strap' was used for when I went to school. While I was a well-mannered student, I always feared the strap. When a classmate was sent down the principal's office in elementary school whispers circulated the classroom about whether 'the strap' was about to be used. And when that student returned, we all silently studied her/his face for signs of distress or dried tears. I don't actually know if it was ever used on any of my classmates, but the rumors about our quiet mannered principal having one was enough to keep most students in line.

I recall feeling angered by Son's story and I wondered what my parents would say or do if this happened in Canada. I felt outraged that this has happened to Son and that he did not seem upset about it. Surely, I thought, he must be angry and was only calm because of the time that has passed since this incident. I asked him how he felt when this happened to him, thinking he must have been as upset then as I am now. He did not even tell his parents about it, because it was his fault for not being able to pronounce the word. I feel such a strong tension between my beliefs and his. I suspect he may have a different perspective on corporal punishment now that he is a father. I pushed on, asking him how this experience has impacted what he wants for his son. Son replied, "Yeah, I think I will try to teach him. He should realize that life is not easy and I will try to improve his language in Thai or anything" (Recorded Conversation, August 31, 2011).

I also felt tensions surrounding the competitive system that Moon told me about in her story. I found myself wondering about the pressure these young students must feel as they complete their pretest exams so the schools can place them in ability groupings. My heart ached for the students placed in the lowest room, and the fact that all the other students knew they were the lowest achievers. Did everyone understand it the same way as Son and Moon?

The more time I spent thinking about Moon's 'King Room' story, I was able to relate it to school practices in Canada. I am reminded of the reading programs teachers implement, where students are placed into different groups based on their reading level. Teachers attempt to disguise groups' reading

abilities by assigning them non-hierarchical names like 'red group', 'blue group', and 'yellow group'. Son's words come back to haunt me: "I think the children know by themselves" (Recorded Conversation, August 31, 2011). After all, do we really think we can fool them?

Composing New Stories of School

Moon and Son's ideas about school come from their experiences as students in Thailand. When they immigrated to Canada in 2009, they envisioned schooling here to be similar as it was in Thailand. When an event is experienced in a particular way, it is often difficult for people to imagine it any other way. Son and Moon compose new stories of school as their lived and told stories differ from Thum's stories of Canadian school. The following sections contain Son and Moon's stories of Thum's schooling in Canada.

Photographs of First Experiences: Navigating New Landscapes

These stories were shared on our last day together, as we sat in a meeting room in the basement of the university library. The room became comfortable to me, as we have met here for three of our four conversation-style interviews. Although the table is a large rectangle, we sat together at the end closest to the door. Moon has arrived early, so we sat and talked about the weather until Son arrived. It has been an unusually warm start to winter, and for this we are both thankful. In a previous email I have asked Moon and Son to each select a photograph that is connected to their son's school. I have asked them to think about why they chose this photo, how they feel about it, what message it conveys, and what was happening before, during, and after the photo was taken.

Story 3: The First Day of School in Canada

"I had a lot of images, pictures, in my head.

I am familiar with Thai school. It's so different here."

(Moon, 2011)

Moon brings out the family's iPad and flips through the images until she finds the one that she has chosen. She hands me the device, and I see an image of her son in a classroom. He is smiling and waving at the camera while sitting in a desk, which is covered in pieces of paper. Behind him I can see other children working at their desks while parents stand close.

Moon tells me this is Thum's first day of school in Canada; he is in grade one at the school he still attends now. Moon felt distressed about this first day of school, she worried about his ability to communicate with his English-speaking teacher and classmates. Moon imagined the schools of Thailand, where children sit at tables and learn just as she had as a young girl, and she wondered if her son would be able to understand what he was instructed to do. On the first day of school, she woke up early to make his lunch and ensure he had all of his school supplies. Moon wanted her son to have everything the other children had, to be the same as the other students. Moon went to the teacher the week before school was scheduled to start and got the supply list. On the first day of school, Moon and Thum left their apartment and walked the two blocks to school. When they arrived, there were other parents in the classroom, all with their cameras ready to capture this milestone: the first day of grade one.

The teacher told the parents to stay as long as they liked and gave the children their first task of the year: each child was given a puzzle to complete. As the children fit their paper pieces together an image of children playing with the word "Welcome" was revealed. As Moon watched her son work on this activity she immediately relaxed knowing he would be successful. Moon expected this school to be similar to the ones in Thailand, to the ones she experienced as a child. She worried about Thum's ability to read English textbooks and complete worksheets in English.

Moon stood beside her son as he worked on the puzzle, until he looked up and said in Thai, "Go home Mommy. I can stay here by myself". Moon then asked him if he wanted her to come back at noon, in case he wanted to come home then, but he assured her he would be okay, that he could be in the classroom without her.

At the end of the day Moon arrived at the school early, wanting to ensure Thum would see her waiting for him when the teacher opened the door. On the walk home, she asked Thum if he understood everything the teacher had said. While he could not understand everything, he shared that he could learn here and that he loved school.

I imagine that all parents feel anxious about sending their children, especially the eldest, to school for the first time. I have never thought about how this feeling must be amplified for families who are new to Canada. The parents imagine school to be how it was for them, aligning their vision with their stories of school. What if Thum's teacher was not comfortable with parents being in the

classroom, and had instead asked them to leave when the bell rang? How different this experience might have been for both Thum and Moon if this had been the case. Moon may have continued to think that school in Canada is the same as school in Thailand; she would have gone home and worried about her son's ability to succeed at reading textbooks and writing assignments.

Story 4: The First Canadian Birthday Party

When Thum was in grade one, he received his first birthday party invitation. It was from a classmate who invited everyone in the class to attend her birthday party. At the time, Son and Moon didn't know much about birthday parties in Canada, but Son expected the children would spend time playing together.

The photograph Son showed me on the iPad was of numerous children sitting around a long, rectangular table with individual pizzas in front of each of them. Thum and his friends are drinking juice and eating their pizza while talking with one another. I am surprised by how many children are at this birthday party, I count fifteen children in the photo, but there is a portion of the table that I am unable to see. There are two "Happy Birthday" banners adorning the wall, next to a Pokémon poster, which leads me to believe this party was not in the child's home but a party room the parents must have rented.

Son stayed for the party, visiting with the other parents while the children played, ate pizza and cake, sang 'happy birthday', and watched their classmate open her gifts. I was curious about what he thought of this event, so asked him to share his feelings about it:

It was okay. You create power for the birthday person. Like, if it my birthday party I will feel, 'Oh, I have power because many people come to celebrate me, and come to sing a song for me and give me a present'. So it's like you are more powerful, more important". (Son, Recorded Conversation, December 19, 2011)

His response surprised me, and caused me to think of birthdays as a cultural practice rather than a universal practice.

The way we celebrate birthdays is vastly different from the Thai way of celebrating one's birthday, something I have only just become aware of. Son shared with me that traditionally in Thailand friends are not invited to a child's birthday, instead it is a family event where the child shows appreciation to their parents for giving them life and raising them. The child would also go to a temple or orphanage and give food or donate money as a way to earn merit[27] for their family. In recent times, due to Western influence, more people in Thailand are beginning to celebrate birthdays in Western ways: parents are purchasing cakes from supermarkets and singing birthday songs to their children. However, I am left with the impression that this does not happen each and every birthday as it does in Canada.

"In Thailand, do they do anything at school for birthdays?" I ask Son, wanting to know more about the differences between our two countries' ways of celebrating birthdays. Son tells me that no, schools normally do not do anything

[27] Merit, similar to karma, is a concept in Buddhism. Buddhists believe that good thoughts and actions carry over to a person's next life.

for birthdays, but here in Canada, Thum's teacher gave him a birthday card. From this comment, I realize that Thum's birthdays could be a time of tension for these parents, when Thai tradition bumps up against and does not align with the mainstream way of celebrating birthdays in Canada. I wonder about Thum's understanding of birthdays, and if he feels like he lives with one foot in each culture. Son tells me that Thum asks to have a birthday party but that him and Moon always say no. "Is it hard for you to say no?" I ask; and Son just laughs and shakes his head. He feels like Thum gets plenty of toys and books compared to other Thai children, so there is no need to have a party.

Son: "But maybe this year we will set some small group for him"

Jenny: "You could have a goodbye party?"

Son: "Mm-hmm, yeah"

As a teacher, the idea that different cultures celebrate birthdays differently had never occurred to me. I think back to all of the children I have taught over the past four years and feel saddened I did not ask their parents how their families celebrate birthdays. Although I have taught children from around the world, I failed to understand how birthday celebrations are cultural events. I feel as though I failed the families of my students—their voices were silenced by my ignorance.

I feel proud of Moon and Son for keeping with their traditional ways of celebrating birthdays. As Freire and Faundez (1989) described, "If you put down your roots too deeply in your new environment, then you run the risk of denying your origins" (p. 4). Birthday celebrations in schools are often disconnected from

children's origins; they are structured around what the teacher feels should happen, not what actually occurs in children's home lives. Sirota (2001) identified three forms of birthday parties for children in France: school birthdays, family birthdays, and friends' birthdays. In her study of children's birthday parties she found there were fourteen unspoken 'rules' which parents needed to know.[28] Her work makes me think about the immigrant parents who do not know Canadian customs and I wonder how long it takes them to learn these kinds of unspoken rules for their new country.

How might birthday celebrations in schools change if teachers were to ask families how birthdays are celebrated at home? If school celebrations were aligned more closely with home celebrations, I believe Thum would view his cultural practice surrounding birthdays as desirable. The Thai way of celebrating birthdays would be accepted as 'normal', along with mainstream Canadian ways of celebrating birthdays. Greene (1990) discusses the importance of resisting following the mainstream culture and being open to new ways of knowing:

> If we are to open space for new beginnings and new initiatives, we have in some way to protect the individual from absorption by the collectivity—or to empower that individual to reflect on what it signifies and to resist. (p. 72)

I am reminded of the different meanings cultures place on birthdays. In some cultures, the specific date is not known due to the context in which people

[28] While her study was conducted in France, I believe her findings are very applicable to the Canadian context.

live. However, the approximation of one's birthdate is known, such as the season in which in falls. When people from these cultures immigrate to Canada they often simply choose a date for their birthday. It has been noted that many Sudanese people from refugee camps choose January 1st for their birthday as this is a well-known date (Gorman, 2009). During my first year of teaching, I had a Sudanese child in my class with the birthday of January 4th. At the time I thought nothing of this; looking back, I wonder if this was a fabricated date once his family arrived in Canada and had to complete paperwork. Moon and Son have brought to light the need for schools to embrace multiple ways of being in this world.

School Memory Box

The days and weeks between our meetings quickly slide by. My 'research time' is spent transcribing our first recorded conversation, as I struggle to find a balance between my roles of researcher, kindergarten teacher, graduate student, wife, daughter, sister, and friend. I sense that Son also struggles to find balance between his roles as father, husband, graduate student, and research participant. He has asked me to contact him through email, as this is the most convenient way for us to stay in touch. Our second meeting is one week away so I email the following instructions to Son and Moon:

> For our meeting I would like you to each bring a "memory box" item of your son's school experience in Canada. The item would be something you would place in a memory box (if you were to make one) of Thum's education. It could be a photograph, a piece of school work he has done,

> something sent home from the school (for example a note, letter, or report card), an item of some sort, or it may be a story about something that happened to him. Does that make sense? Each of you should choose one thing to bring, but certainly if you cannot decide on only one item, then feel free to bring more. Think about why you chose this item: What is its significance? What stories go along with this item? When did you or your son receive it? (Email Correspondence, September 24, 2011)

Our meeting day has arrived and I feel nervous. I wonder if I will ever get to a point when I do not feel nervous about meeting this family. I cannot determine why I feel this way, but suspect it is because of the nature of our relationship. To me, it feels official, my role is that of researcher and they are participants, nothing more, nothing less.

To cope with feeling anxious, I arrive at our meeting room fifteen minutes early. I have booked a room in the university library, hoping it will feel more relaxed than our last meeting room with its bare walls and large round table. This room is bigger, with windows looking out into the library and a large rectangular table sitting in the center of the room. Like our first meeting room, it does not feel cozy or inviting. I place our teacups and napkins in front of three chairs, which are close together at the end of the table and wait for my participants to arrive.

Story 5: Insights from Classroom Volunteers

Son slides the photograph he has brought for his memory box item across the table towards me. The photo has been framed with animal print paper, something I envision the teacher doing, as I cannot imagine Son or Moon having the time to do so. In this photograph, there are five children standing on a path outdoors, each holding a clipboard and pencil and looking intently at their work. There is an adult standing by, three of the children appear as though they have just asked him something as their bodies are facing towards him, although their gazes are lowered towards their paper. They are standing outside, with their light jackets tied around their waists, indicating the weather is warm.

As I look at the photo Son tells me it is Thum and his peers at the city zoo from when he was in grade two. The class was participating in a weeklong field trip at the zoo and both Son and Moon were able to go on separate days as parent volunteers. Son explains to me why he chose this item for the memory box:

> *I picked this picture because it represents many things—it represents school activities. He is paying a lot of attention to his work. Yeah, I think it was very good and it seemed like the children were very excited to participate at the zoo, to study what they wanted to know: how animals live, or how animals eat something, or why monkeys move a lot. I think it was a very, very good thing for children. (Recorded Conversation, September 29, 2011)*

For Son, this photograph also represents a unique learning experience for his son. While field trips are an experience that almost all Canadian students have, this is not the case for students in Thailand:

> *It's difficult in Thailand for students to have field trips because it's unsafe for children to take a school bus and go places. Parents aren't sure if it's safe because of the traffic: it's so busy and quite dangerous. The school bus drivers might drive too fast. But here it seems safe, so when he had field trips I didn't feel like I needed to worry very much. (Son, Recorded Conversation, September 29, 2011)*

Part of the reason Son worried about safety in Thailand was because schools do not normally use school buses. If a field trip is booked then the school rents a bus for someone to drive the children. So, while Son did not worry about Thum going on field trips, he did worry about the safety of being on a school bus. However, he assures me he is confident in the ability of bus drivers in Canada and feels the roads are much safer here.

Thum loves to sit at the back of the bus, despite his father asking him not to. Son worries that the back of the bus is not safe, because if the bus were in an accident the children at the back could be hurt. I explain to him that all children love to sit at the back of the bus. Why? I can't come up with a good answer, the only thing I can think of is that when a bus goes over a bump, the kids in the back row often fly up in the air. I decide it's best not to tell Son and Moon this, I'm afraid it might make them worry more. But is this the only reason students like the back of the bus? I'm not sure because I didn't take a bus to school as a child.

I decide it is a Canadian thing that has been engrained in me and feel unable to deeply understand it.

I am curious about how Son and Moon felt about volunteering on this field trip as Son tells me that children in Thailand rarely go on field trips, or, if they do, parents are not invited to go along. If parents were to join, they would pay for themselves to experience the trip, rather than be a volunteer helper. As Son reflects on his volunteer experience he laughs and tells me "Actually, I was excited to be a volunteer" (Recorded Conversation, September 29, 2011). At first, he felt concerned about talking with the children. He was worried they wouldn't understand his English or wouldn't know who he was. But, he found after he volunteered a couple of times the children knew he was Thum's dad. Moon also worried about talking with the children: she worried they wouldn't understand her and that she wouldn't understand them—especially the girls, as they have high-pitched voices. But Thum was able to help translate when there were moments of confusion, which Moon found comical.

While Moon is telling me about volunteering at the zoo, she pauses briefly and then tells me she recognizes some the differences between Canadian children and Thai children: "I always take care of Thum very, very much; sometimes I do everything for him, but children here they can do everything by themselves" (Recorded Conversation, September 29, 2011). Moon was surprised when she took a girl to the washroom and the child didn't need any help closing the door, flushing the toilet, or cleaning up. She explains to me that in Thailand parents would have done everything for that child. Son adds that Thai parents feel they

show their children how much they love them by doing everything for them, they want their children to be comfortable and happy so they do not want their children to have to work. Thai parents will do this for their children until they are married and have families; Son tells me that only then they might stop worrying. I recall the last time we spoke, Son brought this up as well: "Canadians treat children like independents, like you have to go by yourself. Parents just direct the children. But in Thailand children are children until they die" (Recorded Conversation, August 31, 2011).

I wonder if Moon and Son have had to adjust their parenting style now that they are in Canada. I wonder if this is a source of tension for them, as Canadian parenting styles bump up against Thai parenting styles. They laugh when I ask them about it. Son finds that when he walks his son to and from school, Thum often tells him to go, that he can do this by himself. But Son tries not to do very much for Thum; he is trying to teach him how to be a man, because in Thailand a husband must take care of his wife. However, Moon finds that Thum loves for her to do everything for him at home. When Moon volunteered at the zoo she learned that her son is able to do many things, more than she thought he could.

Their stories of volunteering make me think about the immigrant parents from my previous school and how they rarely volunteered to come on field trips or help in the classroom. There could have been many reasons for their absences: perhaps they too were worried about their English ability, or they were busy during the school day with work or studying English. Then, I realize a thought

that makes me feel uncomfortable: What if I did not make enough of an effort to make them feel welcome in the classroom? Working with Son and Moon has made me aware of the need to make a stronger connection with parents and invite them into the classroom. While I have always invited parents to volunteer, I have done this via written notes and in the classroom newsletter. I now feel this was not enough and that I should have done more to reach parents who might wonder if they have a place on the school landscape.

The learning activities that Thum experiences at school often come up in our conversations, they are a common thread in both Son and Moon's stories. The parents expressed their approval of the child centered approach[29] that Thum's teachers utilize. This type of learning is not what Son and Moon are familiar with from their school experiences in Thailand. I ask them if Thum ever says anything about school here compared to his kindergarten experiences in Thailand. Thum told his dad that the children play more here, despite the fact that he attended kindergarten in Thailand and grade school here. I feel Moon's words beautifully capture the differences between learning experiences in Canada and Thailand:

[29] A child centered approach is based on Vygotsky's social constructivism theory of learning. Children are viewed as active learners who seek to understand their world, are capable of self-directing their learning, and who construct meaning in social contexts (Lall, 2011).

> He told me he loved the SMART Board[30] in the room and after, his English was better. He told me that he can play, but he did not know that he was learning at the same time as he was playing. But in Thailand if you want to learn something the children have to sit and write in their book or read their book. But here, when they study mathematics, they learn by playing games. In Thailand when you want to get the answer in mathematics the teacher will give you a question, such as "What is eight plus five?" and every child will get the answer thirteen. But here, "How can you get thirteen?" It's different, so every child can get the same answer with different types of coins. I think this way is better than lessons in Thailand. (Recorded Conversation, September 29, 2011)

I find myself being taken back with Moon's perceptiveness. Do all parents here see the value in the learning experiences teachers plan for their students? Moon and Son seem to understand the need for children to be motivated and have choice in their learning, as Son indicated when he explained his reasoning behind choosing this photograph. Moon recognized the importance of allowing children to express themselves and try different approaches when solving problems. I think their opinions surprised me because I do not see these values as being present in the Thai school system. Son and Moon's stories of studying out of textbooks and answering close-ended homework questions do not

[30] A SMART Board is a brand of interactive white board that is commonly found in Canadian classrooms. It is a large screen mounted on the wall which children are able to manipulate by touching the screen, rather than using a computer mouse.

allow for variance, imagination, or play. I thought these parents would feel uneasy about their son's school experiences, instead, they support them and are able to see the value of them.

Story 6: The Bug Master Award

[31]

Figure 3.1 The 'Bug Master Award' given to Thum at summer camp (2010).

Moon retrieves this post-card sized paper out of her bag. It is an award her son received from a summer camp leader the summer before grade two. She laughs as she explains how Thum does not play on the playground; instead he digs in the sand and goes in the bushes to find bugs. At first, Moon did not want her son to be doing this. It started in Thailand when he was young and his fascination continued once they arrived in Canada. Moon doesn't like that he comes home with bug bites on his arms and dirt stuck under his fingernails. She told him, "Please don't do that. The bugs are not important for your life. You have to play other things" (Recorded Conversation, September 29, 2011). Despite his mother's pleas, Thum continues to bring home grasshoppers and

[31] This image has been modified. Thum's real name and school name have been removed to ensure anonymity.

crickets and keeps them in a shoebox. He takes care of his pets, giving them water and fruit until they eventually die from living in captivity.

Moon imagined her son playing hockey with his Canadian friends, not searching for bugs by himself. Son also expressed his displeasure:

> *First, when he was in grade one, when I picked him up at school he was always finding bugs. But I didn't want him to find bugs because I wanted him to play like all the other children. Because they have a playground, I wanted him to play with children, like hanging, climbing, sliding on the playground. Thum is a boy and he should play like a boy, not a girl. I want him to be strong. Playing sports or on playgrounds can improve his physical performance. But finally, he showed me the bug award and I changed my mind. (Recorded Conversation, September 29, 2011; Email Communication, April 3, 2012)*

Moon has also accepted that bugs are an important part of Thum's life. She tells me that he finds bugs as they go for walks and tells her their names, lifespans, and describes their lifecycles. Thum continues to bring bug books home from the school library and asks his mother to read them to him:

> *And now he is in grade three and when he goes to the library at school he still checks out bug books. It's okay, at first I thought he should learn many things, that's very important for him, such as science, mathematics, or English language or something. But he still loves learning about bugs but now I think it's okay. Maybe, my thinking is not true for him. He can choose something that he wants, but he still studies mathematics, English*

language, or something that is important for life and for an occupation in the future. (Moon, Recorded Conversation, September 29, 2011)

Son and Moon are able to laugh as they recounted this story. I believe they were laughing at the fact their son was so interested in something they both felt was not important. In Thailand, children would not have time to collect and learn about bugs, as they are busy studying from their textbooks. I wonder about libraries in Thailand, thinking that maybe Thum can use them to learn about bugs if he has any spare time; but Son and Moon tell me the libraries are different from the ones here in Canada, Thum will not be allowed to take books home.

The teacher side of me found it interesting that Moon felt her son should be studying "science, mathematics, and English language" but did not associate his learning about and knowledge of bugs with any of these subjects. She was surprised to find that he knew so much about different bugs' lifecycles. As an early childhood educator, I strongly support learning through play so it was difficult for me not to argue that he is learning all of these things *through* learning about bugs. Thum can describe the lifecycle of each bug he finds, which is a concept in the science curriculum. He is learning this information from books, which he takes out from the school library. This style of learning is quite different from the Thai way of learning through studying textbooks, which is why I believe it is difficult for Moon to accept.

While Moon is not excited that Thum has a love for bugs, she is impressed with the teacher that gave him this award:

> When I got this I thought, “Oh this school is excellent” because I think every child got one, but a different master. So I think the teacher is monitoring each child, and knows that Thum is very interested in bugs. So I thought, “Oh this school is nice.” (Recorded Conversation, September 29, 2011)

When Thum received this award, Moon began to understand that Thum could learn and play at the same time, to give his life the balance she never had as a child. Moon now encourages her son to find bugs and continue learning about them. She appreciates that Thum’s teachers have made an effort to know the children’s interests and encourage them to pursue what they love. While Thum’s classmates do not share his love for bug collecting, it is celebrated as his niche in the classroom.

Childhood Stories Relived

Son and Moon both came to Canada with their stories of school in mind. They were surprised to find that Thum’s school experiences were different from theirs. As graduates of a very different school system, I thought they were surprisingly supportive of the unfamiliar methods Thum’s teachers used. In Canada, our child centered approach to learning used by some teachers can be very different from the experiences of our immigrated families. Moon and Son both saw how much their child enjoyed school and that he was learning something each day. However, Moon feels that Thum’s "real life is in Thailand" (Recorded Conversation, November 15, 2011) as they planned to return once Son had completed the semester, and they worry that Thum will be behind the other

children. While Thum attended school here, the family composed new stories of school about learning through play and inquiry. I worry how Thum will transition to learning in a more traditional way, as his parents' stories of school are relived.[32]

[32] The family has since returned to their previous home in Thailand. Moon has returned to her previous position at the hospital, Son will continue to work on collecting data for his research, and Thum will begin grade four. I plan to make arrangements to visit them on my next trip to Thailand.

Chapter 4: Stories of a Future Professional Dancer

A Childhood of Rules and Competition

Slowly, I come to know Jintana's stories of childhood in Thailand. I feel as though she shares fragments of her youth with me during each of our conversations. Stories emerge of a strict military father who would not allow her to have sleepovers at her friends' homes and who made her finish her homework before going outside to play with the neighborhood children. Her stories of seeing a tutor for help in mathematics, and studying for school entrance exams reveal a childhood filled with competition among students. Through these glimpses into Jintana's childhood, I begin to understand how her past permeates her present hopes for her young daughter.

It is a warm day in early October when Jintana and I meet for our second conversation; she picks me up from my hotel and drives me to her friend's house where we plan to record our conversation and spend time with her Thai friends who have also immigrated to Canada. When we arrive, the two women are in the kitchen making a lunch of delightful Thai foods for us to enjoy: spicy glass noodle salad; sausage with hints of lemongrass and curry (I am told it is a Northern specialty but have not tried it before); and a dish of mashed eggplant and chilies which I end up choking on—the spice is too much for my farang palate. The ladies laugh when I start coughing, I feel my face turning red, they tell me to eat the white rice—it will help calm the raging fire in my mouth and throat.

The atmosphere in the kitchen is relaxed, as the children run around laughing and yelling in the nearby rooms. Occasionally, one of the ladies will

speak to a child in Thai, leaving me wishing I could understand and speak this difficult language. While I am an outsider, these women make me feel welcome and I long to stay here all day, if it weren't for my plans to drive home in a few hours. After talking about how they like living Canada and the places I have visited in Thailand, we clean up from lunch. Jintana and I move to the front entranceway of the home to record our conversation. We sit across from each other on wicker furniture with the recorder laying on the coffee table between us. The children continue to play around us, occasionally running through the room where we sit, while the adults practice Thai massage in the living room (Field Notes, October 1, 2011).

Story 1: A Short Stay in Private School

"My father used to say: 'I don't have anything for you, only education.'"

(Jintana, October 29, 2011)

When Jintana was in grade four, her father enrolled her in private school. Most children go to government schools, which often have large classes of forty to fifty students (Recorded Conversation, October 1, 2011); but Jintana's father was in the military and the government offered to subsidize the cost of private education, enabling her parents to afford the tuition.[33] *Typically, only the upper-class children attend private institutions, and although Jintana's family would not be considered wealthy, she felt as though they were because she attended a private school.*

[33] Jintana tells me that tuition for a private school is typically around 50 000 baht ($1500 Canadian) per semester (Recorded Conversation, October 1, 2011).

I cannot hide my surprise when Jintana lists the rules of government schools in contrast with the less-strict private school she attended.[34] *Although all schools had uniforms the students were required to wear, the children could easily tell who attended government school and who attended private school based upon differences in their appearance (for example: the uniform colour, a girl's hairstyle, and the amount and type of jewelry girls were allowed to wear).*

Jintana attended the private school from grade four until the end of grade six, when her father withdrew her and enrolled her back in government school. He told her that she had changed, that she had begun to look down on others less fortunate than her. Jintana did not feel like she had changed, but Thai children are raised to not question their elders, so she did not argue with her father.[35]

I wonder what it would be like to be a teacher in Thailand—to teach classes of fifty students. I imagine the children would become nameless, as

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[34] For example, girls attending government school had to have their hair cut at their earlobes and their bangs no longer than their eyebrows. In contrast, girls in private schools were allowed to have long hair (Recorded Conversation, October 1, 2011).

[35] Typically, Thai children learn about respect for others from their family at a very young age, especially the elderly who have high status (Pinyuchon & Gray, 1997). Kağitçibaşi (2007) argues that to outsiders respecting elders can be seen as a domineering hierarchy, yet it reflects "a different understanding of decency and ethics, upholding family integrity and loyalty as well as sensitivity to others' needs" (p. 176).

teachers would struggle to create meaningful relationships with each of them. I wonder how students in such a room would feel about being in a school, in a room, so full of children. Would they feel an emotional connection with their teacher? Would they feel a sense of ownership over the classroom space, or see it as simply a space they occupied while they read their textbooks?

Unlike Canada, Thailand has a very prominent private school sector. There are many international schools that hire native English speakers from Western countries to teach students. These schools have high tuition fees in order to pay the international educators, which means that high quality English education and small class sizes are only available to the upper class, thus, creating a two-tiered education system.

In response to the affordable but low-quality education available through government schools, many families send their children to tutoring schools. As a child, Jintana saw a tutor for help in mathematics; as an adult, she opened her own tutoring school. Sending a child to tutoring school has become the norm in Thailand, not the exception.

Story 2: Weekend Buses to Bangkok

Jintana takes out her smartphone and flips through the photos until she finds the one she is looking for. She hands it to me and I see a photo of a younger-looking Mew standing in a hallway; she is posing with her arms out like a dancer wearing a beautiful purple dress and shiny red dress shoes. Jintana tells me this photo was taken two years ago, just before Mew's 'early entry'[36] Christmas concert. Jintana chose this photo because she felt proud of her daughter on this day, proud of how much she had learned in school and how cute she looked dressed up for this special event.

Thinking about this photograph in a temporal way, I wonder about the stories leading up to this moment. I ask Jintana why she decided to put Mew in early entry, as she was not a child who required an early intervention program. Jintana related this decision back to her experiences in Thailand:

> *Maybe it's just me, or because I'm from Thailand. Because we always try to put kids in class early, it's better. That's my idea anyway. Yeah, I want her to learn, I don't want her to stay longer, older and go to school. I want her to learn when she's younger. From my background in Thailand,*

[36] The school district Mew attended called their preschool programs 'early entry'. This was a source of confusion for both Jintana and myself, as it seems each district has their own name for the preschool programs they offer. I have seen them called: preschool enrichment program, preschool, Head Start, early entry, junior kindergarten, and preschool development program.

we want to put kids in lots of classes so they will have more talents, more skills for the future. (Recorded Conversation, October 29, 2011)

During our conversations over the months, Jintana often brings up the competition in Thailand and how growing up in this environment has influenced what she does and wants for her daughter.

Jintana operated her tutoring school in central Thailand, in a city a couple hours away from Bangkok. She tells me of parents living in the area who would send their young children to tutoring schools in Bangkok on the weekends. Families would take the bus on Friday evening, a two to three hour ride depending on traffic. They would rent a hotel room or apartment for the evening and then take their children to a tutor in the morning. The class would run for one or two hours, the teacher sitting at the front of the room while the children learned out of textbooks or practiced equations displayed on overhead projectors. In essence, this was another class period for children; they often did not get one-on-one time with the teacher. After students completed their tutoring session, the family would board another bus carrying them back home for the remainder of the weekend, only to complete the cycle again the following Friday.

Jintana tells me of one tutor in Bangkok, who is widely known for her ability to teach high school chemistry. Families from central Thailand would transfer money through the bank to register their teenaged children for her weekend class. This tutor's class was full of eager students, the number often hovering around one hundred, so she sat at the front of the room and taught using the overhead projector (Recorded Conversation, October 29, 2011).

Composing Stories of School in Canada

Over the years, Jintana's role has shifted from student to tutor and now to mother. While her previous roles have ended, they continue to impact her current experiences. I believe she was not aware of their impact until we began inquiring into her told stories. The following story fragments are the co-composed stories of Mew's school and Mew's teachers from Jintana's perspective. Together, we inquired into the deeper meanings of these stories' plot lines and characters.

Living Alongside Jintana

Our third meeting is two weeks away; I email Jintana to make plans for our weekend together. I plan to arrive in the early evening on a Friday and I hope to spend Friday night and Saturday together before I go back to Edmonton on Saturday evening. My trips to Jintana's city are short, and selfishly, I want to spend as much time with her as she will let me. I find our relationship has grown and I care deeply about her and her family, I look forward to seeing her and listening to stories of the life her family is composing here. I always feel nervous before coming to see Jintana, I want to ensure she feels heard, I want her to know that I cherish her secret stories and the time she takes away from her family to tell me these stories, I feel a sense of responsibility to her (Field Notes, October 28, 2011).

We meet for a late dinner on Friday night, just her and I, while Jim watches Mew at home. I am thankful for this evening together, as we share stories of our families and of plans for upcoming weekends. I feel less pressure in the absence of the recorder that usually sits between us. We finish our meals and

walk through the full parking lot and across the street to our vehicles. We say goodnight, Jintana climbs into her SUV to drive home to her family as I get in my rental car to drive back to my hotel. I feel vulnerable in my small car amongst the trucks and semis on the road, I am happy to pull into the well-lit parking lot of my hotel across town.

The next morning I meet Jintana and Mew at a dance studio, which is located inside a small mall. I arrive just as Mew and other girls her size follow their instructor into the studio. The door is glass with large windows on either side of it, but there is no seating here so we must sit on the floor if we want to watch Mew dance. I assure Jintana that I am okay with sitting on the floor, so we join the other parents and small children watching their loved ones practice ballet positions. The older kids, waiting for their class to start, come in and out of the small waiting room where we sit. It is busy and feels crowded, so we don't talk much, we just watch the girls dance. All the children are wearing their Halloween costumes, as Halloween is just a few days away. One mother has forgotten about the costumes and her little girl is crying while the instructor looks through the back room to find something for her to wear. I feel bad for both the child and mother.

After dance class Jintana, Mew, and I walk to a nearby pizzeria for a quick lunch. Mew has a Halloween party to attend this afternoon. She is excited about seeing her friend from school. We leave my car in the mall parking lot and I go with Jintana and Mew to the friend's house. I feel somewhat like an intruder as we drive along the residential streets of this city. I wonder if Jintana feels like

I belong here, with her and Mew in the family vehicle. As we drive, Jintana tells me of the high cost of housing and how homeowners have to rent out rooms in order to make their mortgage payments. We pull up to the house where the Halloween party will soon be taking place; we are the first ones to arrive.

A woman dressed as a witch answers the door when Jintana knocks; she seems happy to see us and invites us in. I look around at the festive decorations: pumpkins and candles are placed throughout the living room and a witch hangs on the front closet door. Jintana introduces me simply as Jenny, with no explanation as to why I am here or how we know each other. I wonder if she has told this woman about me before, I wonder about what is not said. As we walk into the home, two children come running up and begin excitedly showing Mew their costumes. They pull her away, towards the kitchen where the three of them dance around the open space where the table once stood—the parents have moved it so there will be more room for the children. I sit on the stairs while the kids dance around and Jintana and the mom talk about the party. Again, I feel like an outsider trying to find my place on the landscape I have entered. Mew seems to have warmed up to me; she comes and talks to me as her friends continue to dance. This makes me feel at ease; perhaps she does not see me as an outsider any longer. Jintana, the mother, and I talk about the party she has planned and then leave to go do our interview. As we get on our coats and shoes I wish the mother good luck with her party full of young children.

Jintana tells me she wants to take me to the community leisure centre where there is a library, waterpark, indoor soccer pitches, and an ice rink. She

wants to show me this place because she feels it is something positive the city has to offer. We drive down a long road that seems to cut through the forest—it winds through the thick trees until they suddenly open to a vast parking lot and a large, modern looking building. We park her vehicle among the other trucks and SUVs and go inside. As soon as we walk through the doors I hear children playing and see families everywhere. So this is where the families have been hiding, I think to myself. Through the glass windows looking into the waterpark I can see many families swimming. A short walk leads us to a small coffee shop where parents sit around cafe tables and visit. Next, we head to the library and choose a table that is by the window so we can sit in the sun—we have decided to stay here and record our conversation as it is the quietest place in the building. We take off our jackets and I retrieve my recorder from my purse and place it on the table between us.

Story 3: Mother's Day Tea

Jintana pulls out her phone and flips through her photo album, looking for the photographs she has already emailed me. Previously, I had asked her to select photographs that we can talk about:

> *Can you choose one or two photos that portray Mew's school experiences? They can be photos of her at home where the stories connect to what has happened at school or they can be photos from school, whichever you like. We can talk about what is happening in the photo, what has happened before the photo was taken, and what has happened since it was taken.*

Think of all the connections to school and your family. (Email Communication, October 24, 2011)

The photos are from Mother's Day last year, when Mew was in kindergarten.[37] *The class had prepared a tea for their mothers. The first photo is of Mew and her peers standing at the front of the classroom, Jintana tells me they are singing a French song for the moms. The second photo is of the table where Jintana and Mew sat. There is a paper plate with strawberries on it, a vase of colourful flowers, and a place card that Mew has made: it reads 'Mew et Maman' to designate their spot for the tea.*

When Jintana arrived at the school for the tea all the children were waiting at the front doors for their mothers to arrive. As she walked up the sidewalk she could see Mew standing with her face and hands pressed up against the glass. Jintana felt special that she had been invited to the class for Mother's Day. When she walked through the doors, Mew took her hand and led her to the classroom where she sat her down and brought her flowers, cookies, strawberries, and tea.

[37] Mew was enrolled in a half-day French immersion kindergarten program at a local Catholic school. She attended in the mornings.

 [38]

Figure 4.1 The place card Mew made for the Mother's Day Tea (2011).

The children sat with their mothers until they were finished and then stood at the front of the class to sing songs for them. Jintana was impressed by how much French her daughter had learned and with the amount of effort Madame Jeanette[39] had put into creating this tea. She liked that the children were able to show their mothers how much they had learned. After the song, Mew and Jintana sat and read books together, an activity that is difficult for Jintana as the books are written in French, a language that she does not know:

> *It's hard for me actually, because my English is not quite good too and French is another world for me. It's hard because I cannot teach her. But*

[38] Mew's real name has been removed from the place card.

[39] I named Mew's teacher Madame Jeanette in honour of my kindergarten teacher who holds a special place in my heart.

because my husband is Canadian he can help with basic French. I don't know when she's older how I am going to help her. Maybe I will try to find another way, maybe ask the teacher or a tutor to help her out that way, I guess, I think, yeah. (Recorded Conversation, October 29, 2011)

Jintana thought it would be good for Mew to know French since it is one of our official languages; she feels it will provide her with more work opportunities in the future. I relate this back to her childhood stories of competition, and she laughs saying "Yeah, I think so. That's just me. I'm used to that, I think that's from my background" (Recorded Conversation, December 18, 2011).

Jintana's retold stories of competition in Thailand are now becoming her relived stories in Canada. She and Jim have enrolled Mew in French immersion so she will be bilingual in Canada's two official languages, with the belief that this will help her attain work in the future. During our first conversation in September, I was surprised to learn that Mew does not speak Thai. Instead, the family felt it would be more beneficial for her to learn French since they live in Canada. I wonder about the things Jintana does not say about this decision. I wonder if there is a disconnect between Mew and her Thai heritage. Will she ever learn to speak Thai? Will she see it as a valuable skill? Will she feel like she belongs in the Thai community?

When Jintana signed Mew up for ballet class she envisioned her becoming a professional ballerina. She hoped her daughter would excel at dance and that

this would become her specialty, as parents in Thailand begin to specialize their children at a young age:

> I already have a plan for Mew, when I think about it. Sometimes I think I want her to be a professional dancer. Like ballroom dancing, and sometimes I'm disappointed I cannot find any professional school for her. And when I look back, I think, 'Okay, I shouldn't get too serious about this.' Yeah, because of my background. (Recorded Conversation, October 29, 2011)

Story 4: The Blank Agenda

"This year I just let it be, just, just go to school, whatever the teacher wants to do. I give up, I don't want to say anything anymore" (Jintana, December 18, 2011).

In each of our conversations, Jintana discussed her frustrations with the lack of communication between herself and Mew's grade one teacher. She struggled to understand if this was because Mew had changed grades or if the teacher was not exerting enough effort. She wondered if there was supposed to be a decrease in communication between home and school in grade one, meaning that she would need to adjust her expectations. However, she suspected that the problem was the teacher, who used to teach junior high school and had only moved to first grade this year. Perhaps she did not know how much communication the parents in her grade one class expected? Or, Jintana wondered, was it because Mew's teacher was not a caring and concerned first grade teacher?

Jintana pulled out a scrapbook from her cloth bag lying on the floor beside her. She handed it to me and I flipped through the pages, full of Mew's kindergarten work. It saw printing activities, small crafts and art creations. I knew the many hours the teacher had put into compiling such a book for each child in her care—I know this because it is something I had done for my kindergarten students as well. Jintana appreciated being given this keepsake to reflect on Mew's year in kindergarten. She told me of the close relationship she had with Mew's preschool and kindergarten teachers:

> *They communicate the main things with us all the time and [Madame Jeanette] even took time to talk to me at seven, eight at night—wow, she works so hard. Every week she always sent an email to everybody about the schedule, about what's going on, about what [the children] are going to learn, and what she wanted us to help out when they came home. When we are in grade one I have to adjust because I feel like I miss last year because she always communicated with us. But not grade one, just different; just leave her like that. (Recorded Conversation, October 1, 2011)*

Over the course of the year, Jintana's frustration had built up, causing her to give up, in a sense, on Mew's teacher. She felt that Mew's teacher did not care deeply about the children, as Mew's preschool and kindergarten teachers had.

One afternoon in mid-December Jintana and I met on Skype for a conversation. I had asked her to select a school artifact (a letter from the school or teacher, a report card, or Mew's homework for example) to share with me,

thinking about why she chose this artifact, how it made her feel, and what meaning she took from it (Email Communication, December 8, 2011). She wanted to show me Mew's agenda, a source of frustration and an example of the stark contrast between the communication styles of Mew's previous and current teachers.

Jintana held up the agenda so that I could see it on my computer screen. She slowly flipped through the book, revealing the blank pages it contained and told me of her frustrations:

> *The agenda last year, we had to sign everyday. We had to communicate with the teacher everyday when she came home. And you can see this is the first week, I have my initials here. I got used to it from last year, I had to check and let the teacher know that I looked. This is my first week, and I don't do it anymore because it's nothing. Barely have nothing come up. And second week, I don't do anything because the teacher doesn't do anything…it's all empty. (Recorded Conversation, December 18, 2011)*

Jintana held the book open so I could see the first week of school where she had dutifully signed her initials on the empty pages each night.

As the year progressed, the blank agenda continued to come home each night and each night Jintana would look at it and put it back in her daughter's backpack. Once, Jim wrote a note to the teacher asking how he and Jintana should explain the letter 'Y' to Mew, as she was confused about the different ways the letter could be printed. Jintana flipped to the page in the agenda where he has written the note, so that I could see the teacher's response: "Yes, this is

mentioned in the homework letter. It gets introduced later" (Field Notes, December 18, 2011). Jintana and Jim both felt this response was unhelpful and vague, causing them to conclude that communicating with this teacher was pointless. Both Jim and Jintana no longer sign the agenda; no longer write notes to the teacher.

I didn't know the answers to why the communication had shifted so significantly from kindergarten to grade one. Was it because this is the dominant story of grade one home-school communication or was it because this teacher was not experienced in grade one and didn't know what the parents expected? I felt for Jintana, because of her frustration, and also for the teacher, because she was being storied as someone who didn't care about the families in her class.

I wonder how Jintana's school experiences in Thailand have influenced her view of and expectations for communication. Stories of learning from textbooks each night, of completing homework and then having it marked and retuned home the next day reveal a rhythm of communication between home and school, teacher and parent. While this is a form of indirect communication, it is communication nonetheless. With homework being completed at home and then returned, parents see what their children are working on at school and can see how they are doing.

Story 5: The Bully

Before Jintana and I met, we communicated through email about the inquiry and made plans to meet for our first conversation. Each time I saw her name listed in my inbox folder, I excitedly opened her latest email, wondering

what fragments of her life she would share with me. Stories of her daughter's struggle with a classmate bully were first introduced to me in these emails and continued to weave their way through our conversations over the months.

September 3, 2011

The first email I received from Jintana:

> *I am happy to talk to you. My daughter just had a problem with a bully, she didn't want to go back to school again. It shocked me that kids would start to do that at such a young age. That would never ever happen in Thailand.*

My heart sank when I read this. It was only the first week in September; the very beginning of the school year, and her daughter was being bullied. I found this alarming; my heart ached for her as I responded to her email.

September 5, 2011

My email response to Jintana:

> *I too, am surprised your daughter had a problem at school already. I am sorry to hear that happened. I don't have children, but I can imagine it is painful to see your daughter upset. Would you tell me more about what happened to her? Are any teachers at the school aware of what happened?*

The teacher in me wanted to hear the details of the incident. I wanted to know the when and where of the incident, and the events leading up to it, so I could judge how serious it was. I tried to put myself in Mew's teacher's position, and wondered what I would do if these were students in my classroom. However,

'teacher' was not my role in this situation. The researcher in me wanted to know what had happened from the family's perspective and how this story of school caused ripples into home life. How had the family made sense of such an incident?

September 7, 2011

My second email from Jintana:

> *My daughter is being bullied at school by another little girl. My daughter is so quiet, and this girl seems to treat her bad. Like slapping her hard, telling her she's going to the principal, and threatening to damage her school stuff. Little things like that. It's a little better now because I spoke to the teacher.*

After reading this email, I felt shocked about what was happening to Mew at school. I thought about the kindergarten students I had taught in the past and how quarrels often erupted over toys or personal space being invaded by others who were unaware that such space existed. But these clashes sounded more serious. This bully sounded vicious to me, and I wondered about her life too. I wondered what had caused such a young child to be so cruel. I wondered about the relationships in her life and if she had caring adults looking after her. I wondered what stories she had heard of going to visit the principal (Field Notes, September 10, 2011).

Over the months, Mew's school bully is a common topic during our conversations. The day we sat in the front entranceway of her friend's home, Jintana told me that the bully was still bothering Mew at school. Mew had pink

name stickers on all of her school supplies: her books, pencils, even her shoes. Jintana laughed as she recalled this, telling me she didn't want to write her name over and over so opted to buy stickers of "Mew" instead. However, the bully didn't like these stickers, maybe because they were pink or maybe because she didn't have name stickers for herself. The bully told Mew that she was going to rip them all off. When Mew told Jintana this after school one day, she immediately contacted the teacher in hopes of having Mew's desk moved. Jintana struggled to understand why this child would say such a thing to her daughter, why she would want to rip her daughter's stickers off her belongings.

Speaking with the teacher about the stickers didn't seem to help as the bully punched Mew on the way to music class only days after the conversation. The children were walking down the hall when it happened, the teacher didn't see as she was at the front of the line leading the students to music class. Jintana worried about what she should do in response to this incident because she had already spoken to the teacher once and wondered if it was acceptable to keep approaching her:

> *It's still happening and because, I don't know, after I talked to [the teacher] every time I drop Mew off, when she sees me walking, she goes in the room. I feel like, I feel like um, what should I do? What should I do? Because I don't want, I know, I don't want to bother her too much. That's why I talked to you last time, I don't know what, um, what should I do as a parent and uh, teacher, I should leave her do her job ... I don't know, but it looks like she, she avoids and doesn't want to talk to me too much. And*

everyday I drop Mew off now, okay, "Bye Mew" because I don't want to feel like uncomfortable. Yeah, I feel uncomfortable because I feel like I don't want to bother the teacher because maybe she doesn't want me to talk to her anymore. Yeah… (Recorded Conversation, October 1, 2011)

I felt for Jintana because of this situation and her uncertainty over what she should do. I believe that she wanted the teacher to help her daughter, but worried that she was bothering her too much. I offered to come to a meeting with the teacher with her, if it would make her feel more comfortable. I assured her that she was not being too persistent, that teachers want to help students and their families, and that schools should feel inviting for families, not a place that makes parents feel unwelcome.

Shortly after this conversation, another incident occurred, but this time with a small group of boys on the playground. While we sat at the window table in the public library in late October, Jintana showed me a video of Mew explaining to her what happened on the playground during recess that day.[40] *Mew talks of being chased by three boys, who grabbed the hood of her sweater causing her to choke when she tried to run away. In the video, I hear Jintana ask Mew if she told the recess supervisors what had happened. Her small daughter*

[40] Jintana felt frustrated with the bullying situation at Mew's school. She felt that the staff was not doing enough to protect her daughter. After Mew told her of the playground incident, Jintana had her repeat the story, this time video recording it on her iPhone. Jintana wanted to keep the video in case she needed to show an administrator at Mew's school.

replied that she couldn't find any supervisors to help her, looking at her mom she adds: "I was so scared" (Field Notes, October 19, 2011).

One of Jintana's friends advised her to make an appointment with the school's vice-principal about the playground incident. She and Jim met with the administrator and discussed what was happening to Mew in the classroom and on the playground. The vice-principal listened to their concerns and informed them the boys would apologize to Mew the following day and that she would let her teacher know about the incident. However, when Jintana and Jim met with the teacher at parent-teacher interviews she said she hadn't been told about the playground incident, leaving Jim and Jintana feeling frustrated once again. In a later email, Jintana compared these school experiences with her experiences in Thailand:

> *I hear [the school] talk a lot about stopping bullying, but the teachers, and principals don't want to enforce the rules that they stand up for at all. I never had to deal with this in Thailand. I feel like the kids had more respect for authority, and were afraid to do the things they do in Canada. I think maybe because in Thailand, parents would be very angry with the kids if they knew they did that at school. (Email Communication, March 4, 2011)*

These stories of school were in contrast to the ones Jintana had previously heard about this school. She had heard it was the best in the city, which is why she enrolled Mew here. Yet, she began to feel uncomfortable communicating with Mew's teacher. She was afraid she was bothering her; worried she was

going too far, which in the end caused her to feel a sense of helplessness. I believe dealing with bullying would be hard on any family, but think it must be worse for immigrant families who are unfamiliar with the school system and Canadian cultural norms. I wonder if many immigrant families feel a sense of helplessness when dealing with teachers, school issues, and school culture.

Awakening to Alternate Plotlines

As Jintana and I inquired into her childhood stories of school, rules, and competition we came to see how they impacted her as a mother. Reflecting back on her childhood, she still feels her father was too strict. However, she has since realized that she was reliving these stories with Mew:

> I was so depressed from my parents, especially my dad, *why* he pushed me too much at that time, and *why* they control me too much. And here I am; I've become them. I became them! Like, my dad's so strict in everything; I cannot go to sleepovers at anyone of my friend's because my parents were afraid of something. Nothing, they didn't have anything to worry about at that time. I felt like they worried too much about me. You know what? I worry too much about Mew now. I became them. Yeah, I didn't see it, and I can't believe it, I became them. (Recorded Conversation, December 18, 2011)

When Jintana came to this realization she decided she wanted a different story for her daughter. She let Mew decide if she wanted to continue with her dance class, and Mew felt that she wanted to take a break from it. Jintana wants

her daughter to have a balance in her life, a balance that she felt she was not allowed to have as a child.[41]

[41] In January, Jim and Jintana applied for transfers within their companies. They both received them and have relocated to another city in Alberta. They can now afford to rent a house, rather than an apartment. Mew began grade one at a new school and has loved it from her first day. She has not returned to any type of dance class, but Jintana would like her to take piano lessons. Jintana is very happy they have moved and only wishes they would have done it sooner.

Chapter 5: Attending to Storied Lives, Teaching Families

This study allowed me to explore my wonderings surrounding immigrated parents' perspectives on early childhood school experiences in Alberta. The tensions I felt throughout my years of teaching in a culturally diverse school led to my research puzzle. Over the course of this study, I have had the opportunity to engage in conversations with two very different Thai families. As we inquired into their childhood stories of school and their stories of their children's school, Dewey's (1981) concept of past experiences shaping current and future experiences became undeniably evident. As these parents shared their stories, I found myself relating my stories of school with theirs, and also further reflecting on how my stories of school and childhood have shaped my teacher identity. As Creswell (2007) reiterates, both the researcher and participants often "learn and change" (p. 57) through an inquiry. Greene's (1995) words illustrate how my participants' stories have altered my location in the world:

> The narratives I have encountered in my journey have made it possible for me to conceive patterns of being as my life among others has expanded: to look through others' eyes more than I would have and to imagine being something more than I have come to be. (pp. 85-86)

Finding Myself in Son and Moon's Stories

As someone who has experienced Canadian schooling as both a child and teacher, I strongly believe in our current child centered approaches to education. However, I recognize that this approach is not globally accepted as superior (for example, see Dunn & Dasananda, 2006; Lewis, Macfarlane, Nobel, & Stephenson, 2006). As Son and Moon shared their stories of school in Thailand, I found it difficult to understand their support for the Thai educational system. I became upset when Son told stories of corporal punishment and expressed acceptance towards his teacher's response to his pronunciation difficulties. When Moon shared her story of the King Room, I felt for the students placed in the lowest ranked classes. Their stories of school in Thailand were so different from my stories of school in Canada that it was difficult for me to relate to them. As they shared stories of Thum's school, I found I related more to his stories than theirs.

Moon's story "The Bug Master Award", reminded me of a story from my childhood. Like Thum, I too had an interest in bugs. However, unlike his parents, my parents did not seem to deter me from this pastime. As a young child I often carried a large glass jar in my backpack as I rode my bike around the neighborhood. This jar, with holes poked in the metal lid, was for collecting fuzzy tent caterpillars. I loved the summer months when large swarms of them would overtake a section of tree trunk or a neighbor's fence. My friend and I would spend hours collecting them and letting them crawl up our arms. Unlike Thum, I did not take an academic interest in these caterpillars as he has with the

bugs he finds. The caterpillars were simply something to collect, look at, and play with. I never took the time to research information about them.

Listening to Son and Moon talk about Thum's interest in bugs made me wonder what my parents thought about my jars of caterpillars. I phoned my mom one Saturday evening to ask her about this childhood story of mine. The line went silent for a moment as she reflected back; "I think there is beauty in nature; as long as you kept them in the jar I didn't mind that they were in my house" (Conversation, March 31, 2012). Her response does not surprise me when I think about the snakes my two younger brothers used to bring home. I am sure she preferred my caterpillars to the large bull snake they carried home one year for her Mother's Day gift.

From this conversation, my thinking shifted to the future as I wondered about my future children and the bug collecting I envision them doing. I hope that when my child brings home a container of bugs, I will not try to sway their interests, because I have these stories from my childhood. I can see how Moon, with her stories of school as her job, cannot understand why a child would want to bring home grasshoppers and crickets; and Son, with his childhood stories of sports, wants his son to play on the playground equipment with other boys rather than digging in the dirt. My stories of childhood are more similar to Thum's than to Moon's or Son's. Their stories of childhood bump up against the story of childhood their son is composing.

As I find similarities between Thum's childhood and mine, I continue to return to the fact that Son, Moon, and Thum have since moved back to Thailand.

As Moon told me, Thum's 'real life' was there, waiting for him to return. I wonder about the stories of childhood and school that Thum will now be composing—will his storylines continue, or will they be interrupted by very different stories? I wonder how he will transition to a traditional classroom where students sit in desks and read from their textbooks. I also wonder how knowing they would be returning to Thailand impacted Son and Moon's perceptions of Thum's schooling in Canada. Would they have been more concerned with his academics if they were staying? Would they have the same acceptance and appreciation for the child centered approach to learning Thum's teachers embraced? Or, were they simply okay with it because they knew it was not permanent; that he would return to Thailand and resume composing similar stories of school to theirs?

Finding Myself in Jintana's Stories

A common thread running through Jintana's stories was the importance she placed on home-school communication. We came to understand this as being connected to her experiences in Thailand where nightly homework served as a means to communicate academic performance to parents on a daily basis and where she had close relationships with the teachers at government schools when she operated her tutoring school. Jintana greatly valued the communication she had with Mew's 'early entry' and kindergarten teachers. Understandably, it was a lack of communication with Mew's current grade one teacher that left her feeling helpless and unwelcomed in the school environment. Interestingly, or perhaps not, Morris and Taylor (1998) noted that "many teachers do not possess the

knowledge, skills, strategies, and attitudes needed to collaborate effectively with families" (p. 219). Both Morris and Taylor (1998) and Pusher (2011) note there is a lack of focus on partnering with parents in the curriculum of post-secondary teacher education programs.

Discussing these stories with Jintana caused me to reflect on my imagined teacher identity—who was I in the eyes of my parents? Was I a teacher who made them feel welcomed and valued through our conversations? Or was I a teacher who silenced their voices and made them feel uncomfortable on the school landscape? My time with Jintana impacted how I interact with my students' parents; her stories have prompted me to reach out to the families in my classroom, to make a greater effort to know them on out-of-school places. Her stories have greatly impacted my teaching, something I did not imagine when I began this journey so many months ago.

For me, Jintana's stories illuminated the importance of understanding a child in the context of her/his family. Through her "small stories" (Georgakopoulou, 2006) I came to understand that Mew attended extracurricular activities as a means to prepare her for a better future, not simply for recreation as I had thought. I related this to my childhood: I was enrolled in French immersion kindergarten and also attended a modern dance class when I was five. Like Jintana, my mom thought that knowing French would allow for greater opportunity in my life. She had been told that I would need to speak Canada's two official languages in order to continue on to post-secondary education. She felt that I was bright, and since I was eager to start school she believed knowing

French would be my path to success. My mom had written my story, but it was not the story of school I would go on to compose. I don't remember much about my year of French immersion, only that I loved my teacher, was good friends with twin girls, and there was a kid named Duncan who always got in trouble.

Over dinner one night, I asked my mom why I didn't stay in French immersion, why I had switched to English in grade one. Her voice cracked with emotion as she told me that by the end of kindergarten I, the little girl who was so excited about starting school, no longer wanted to go. I was frustrated with not understanding what my teacher was asking me to do. Although I was young, my mom allowed me to compose my own story and enrolled me in an English grade one class where I once again became excited about going to school each morning.

Years later, as I began junior high school, the story my mom had written for me returned to my life as she insisted I take French as one of my option courses. To appease her, I continued to take it all through high school, completing French 30 when I was in grade twelve. I am still unable to hold a conversation in French. As I think about the way my story played out over time, I wonder about Mew's future and how her story will unfold.

I know Jintana only wants what is best for her daughter, and her stories have given me insight to the plotlines of my students' lives which I cannot see. Thinking back to Chet, my Thai student who arrived during my first year teaching, I have a greater understanding for the reasons his mother made him complete hours of Thai worksheets at home each night. Living in an Albertan city with a very small Thai population meant these worksheets were a way for him to retain

and learn his first language. His mother was a graduate of the fiercely competitive Thai school system where studying was a students' job. "Play is children's work," is a common saying in North America. However, I suspect this saying holds little value to those who experienced learning from textbooks instead of learning through play. Communicating to families *how* children learn through play is essential for parents who have not experienced this teaching approach.

A Shift in my Teaching Practice

I have come to recognize that experiences on the school landscape extend into the home lives of students much more than I ever imagined. By attending to children's home lives and families' stories, teachers are able to see children 'in context,' rather than isolating them from their environment. Returning to Setterfield's (2006) words, "Human lives are not pieces of string that can be separated out from a knot of others and laid out straight. Families are webs" (p. 59).

As I began to view students' lives as being interwoven with their families, I saw parents in a different light. I no longer fear their questions, worrying that they don't trust my professional decisions; instead I see them as holding valuable knowledge about their children. I see them as caring and concerned, wanting what they feel is best for their children. As Chung (2008) states, "I am awake in knowing that for children and their families to be a part of the story, we have to live, tell, retell and relive our stories together" (p. 71). I no longer wait for parents to approach me on the school landscape, because I have realized this landscape means something different to each of my parents. The relational aspect

of teaching has become ever more essential as I now seek to understand my students' lives outside of school. In Phillion's (2002) words: "I realize that it is the people that truly count and the relationships that truly matter" (p. 152). I no longer see school as a building full of students; I see it as a storied place full of families living storied lives.

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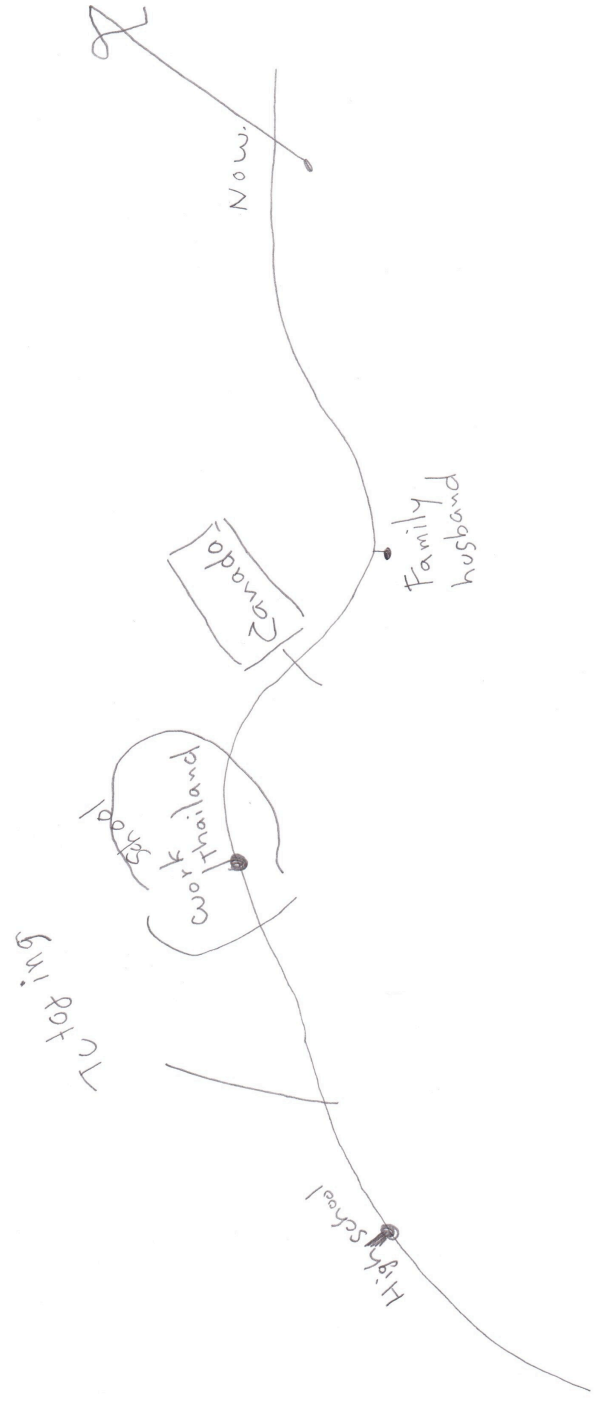
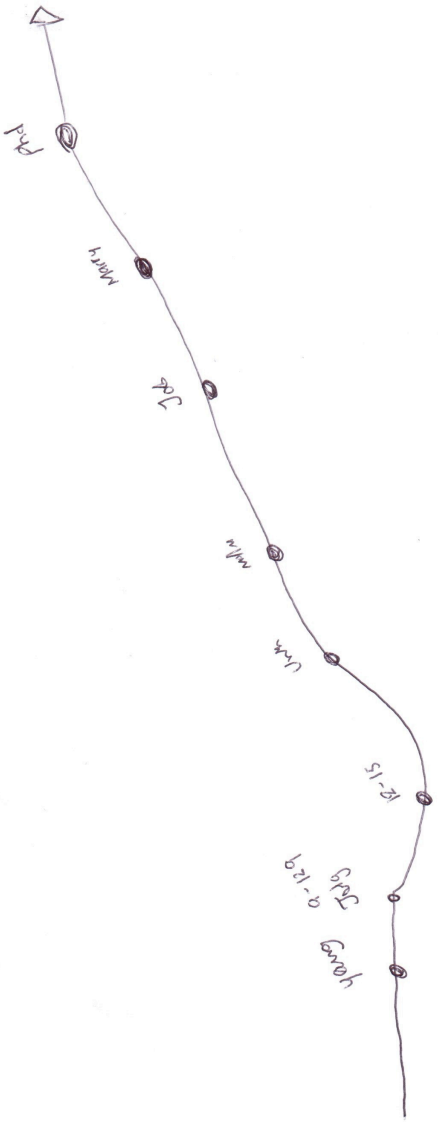
Appendix A



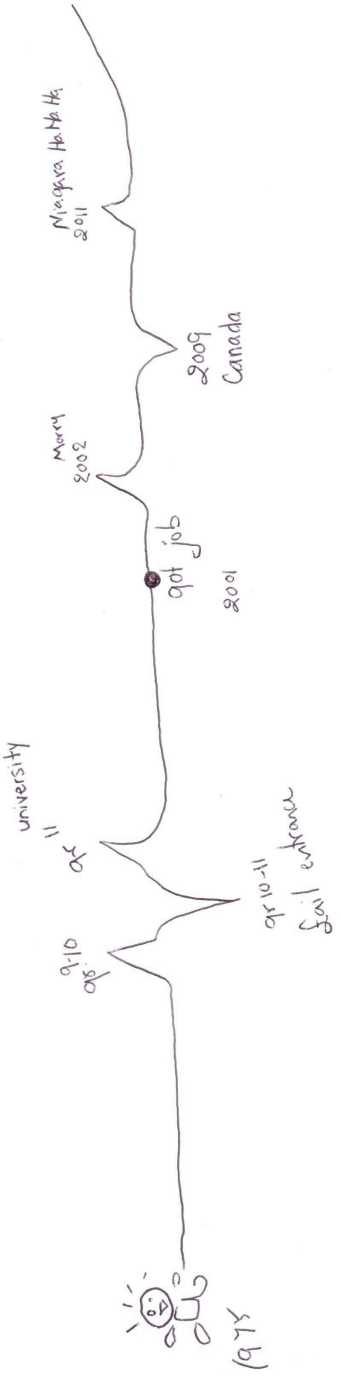
Jintana's annal (September 10, 2011).

Appendix B



Son's annal (August 31, 2011).

Appendix C



Moon's annal (August 31, 2011).