

**A Narrative Inquiry alongside the Familial Curriculum Making Experiences of
Urban Indigenous Children and Families**

by

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Abstract

This narrative inquiry is shaped by my experiences as an Indigenous Cree-Métis early childhood educator and expands upon my master's autobiographical narrative inquiry thesis in which I make visible the importance of remaining attentive to familial curriculum-making worlds. My doctoral research inquires into the early experiences of three children and families of Indigenous ancestry as they compose their lives within their familial curriculum-making worlds. Using narrative inquiry as the methodology, the focus of the study is to understand how familial curriculum making is lived out narratively, over time, and within various contexts and how their familial curriculum making is shaped by their school curriculum making experiences.

Narrative inquiry is a relational research methodology that studies experience as storied phenomena. Narrative methods for this inquiry included co-composing field texts (data) and research texts. Field texts include transcribed conversations, field notes, and artifacts, such as photographs and artwork. I co-composed three narrative accounts (interim research texts) with each child and her family. These narrative accounts were negotiated with the families. Subsequently the three storied narrative accounts were metaphorically laid side by side, taking a step away from the closeness of the experiences to ascertain what became visible and audible in the resonances. Three resonant threads across the familial curriculum-making 'worlds' (Lugones, 1987) were discerned: familial curriculum making grounded in community; invitations into children's 'worlds' of ease and comfort; and school curriculum making as shaping familial curriculum making. In

the third thread there were glimmers into how each child's school curriculum-making world shaped her familial curriculum-making worlds.

There are personal, practical and theoretical justifications for the study. In the personal justifications I show the ways that identities of myself as a researcher and teacher shift within familial and school landscapes. Engaging in the research shows that I have become more at 'ease' (Lugones, 1987) in living these multiple stories of who I am alongside children and families. Now as a teacher, I am open to understanding myself as a researcher interested in the familial curriculum-making experiences children and families embody as they enter my classroom.

In the practical justifications, I show how I returned to teaching with new insights into how to listen to, and come alongside, children and families in ways that allow me to continue to wonder and think differently. I particularly attend to the importance of familial curriculum making with Indigenous children and families and show the importance of developing ways to resist deficit stories of children and families. The experiences of participants speak back against these deficit stories and offer stories of families and children co-composing their familial stories of resilience, community, creativity, imagination, hope, and possibilities.

There are theoretical justifications for the study. I show the importance of composing relationships with parents first before developing inquiry relationships with children as the ways I entered relationships with the families greatly shaped the inquiry. How narrative inquirers enter into research relationships matter. It matters how we are storied as we begin with participants. The stories in the midst that shape the first meetings

continue to shape the relationships until the final texts are negotiated. A second theoretical justification involves the importance of negotiating research conversations with children and families. I learned through listening to the children that I needed to slow down and attend to the children's invitations. Negotiation is a continual process that shapes narrative inquiries from start to finish. The third theoretical justification is around the importance of understanding familial curriculum making as places of thinking narratively. The children showed how they resisted bringing school curriculum making into their familial curriculum-making worlds. Although the children did not distinctly recognize there were two worlds of curriculum making they were living in, there were ways in which the children showed me, and the families, that there was a separation of the two worlds they were experiencing daily as they traveled back and forth between home and school. The children were eager to invite me to their familial curriculum-making worlds but resisted inviting me to their school curriculum-making worlds. This research adds to what is known about the experiences of urban Indigenous children and their families and how their lives are shaped in both familial and school curriculum-making worlds.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Cindy Swanson. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “A Narrative Inquiry alongside Urban Indigenous Children and Families and their Familial and School Curriculum Making Experiences”, No. Pro00055041, February 18, 2015.

Dedication

To the girls and their families,
who are being loved into new stories

Acknowledgements

All of this is possible

because one day

I entered the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (CRTED)

at the University of Alberta

to learn about

Life in elementary classrooms

and met others who were curious...

Thank you to the three young girls, Miranda, Naomi, and Kylie, and their families, Vince, Linda, Mary and Denise for agreeing and welcoming me into your homes/communities, and into your lives. Thank you for all that you taught me and for inviting me alongside your different worlds, despite my grown-up ways. Thank you for teaching me the importance in remaining wakeful in moments filled with imagination and creativity. Our experiences together, and the teachings you have shared with me, will continue unfolding in new ways and I am forever grateful for you all.

I am forever changed in meeting my co-supervisor, mentor, and friend, Dr. Jean Clandinin. I think my granny guided me to you in a time when I needed a safe place to rest my stories with someone who loves me like she did. Thank you so much for inviting me in so lovingly into the centre and into your life with open arms. I will forever be filled with love and gratitude for everything you have done, and continue to do, to support me and encourage me as a woman, a writer, and a narrative inquirer. I will forever cherish the times we spent together over tea, coffee, and dinners these last nine and half years. Thank you for making the time and inviting me into your home, and spending countless hours with me, and for continuing to help me to imagine new possibilities as I move forward.

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Thank you to my committee members, Dr. Vera Caine and Dr. Florence Glanfield for continuing to be alongside me on this journey and for your friendship over the last eight years. Thank you both for your kind and thoughtful responses to my writing. You both continue to inspire me and I am so grateful for your love, encouragement and support throughout this process. I look forward to continuing to create spaces where we always wonder and imagine together.

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I am filled with much gratitude towards the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for funding my research study. I also would like to acknowledge and thank PolicyWise (formerly Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research) for also funding the research study and for acknowledging the importance of attending to the experiences of Indigenous children and families. I received numerous awards during my doctoral program from the University of Alberta, for which I am incredibly grateful.

I am also especially grateful to my mom and dad. Thank you mom for becoming the first in our family to graduate from university and showing me I could do this too. Thank you for all the ‘care’ packages you sent me home with. Dad, thank you for always encouraging me to finish what I started and for our weekly Sunday evening phone calls.

Thank you all for believing in me and enriching my life in so many incredible ways. My life is forever changed because of you all.

*.....which turned into a life
where I am awakened to possibilities
looking onward
with a creative and playful attitude.
Being with the children reminds me
there are worlds
we can travel to,
to live and feel,*

*at 'ease' in,
worlds
where we can continue
to imagine,
together.*

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Chapter One

Revisiting a Moment of Tension¹ on the School Landscape

During my eighth year of teaching in 2008, I found myself staring out my grade two classroom window while the children read silently, and thought, “What the hell am I doing here?” I wondered to myself, “Should I even still be teaching?” I was trying to imagine a different life, a different way to live. Years of teaching the same mandated curriculum, using the same methods of assessment I was expected to use, had worn me down and metaphorically squeezed the life out of my imagined stories of teaching. I was completely disengaged from learning through the professional development set out by the school agenda² and from teaching the mandated curriculum year after year. I began dreading the drive to school in the mornings and could not wait to leave the building at the end of the day. School had become routine and the routine had become extremely boring, for the children and for myself.

Our school day began with silent reading, an activity developed and encouraged school-wide to promote the habit of reading based on the children’s interests as they selected their own reading material and read to themselves silently for at least 15 minutes. It was in these silent moments, while the children read to themselves, that I turned my gaze away from the children and towards the

¹ Inquiring into ‘tensions’ is a key methodological strategy in narrative inquiry. Tensions are often seen as “something to be avoided or smoothed over,” yet Clandinin et al. (2010) “understand tensions in a more relational way, that is, tensions that lived between people, events, or things, and are a way of creating a between space” (p. 82), a space of inquiry. They further write, “tensions can only emerge from relationships...in wide-awake ways...[b]y coming alongside, over time and in relationship, we are able to name, show, talk about, dwell in the tensionality, and learn from the experience of dwelling within...[and] to live and tell different stories as counterstories to the dominant institutional, cultural, and social narratives that shape the landscape” (pp. 83-84).

² I understand school agendas are often mandated and or driven by larger institutional, cultural, political, economic, and social narratives.

outdoors, staring out onto the field as I silently wondered if this was the life of which I had always dreamed. Sometimes 15 minutes turned into 25 or 30 while I questioned and wondered about my future as a teacher. I knew I had hit a low point in my career as I began each year with less energy. As time moved forward, I knew teaching was no longer sustaining me in my life³. I often wondered, “How long can I possibly keep this up.”

After silent reading, our next planned activity was vocabulary building and a spelling activity that was, yet again, based on another mandated platform, a daily experience that became less enjoyable as the school year pressed on. I could see some children were beginning to see this activity as boring and predictable, much like myself, but they pleased and placated me because I was the teacher and some perhaps perceived me to be the one who held the authority to determine and shape their learning experiences for the year. Appeasing the teacher was a story I had learned all too well as a student and this was the story I believe, as the teacher, I was continuing to live alongside the children. Children who followed the routine were praised and those who resisted were given consequences when they did not follow my plan. This was not the dream I had imagined as I was looking forward to becoming a teacher. As a Métis Cree woman, I knew I wanted to work alongside Indigenous children, but not in this way. Efforts to shift the scripted methods of teaching the mandated curriculum were met with criticism from those I relied on for support⁴ on the school landscape. I felt an enormous

³ I often think in sharing stories of experiences how I may be positioned or storied by the listener and/or reader. I realize the stories I share may be understood differently than how I hoped the reader would take them up. Looking back at the stories I shared throughout this dissertation, I realize how moments such as this were experienced when my imagined stories of teaching and my lived stories of teaching were in conflict. Within these tensions acts of resistance surfaced.

⁴ In an effort to shift the routine in ‘making words’ within the Balanced Literacy Program, I created a game with the children called ‘shut the door’. Once the children read the words in their regular voice we would then read the words in our loudest voices in an effort to shut other classroom doors down the hallway. Other teachers were aware of our game and supported it. The children were energized with the activity. Within the first few times we did this I was reprimanded by an administrator for interrupting the learning of other children in the school and our acts were viewed as disruptive.

weight of guilt and shame that I wasn't being true to myself in how I imagined teaching, and I wasn't being fair to these young children. I wondered sometimes, why the classroom was so quiet. Where was the 'life' in the classroom? Why did it seem joyless most days? I felt as though I was repeating a traditional form of teaching where I was the giver of knowledge through the mandated curriculum I was obligated to teach.

In this way, I was continuing a form of teaching I had grown accustomed to over my years as a student while I moved through the grades, with many different teachers⁵. I also experienced this kind of practice in my teacher education program where professors lectured on how best to teach children and how to use curriculum guides to shape my practices; in these ways I learned to always begin with the guides, rather than the children's lives.

There were glimmers where I was able to become the teacher I had imagined and I switched things up to try and remind myself of why I had become a teacher. I developed strong relationships with many of the children and their families; I created and decorated character birthday cakes for every child; I provided a belonging and welcoming place in the classroom for the children. These interactions were my reason for continuing, however, these were fleeting moments where I found temporary comfort in my chosen career. When I interacted with the children and families in these ways the tensions I experienced seemed too great and I would return to a way of teaching that was encouraged and supported on the school landscape of having a quiet, compliant, well-run classroom. This became one of my early stories of success, around which I built my stories of what it meant to be a good student, and a good teacher. (Life in Elementary Classrooms, written response, November 2010)

⁵ I attended thirteen different schools from K-12.

Now, some years later, I reread this piece and remind myself of my struggle to think about how I could be otherwise in my classroom. As I think back to these multiple moments, occurring over time, I could no longer see myself as sustaining my life as a teacher. I am reminded of how easily I fell into living out the dominant narrative of labeling and categorizing children. I began the school year shaped by this narrative as I busied the children with “free time” workbooks so I could spend time with each child individually and run them through a series of tests that would determine their literacy levels and performance, and ultimately their overall ability to navigate the grade two curriculum. Armed with my list of grade one sight words and leveled books I met each child at my circle table. I asked each child, one by one, to identify the 125 grade one sight words that were on the paper, checking off the ones they knew and circling the ones they did not. Based on the child’s performance with the sight words, I then switched to the leveled reading books according to how many words they were able to read on the word test and worked my way through the levels, depending on how well they read until I was satisfied they had reached an instructional level of reading. I wanted to see how many words the children were able to decode and comprehend and how fluent they were as they performed during the testing. Based on this I placed the children into three groups: low, middle, and high functioning. I began first identifying children who were in the low group as ‘below level’ and viewed them as having some deficit. Already at the beginning of the school year, I saw some children as lacking in their academic ability in the second grade and this, in turn, meant they required a lot of my assistance to get them to a higher reading level. Those who were in the middle range were just below the desired end of grade one and would progress normally and those who were high were beginning or well into the second grade literacy levels became the group I labeled as strong, capable, and successful. I viewed these children as experiencing no major challenges in their academic trajectory through the year. They became the group of children I later came to rely on in assisting me as I gave them ‘teacher’ jobs to support the children who were experiencing difficulties. I became excited and praised the children who were able to read the words I listed in front of them and my excitement increased as they moved into the higher leveled

reading books. For children who struggled, I do not recall praising them, but rather, turned inwardly silent as I experienced tensions as the ‘low’ group increased in numbers, and wondered how would I be able to support them all and improve their literacy levels.

Looking back at my assessments early in the school year, I imagine the children’s anxiety rose, much like mine, as we moved backwards in the leveled reading books. I imagine they returned to their desks feeling disappointed, knowing they were placed on the lower level of my list. I began each year defining the children and gauging my workload based on what they were able to do academically before even coming to know them. My testing occurred in the first few days of school and by the end of the week I grouped the children into four or sometimes five colored reading groups based on the data from these early assessments and the number of children who fit into each level.

By the end of the first week I posted on the wall a leveled reading chart with all the children’s names listed vertically on a bar graph showing their beginning reading level with the lettered levels displayed horizontally along the top of the graph with the letters A through N. Level A indicated a very early reader and N indicated the beginning of grade three, the level I hoped many children would meet by the end of my teaching year. The reading levels in grade two were between levels I-M, and I hoped the children would at least meet me at the I level when they first arrived in my class. As well, colored pieces of paper, according to leveled groups, were prominently displayed on the wall behind my reading table with the children’s names listed on each piece of paper indicating the group to which they belonged. The children knew who belonged in the lowest and highest reading group, as well as those in-between. I did not need to tell them; rather, this display showed them and all who entered my classroom where each child was situated. Having a clearly labeled reading chart was a common and expected school wide practice. Other teachers used different methods of showing their leveled groups such as naming their groups as different animals or shapes, all identifying those who met the desired requirements of the grade and those who did not. I did not question this practice

of placing children in reading groups; rather, I supported it by beginning the school year with this practice of labeling children and categorizing them⁶. This was a school wide expectation and something I did not see as anything other than a requirement as a classroom teacher, which identified a starting place in my work with the children. This too was a dominant and well-supported practice by all who lived on the school landscape.

Labeling and categorizing the children carried over from the classroom into their home lives when I began setting up additional reading practices for their families to support the school agenda of increasing their literacy levels and therefore, their success. The further a child fell in the lower levels, the greater the pressure I experienced. I expressed my concerns to their parent(s), specifically how their child was ‘struggling’ in regards to where they ‘should’ be. I sent home flashcards of grade one sight words, as well as additional reading material accompanied with assessment pages⁷ for children to complete at home. For parents who visited the classroom, I urgently impressed upon them that their child needed extra support at home; as I met parents I did not wonder with them about their lives at home or even if my suggestions were something parents were able to do to support my agenda⁸ in their homes, away from school. For parents who did not visit the school, I placed the ‘support’ package of sight words and additional reading material in the children’s backpacks with a note indicating their need for extra practice at home. The assumption I carried was, of course, that parents wanted to support their children’s reading and this was a way they were able to do so.

⁶ All teachers were expected to create a ‘learning’ profile on each of the children and report to administration regarding their academic abilities, specifically their literacy and numeracy levels, as well as any other information such as behavioral issues or noticeable learning deficits to decide whether additional supports were required.

⁷ I photocopied reading books from the online leveled reading program RAZ-kids and assessment sheets to support my home guided reading program.

⁸ I understand there are much larger social, political, institutional, cultural, and familial narratives that shaped the school agenda and provincial mandated curriculum, which also significantly shaped my agenda and curriculum making in the classroom.

Parents never expressed any resistance to what I was telling them, at least they did not do so in conversation with me, and many seemed to welcome additional ways they could support their children in their learning. However there were noticeable silences as I spoke, and in their silences I imagine now that many parents were resisting what I was expecting them to do in their homes. Many children shared they did not use the flashcards or complete the extra reading material I sent home. At the time I sent the additional work home, I did not experience any tensions in my efforts to improve the children's reading abilities. Looking back, I imagine now, in sending home the extra practice, I expected the families to support my work without consideration of the busyness of their lives. I must have thought to myself, "of course they want their child to be successful" and as their teacher I continued to impose my knowing that I knew exactly what their child needed. If the parents did not encourage and support the extra work I provided, I justified it as their lack of interest or time and as something beyond my control. I see now, how I lived with arrogant perceptions (Lugones, 1987).

Returning to this practice of my beginning of the year assessment now causes me a great deal of tension, as I know this practice is encouraged and supported in schools and serves as an early indicator of who is successful and who is not. The practice situates children on a scale indicating their academic placements and it is commonplace for teachers to carry out early in the year testing of children, positioning them on a continuum of who is performing well and who is not. Early testing, such as I used, presumes who will be successful and who will struggle. It is a practice I carried with me for a long time, a practice I welcomed as a beginning teacher and which I continued without question. However, I notice now that it was this practice itself that allowed me to 'fall asleep' to the lives of the children and families in my classroom as I used the testing to begin and locate the children in my curriculum making.

Thinking back to my early practice of labeling children at the beginning of the year and placing them in groups based on abilities, I am reminded of my struggle⁹ to think about how I could be otherwise in my classroom. How could I have done things differently when I was expected to follow a program that encouraged labeling and categorizing? Identifying children who were situated in low, middle, and high groups seemed a commonsense approach in locating a starting place to work with the literacy program I was expected to use and to identify children at an appropriate ‘instructional level’. In creating the leveled chart, I wonder if I imagined children would be encouraged and motivated in seeing the possibilities of moving into a higher level of reading or any other assessment. I wonder now about how harmful this practice of labeling and categorizing may have been in the lives of the children, and in my life as a teacher as I began every school year in this way. And what is most troubling to me now is, why did I continue this practice for so long and without question? Returning to these practices I lived as teacher, I wonder now how I would have done on these early assessments as a child entering school. I wonder, which group would I have been placed in since I had not been readied for school in ways that would have prepared me to be successful in the assessments I was asking of the children.

Returning to my Early School Landscape

*The narratives we shape out of materials of our lived lives
must somehow take account of our original landscapes.*

(Greene, 1993, p. 148)

I do not remember beginning kindergarten, yet I am told I resisted being left in an unfamiliar place. Leaving the familiarity and safety of my home and being placed in a room of strangers was one of my first experiences with other children and adults on the

⁹ I was required to complete three years of district-wide training in the literacy program called Balanced Literacy. Because of this extensive training, I was expected to follow the prescribed literacy program and level children based on their instructional level of reading.

school landscape, an experience most children live out as they enter schools for the first time. As I look back and return to my earlier experiences of being in kindergarten I remember only a few fragments of being with others in the classroom space, particularly enjoying the kitchen play area and being read to by the teachers while I sat on a carpet square¹⁰ positioned on the floor. I do not remember any testing that occurred and asked my mom if I had been tested. By asking my mom about her experiences as I entered kindergarten, I hoped her stories might trigger my early memories. Rather than telling me stories of how I may have experienced traveling from home into school, she recounted an early story of how I was labeled as having a speech problem, a speech deficit.

Through family stories I learned I had difficulty saying certain words and letters and repeated words or phrases often when I was young. When we gathered together, my auntie Barb often recalled a time when she called the house to speak to my mom. She called during the day when I was supposed to be in school. I picked up the telephone. When my aunt asked me why I was not in school, my response was “I’m-too-tie-yud.” This story became one that lived in my family for years, and even as I became an adult, she often shared this story at family functions where everyone laughed and was reminded of how I used to say “tie-yud” instead of “tired”. The story was never spoken of in a deficit manner in my family. Rather, it became a loving and humorous one. Members of my family would tease me asking me if I was “tie-yud”.

However, shortly after I entered kindergarten my mother received a telephone call from the teacher indicating that she would soon be contacted by a speech pathologist from the school. My mother was told I had a speech deficit and was asked if I could be placed into therapy for speech lessons. My mom responded, “No, she’s fine. She’ll grow out of it.” My mom then continued to tell the teacher that when she was younger she too could not say certain words or letters, yet she had grown out of it and I would as well. My

¹⁰ I attended afternoon kindergarten and remember after the teacher read us a story, the lights were turned off in the classroom and we were told to lie down on carpet squares. Story time was not an engaging process but rather one that lulled us to sleep.

mom indicated that if my speech continued to be a problem for the school, then she would consider speech therapy, however it was not required at such a young age. I eventually spoke in a way that no longer caused any concern to those on the school landscape because my mom did not receive any more phone calls regarding my speech. My speech ‘problem’ was certainly not a concern on my home landscape, but rather was supported and encouraged. It became an endearing memory of how I once spoke that lived on through the years alongside family members as I grew older.

In retelling this story, I am reminded of a story I lived out as a teacher in 2003 when I was labeling children in their student profiles as having a speech deficit and in need of speech therapy. In particular one child stands out from years of referrals, Johnny¹¹. When Johnny entered our second grade classroom I was deeply concerned because I could not understand many of his words and phrases. Other children who had been alongside him in kindergarten and grade one often came to his rescue when they saw the look of confusion on my face when he told me, or asked for, something. They often repeated what he said in hopes I would understand him. Although the other children were helpful my worry and concerns grew. During a ‘student profile’ meeting with administration I requested immediate therapy for Johnny, and like the teacher I had in kindergarten, made the phone call home to his mother. I shared my concern that I was unable to understand Johnny and his immediate need for speech therapy. I told his mother that the required form was in Johnny’s backpack and all she needed to do was sign and return it to the school and soon therapy would begin. I was surprised when the mother indicated to me that she would not sign the form and that he would not be entering into any therapy set out by the school. I was stunned by her resistance and wondered how she could not see the need for therapy. How could she not see this was important for his development and why would she not help him so that he could be more successful in school? I was angry she did not approve and at the time, I judged his mother negatively

¹¹ Names have been changed to pseudonyms to protect the identities of those I write about in my experiences.

and my concern for Johnny increased as I imagined his speech problems affecting his reading and writing abilities over the year, as his overall progress in school. I wondered what would happen to Johnny if he didn't get the help we were offering. My view of Johnny and his family was very narrow.

Over time, I began to understand Johnny's words and relied less on other children to tell me what he was saying. When he moved on to grade three I knew the recommendation for speech therapy would continue with the new teacher and had spoken to her about his mother's resistance. I imagine the story I shared was that his mother would not accept any recommendation for speech and referring him would not be supported from home. At the time I made the call to Johnny's mother I did not know the story of my mom's resistance to the school and the speech therapy they were suggesting for me when I began school. How quick I was to judge and label Johnny as being deficit and his mother as not wanting him to be successful in schools. I wonder now, had I known my earlier story of being labeled as having a speech deficit would I have been so quick to judge Johnny's mother. Would I have honored her experiences with her son and his speech? Would I have understood and created a positive forward-looking story¹² rather than positioning Johnny and his mom as deficit throughout the year and allowing the labels I gave them to continue in his subsequent grades?¹³

Searching for Ways to be a Better Teacher

Prior to returning to graduate studies, I enrolled in a course offered to teachers in the district on assistive technology through the University of Alberta as an open studies student. I hoped that in taking the course, I would learn innovative pedagogical methods

¹² Lindemann Nelson (2002) connects forward-looking stories along with backward-looking stories when she writes, "understanding how we got 'here' is crucial to the determination of where we might be able to go from here, and this is where narrative is indispensable. The story of how the participants of the case came to their present pass is precisely a story, as is the narrative of the best way to go on in the future. The backward-looking story is explanatory; the forward-looking story is action guiding" (pp. 39-40).

¹³ I learned through a friend/relative of Johnny that he completed high school and was the male valedictorian of his graduating class.

that would allow children to improve their literacy skills through technology. A story of school told and lived in the school and district was that teachers could use technology to enhance literacy. Seeing this as an opportunity to engage differently with the children and the mandated curriculum, I began incorporating technology into my practice. I found the children responded well to using different platforms of technology in their learning activities. As well, using technology shifted my teacher planning and practices from the prescriptive routine I had experienced with the mandated curriculum. I completed the course, which then began to shape a story of who I was on the school landscape around the use of technology. In doing so, I became the ‘technology lead’ in the school with added responsibilities. Other teachers and administrators began praising the projects the children completed using technology, such as powerpoint presentations and reports we proudly displayed for others to enjoy.

As I continued searching for different ways of living as a teacher, I decided that incorporating technology into my practice would breathe new life into my teaching practice. In January of 2009 I was accepted into a master’s program called *Technology Integration in Elementary Education*. However, after spending 4 tension-filled weeks in my first course I felt completely disconnected with what I was learning and being asked to complete in assignments. It seemed that everyone in the class was speaking a different language from me and I found myself becoming more anxious and frustrated as time went on. I thought I would be able to continue in the course until I was asked to complete a research paper centered around the use of virtual worlds in classrooms. More specifically, I was asked to create an online avatar in the virtual world called *Second Life*. The purpose was to enter this world and explore, socialize, communicate with strangers, and imagine its educative purpose in my life and in the lives of the children I taught. It was completely foreign to me and I was unable to imagine how I could weave this virtual tool into the contexts of my life as a teacher and with the second grade children with whom I worked. I withdrew from the course before the deadline and left the master’s program for the term. I told myself that the course was a bad choice and enrolled again in

the same program in the fall of 2009. In the first two terms, I completed two on-line courses. I continued to feel unsatisfied with the program. I continued to search for inspiration and meaning in my life as a teacher. After the two courses, I questioned whether technology was the area I should continue in and whether returning to university had been a good decision.

Returning to Early Familial Stories and Stories of School

I enrolled in my third course *Life in Elementary Classrooms* with Dr. D. Jean Clandinin in the fall of 2010. I chose the course based on the title, imagining it would be an easy one since I already knew about *life* in elementary classrooms. I had attended various classrooms as an elementary student, went to eight different elementary schools, and been an elementary teacher for ten years. I believed I knew what ‘life’ was about in elementary classrooms.

As I entered the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (CRTED)¹⁴ on the first day of class, I did not anticipate that this space over time, alongside others, would set the beginning of a necessary interruption into the stories I had silently carried for so long. Early in the course, I was encouraged to begin inquiring into my earlier experiences as a student and teacher while beginning to learn a conceptual language that allowed me to name some of the tensions I was experiencing on the school landscape. I found I was not alone as others shared their experiences and tensions around school stories and stories of school, and the sacred, secret, and cover stories¹⁵ we all lived

¹⁴ Since 1991, the mandate for the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (CRTED) is to foster and produce high quality research for teacher education; to provide a scholarly community for graduate students and postgraduate students and faculty; and, to collaborate with agencies, researchers at other Universities in Canada and internationally, and with schools around research in teacher education.

¹⁵ Clandinin and Connelly (1996) write of sacred, secret, and cover stories as a way to understand the dynamic relationship between teachers’ personal practical knowledge and professional knowledge landscapes in which they live. Sacred, secret, and cover stories are experienced on both personal and professional knowledge landscapes. Stories, having the quality of sacred stories, are unquestioned stories shaped by practices and/or policies, created by others in out-of-classroom spaces, imposed on teachers. Secret stories are stories teachers tell to others in safe places and cover stories allow teachers to protect the secret stories they live alongside children.

on school landscapes. The interruption I began to experience in relation with stories of school occurred when I was asked to write stories of my early experiences of school as a student. I did not expect to awaken to my earlier experiences around the importance of school that began on my familial landscape as a granddaughter alongside my late granny, Mary Pruden. Family stories, school stories, and stories of school were woven¹⁶ together and nested in one another. It was difficult to share and/or write of one without experiencing reverberations into the others.

I began writing stories of tensions I was experiencing as a teacher. I travelled backward in time to inquire into early experiences, which shaped who I became as a student and how they carried on in who I had become as a teacher, particularly around what it meant to compose a *successful* life. This was the first time in my graduate program where I was encouraged to inquire into my experiences, rather than study and recite information from others, a narrative I had often lived as a student and teacher in schools. Every week I engaged in works in progress groups alongside two other students in the course and wrote weekly reflections to the assigned readings. This was also the first time I engaged with others who were genuinely interested in what I was sharing and writing about. I felt connected to others as we shared stories of our lives. I was asked to inquire into how I had been shaped by my earlier experiences and I began sharing early familial stories that I knew of in relation to school. For the first time, I had time and space to begin thinking with others about my experiences, particularly how family stories about school had shaped who I was, and who I was becoming as a granddaughter, student, and teacher. I began thinking about how *success* was shaped in my family and wondered if I was *successful* in my life as a teacher, especially when I was feeling as though I had lost so much in my efforts to become ‘educated’ in schools. In this course, I began inquiring into a very early experience that significantly shaped my life making; it is an experience

¹⁶ Clandinin (2013) describes stories of school as “stories told about a particular school by people ... both in and outside the school context”...school stories are “stories told by practitioners within the school and become shaped when policies and mandates intersect with the unfolding histories of school landscapes and those who live on them” (p. 66).

that continues to guide my wonders and shape who I am, and who I am becoming (Greene, 1995). This inquiry allowed me to identify some of the tensions I was experiencing. It was also in this course, although unknowingly at the time, that my autobiographical narrative inquiry for my master's research began to take shape, using the methodology of Narrative Inquiry.

Revisiting Moments of Tension on my Familial Landscape

Moment 1

*My girl,
Go to school. Don't be like me.
Gee, I wish my mom let me go to school.
Once you have kids that's it, your life's over.
Always go to school and become somebody first.
Okay!*

(Life in Elementary Classrooms, written response, September 2010)

When I think of my granny, I think most often of her words to me shared over many years. These words take me back to her home and call me back to her. They pull me back to earlier times I spent with her as she silently signalled me to follow her into her bedroom where she locked her door, keeping other family members out while we visited. They stay with me as an embodied knowing¹⁷ and as a compelling story to live by¹⁸. Most often granny shared these words of advice, as a warning to not be like her,

¹⁷ Johnson (1989) writes of embodied knowing by exploring how, “narrative, too, is a bodily reality-it concerns the very structure of our perceptions, feelings, experience, and actions. It includes our sense of time and our awareness of the patterning and flow of our experience. It is what we live through and experience prior to any reflective ‘telling’ of a story in words. Therefore, any articulation of someone’s narrative understanding must focus, not just on their (or our) beliefs and judgments, but equally on the structure of their bodily being in the world...it is here that the personal practical knowledge approach may be able to offer especially rich interpretations and deep insights” (pp. 374-375).

¹⁸ Connelly and Clandinin (1999) developed the term “stories to live by” as a narrative conception of identity, which links together experiential knowledge and storied contexts (p. 4).

while she recounted her experiences of living in the North as a young child, wife, and mother. Her stories were filled with a gamut of emotions ranging from excitement, joy and laughter to sadness and regret. Many times there were long silences.

In her home in Edmonton, far from Grouard where she grew up and lived the first half of her life, she spoke these words while she imagined a different life for me growing up in the city. Her words about living a different life, one different from her experiences, were told to me multiple times during my early childhood before I entered into school. They continued to resonate throughout my years as a student while my granny proudly watched me move through the grades and into post-secondary. My trajectory was one she had dreamt of for herself. She had wanted desperately to attend school to become a nurse, yet her mother prevented her from leaving her community and family obligations. She believed by going to school I would become *somebody*, somebody who would be deemed important and successful and not live the “very ugly poor life” my granny expressed she was living (Hand written note¹⁹, Mary Pruden, 1999). Looking back at the times she spoke these words, I wonder how my granny must have felt telling me to live a life unlike hers, to not be like her. I imagine these words must have been hard for my granny to live out. My granny knew the stories of school well and the markers of success. She had seen people around her become successful, and they were not the Cree speaking people she grew up with or those who cooked and cleaned houses for others or created and sewed beautiful moose hide garments for a living like she did. Successful people spoke English and were educated in schools. The more educated a person was, the more respect she held for them. She knew that education was the key to my success and I assured her that I would become *somebody* and go to school, even if that meant I would not become like her.

¹⁹ My granny wrote her storied experiences down on pieces of paper and passed them to me. She often mentioned a desire to have her stories written into a book. I imagine now she gave these to me because I was becoming ‘educated’ in University and she hoped I would be the one who would write a book based on her experiences. Even after her passing, she left an envelope for me that contained stories of some of her earlier experiences. I wonder now if this desire had been shaped by our recorded conversation in 1999. I say more about our recorded conversation in an upcoming section.

Moment 2

The familiar scent of smoked hide fills her house as pieces of “Indian tanned” moose hide rest on her kitchen table. ‘Pot of Gold’ boxes that once held chocolates are also scattered on her table, and now hold various sized pill bottles filled with different colored beads. She is softly whistling as she beads a pair of moccasin vamps, making them for someone she knows or perhaps to sell for extra soniyas²⁰. I am sitting opposite her, watching her count beads silently with her needle and thread, tacking them down in the formation of a flower petal. She rests in her regular spot between her sewing machine and dining table, beading and making moccasins, something she has done all my life. Making moccasins and other moose hide garments had become her life’s work and a means of survival to supplement her income from cleaning others’ homes. She beaded everyday except on Sunday, which was a Church day and a day of rest. She gives me a set of blank moosehide vamps, a threaded needle, and lets me sift through the many pill containers filled with different colored beads. I choose my beads and begin, but I am not very good.

Her soft whistling sounds stop and she begins sharing a story of when she was young living back home in the community of Grouard, Alberta. She begins speaking in English, but soon her sentences turn into her first language Cree; a language I grew up listening to, but do not understand. Her words blend so effortlessly while she looks at me, wondering if I can understand the story she is telling me. For a moment she forgets, but then recognizes I do not understand. I am not one of her children who can understand what she is saying. I am her granddaughter. Her words return to English as she wonders, “Do you understand what I am saying to you?” I sense hopefulness in her voice; hope that I may understand her, but she already knows the answer. A moment passes and her eyes

²⁰ Soniyas means money in Cree.

and expression give her away; she shakes her head as though she is remembering she is the last fluent Cree speaker in our family and I cannot enter into conversation with the beautiful sounds she speaks to me. Silence emerges between us as she returns her focus back on her moccasin vamps. Looking back, I now wonder if, in our silences, she is filled with regret for not teaching me the language; for not insisting I am more connected to my relatives living in the North, the ones who speak Cree; for not teaching me to bead and sew moccasins, a necessary skill she had to learn to survive. I wonder if she feels disappointment for not knowing what to do in this moment when she realizes it is I, her granddaughter, sitting across from her, family, yet stranger, who does not share this familial knowledge with her. Moments pass and she continues in English, but I sense sadness in her voice for I know she misses hearing her language spoken back to her. Since her sister passed she does not hear much Cree anymore, except when family from the North visit her. She finishes her story and then looks at my attempt to bead a flower. She chuckles and tells me to practice. (Personal narrative, April 2013)

These must have been the tensions she experienced as she sometimes tried to teach me Cree words and spoke to me in her language, assuming I understood. I think back to many moments when she appeased my requests to learn to bead by sending me home with blank baby vamps wrapped with long pieces of thread with a needle tucked into the hide, along with pill bottles filled with beads so that I could practice beading at home all the while knowing they would never come back, as the previous ones she sent me home with had not returned.

I wonder why she often told me the same stories of how she lived in the North and how wonderful it was alongside stories filled with sorrow and pain. I think of how proud she was watching me, her granddaughter, live out a life she dreamed of while making sure I had beautiful moccasins to wear, and the tensions she must have felt

knowing she would be the last in our family to create these gifts. I think about the contradictions in my earlier experiences in asking her to send me home with pieces of moose hide so that I could practice, yet trying to live a different story by going to school and becoming somebody else. If I had spoken up and insisted she teach me with her personal practical knowledge²¹, would she have seen herself as having more worth and as being *somebody*? Would I have seen her as having more worth, and as a holder of knowledge worth having in my life?

As I was sitting alongside my granny, I was also attending school. School was not a place I wanted to be and I would have preferred to stay in the familiarity of my home. I imagine earlier stories told to me by my granny shaped and developed within me strong notions around the importance of school and that it was a place I needed to navigate to become *somebody*. In my day-to-day experience, however, home and school were two different worlds. These two different worlds rarely intercepted until I met my grade two teacher Ms. Z.

²¹ Connelly and Clandinin (1988) write of personal practical knowledge as, “a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions for the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation...a narrative, curricular understanding of the person is an understanding that is flexible and fluid, and that therefore recognizes that people say and do different things in different circumstances and, conversely, that different circumstances bring forward different aspects of their experience to bear on the situation” (pp. 25-26).

Bringing School Home: Creating a Space of Belonging and Privilege

It was not until I entered grade two, as I began to imagine becoming a teacher, that my early stories of school started to shift. It was in this grade and for the first time on a school landscape where I came alongside a teacher, Ms. Z, who did not treat me as ‘outsider’ in a community rife with multiple tensions, far too complex for a young child to understand. Growing up in Wetaskiwin, Alberta I bordered two complex and tension-filled landscapes, both in my community and in schools. Thinking back now, I grew up in a place where the notion of insider/outsider was embedded within the community landscape between those who lived in the community and those who bordered it, shaped by racial undercurrents deeply rooted in social, historical, and political contexts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

When I entered kindergarten I do not remember having a sense of the phenomenon of racial tensions in schools, although I now know it existed. As I moved forward through the primary grades I began recognizing separate clusters of children forming both on and off the school landscape. I was unable to make sense of this at the time. However, over time, I learned from those who lived in the community and those who lived outside of it, that insiders and outsiders existed within both groups. Insiders were those who created the rules to live and play by, while outsiders hovered on the edges, waiting for invitations by the insiders to be accepted. Sometimes I was able to negotiate entry into both communities, however there was always a sense of uncertainty as I tried to earn my status as ‘insider’ and full acceptance into either world. Most often I teetered on the edges, rarely having been granted complete participation, particularly during my earlier years.

It was in grade two, alongside Ms. Z, my tentativeness was eased on the school landscape. Perhaps she sensed my uncertainty as I tried to navigate the multiple landscapes, and in so doing, provided a disruption to my earlier stories of school where I felt I did not belong. I began looking forward to school. I felt connected to Ms. Z because

she treated me with kindness, something I had not yet experienced with others in schools. She often allowed me to visit the classroom prize box, where I selected extra photocopied worksheets, worksheets we completed in the class, to bring home.

Around this time, and at my request, my dad brought home two wooden student desks and placed them in our basement. The space was transformed into ‘my school’ where I acted out being Ms. Z with the worksheets I brought home. The act of using worksheets became one of my early stories of being a teacher, and lived on as I continued using them in my practice of assessing children, labeling them as successful or not. I adored Ms. Z and, through imaginary play as ‘teacher’ in my home, I began creating a belonging place for myself as I imagined being her, my beloved teacher, outside of school. Looking back now, I imagine that by becoming her outside of school, I was living a story that my granny had shaped in my earlier experiences of becoming somebody else, somebody other than her. Although I loved my granny, Ms. Z was someone whom I also loved. She was important, well respected, listened to, educated, spoke proper English, and was white. My granny was ‘uneducated’ in schools and had not seen herself as *somebody* important, respected or heard, most often by those who were white and spoke properly. This was not the life she wanted for me and encouraged me to become someone other than her and in doing so, I became Ms. Z.

Looking back, Ms. Z became a model of who I wanted to become as a teacher and I began living out those early stories in my basement. This was one of my early stories to live by as I began to privilege the school curriculum making I was living in her classroom. By becoming Ms. Z outside of school, the experience began shaping my desire to teach those who were often considered ‘outsiders’; children positioned on the boundaries, particularly children who were of Indigenous ancestry like myself. My desire to teach Indigenous children grew as I moved through University and much of my focus

was on Indigenous Education²². A story of school that lived in many school districts at the time was that Indigenous children were deficit, as ‘dropping out’ of school, and policy and practice focussed on how to increase their success in schools. I imagined, as I moved through my teacher education program that I, being Indigenous myself, had an advantage in working with Indigenous children and helping them become successful, like I had seen myself being at the time.

‘At what cost?’ - Beginning to Name my Tensions between Family and School

It was during my fourth course of my masters program in the spring of 2011 with Dr. Dwayne Donald that I began to further inquire into my granny’s notions of success, her advice to not be like her, and to explore how it continued to shape me. In a paper I wrote, “according to my granny’s definition of *success*, I had reached it and she was always proud of that. However, I cannot help but question, at what cost?” (Indigenous Philosophy: Curriculum & Pedagogy Inquiry, Written paper, May 2011). My wonders, *at what cost*, centered around what I believed I had to give up as I became educated, were still filled with tensions as I continued thinking back to my lived experiences as a granddaughter, student, and teacher. Although I had gained so much in living alongside my granny for 34 years, I wondered about what I had also given up and lost as I grew to privilege school.

Naming the Phenomenon – Familial Curriculum Making²³

My wonders around what I had given up continued when I enrolled in the Mahatma Gandhi Summer Institute two-week summer course titled *Toward a Curriculum of Community* co-taught by Drs. Janice Huber and M. Shaun Murphy. It was in this

²² At the time, the Bachelor of Education program in which I majored at the University of Alberta was Elementary Generalist and I minored in Native Education.

²³ Huber, Murphy & Clandinin (2011) define familial curriculum making as an account of “parents’/families’ and children’s lives together in homes and communities where the parents and families are an integral part of the curricular process in which families, children/learners, subject matter, and home and community milieux are in dynamic interaction” (pp. 7-8).

course, alongside others, that I continued engaging in a narrative inquiry into my experiences alongside my granny, while continuing to question, “at what cost?” This tension-filled question was more prominent as I was trying to imagine a new way of being alongside children in the upcoming school year and of creating a sense of community, something that had been mostly absent in my life in schools, as a student and teacher. As in my previous two courses, I was coming to realize the importance of creating a space for myself and others to share and to inquire into our experiences, a pedagogy I had not experienced on school landscapes until entering the CRTED alongside Dr. D. Jean Clandinin and other students. In the course I shared artifacts given to me by my granny, told stories of our experiences together, and told of how we co-created curriculum together in her home, which centered around a space of belonging, something I yearned for in my classroom with children. Being in a safe space with others, sharing stories of experience shifted my stories to live by as a teacher; these shifted stories began to sustain me as I imagined creating a space with the children. Shortly after the course was completed, I received a letter from the instructors in which they wrote,

What we see as profoundly significant here in your curriculum making with your grandmother was what we have come to call familial curriculum making; a kind of curriculum making no less significant in our life compositions than school curriculum making. (M. S. Murphy & J. Huber, personal communication, July 15, 2011)

When I read the words “familial curriculum making,” suddenly my experiences lived alongside my granny were given a name, and I was given a language to identify and validate *our* experiences and the tensions with which I lived. I began reading more about familial curriculum making and realized that familial curriculum making used a concept of worlds (Lugones, 1987). I began thinking about how I traveled between my familial

and school curriculum-making worlds²⁴. Both naming the phenomenon of familial curriculum making and conceptualizing familial curriculum making as equally important to school curriculum making were very significant to me. I was interested in inquiring into the tensions I experienced between my familial curriculum-making world and my school curriculum-making world as I continued to wonder *at what cost*. It was this wonder that began to significantly shape my experiences as a teacher and my master's research as I inquired into the tensions or bumping places I experienced between these worlds. I needed to inquire further into how both curriculum-making worlds shaped my identity as a granddaughter, student, and teacher as I had often privileged school curriculum making over familial curriculum making.

My Master's Research: An Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry into the Lived Tensions Between Familial and School Curriculum-Making Worlds

In my master's research I inquired into the lived tensions between my familial and school curriculum-making worlds as I attended to my wonder '*at what cost*'²⁵ when school curriculum is privileged. Early in my master's inquiry I wrote of a tension or bumping place I experienced between my familial curriculum making alongside my granny and the school curriculum making I was living on the university landscape.

While I was an undergraduate student in 1999, I enrolled in a course titled *The Métis*. It was during this time that I asked my granny to share, while I tape-recorded our

²⁴ Lugones (1987) notes that a "world" need not be a construction of a whole society. It may be a construction of a tiny portion of a particular society. It may be inhabited by just a few people. Some 'worlds' are bigger than others" (p. 10). Lugones calls me to pay attention to the concept of 'world'-travelling where "those of us who are 'world'-travellers have the distinct experience of being different in different 'worlds' and of having the capacity to remember other 'worlds' and ourselves in them" (p. 11). As I inquired into my experiences alongside my granny it was my hope to travel to her world with "loving perception," with the ability to "understand what it is like to be [her] and what it is like to be ... [myself] in [her] eyes" (Lugones, 1987, p. 17).

²⁵ Dr. D. Jean Clandinin introduced me to Thoreau (1854/2008) who framed the use of the term *cost* when he wrote, "the cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it" (p. 20). In their study on teacher attrition, Clandinin et al. (2012) also wondered about the *cost* of becoming a teacher when they wrote, "The cost of becoming a teacher is paid from the 'life' of the teacher, much of which takes place off the school landscape" (p. 72). It was in this sense I framed my masters research.

conversation, her experiences of traveling to her father's Hudson Bay post in Fort St. John in 1930. She had shared her experiences many times through the years and I saw this as an opportunity to draw upon her experiences for an assignment in my school and imagined her stories would provide me with appropriate subject matter about the lives of Métis people. When she began sharing her experiences, I did not expect to experience feelings of disappointment because they had been stories I grew up with as she returned to her fondest memories of living in the North. Returning to our conversation years later, I notice I began comparing her experiences to the experiences of Métis people I was learning about in our university curriculum making. I attended to our words, our silences, the way I asked questions, and how I responded to the stories I had heard many times before. I noticed surprise, shock, and disappointment in our voices; especially mine when the stories my granny told did not follow the plotlines, events, and settings of the stories told in my school/university curriculum making. As I found myself growing impatient and disappointed as she shared her stories, I began interrupting her stories and imposing the school curriculum of who Métis people were onto her stories of experiences, hoping she would tell me a story that resembled the university learning in which I was engaged. I imagine, at the time, I began questioning her experiences as having value and importance, specifically the value of using her stories in a paper that would allow me to be successful.

At the time, I did not interrupt what I was learning in university as I tried to guide the stories she was telling me to fit the stories I was learning in school/university, stories I believed to be valued and most recognizable by those in the university curriculum-making world. I wonder what she thought about my questions as I was becoming *educated* in a university setting, an opportunity she never had. I wonder what she thought of my interruptions of her stories of her experiences. When I began to question her stories, I wonder if she began to see her stories as less than, and my stories as more important because I was in school, while I recorded her stories for my school/university assignment. I wonder who I was becoming as a granddaughter and the ways in which I perhaps compromised my own familial knowledge while comparing it to what I was

learning in school. This experience remains close as I continue to wonder about the costs of living in, and travelling between, multiple curriculum-making worlds, while becoming *somebody*.

I continued to privilege the school curriculum over my familial curriculum when I put aside my granny's stories of experiences in 1999. It seemed I valued the stories she was sharing with me as less than the ones taught in the university courses; I silenced them as I continued to follow the narratives I had learned in multiple school curriculum-making worlds of who Métis people were instead of honoring my granny's experiences and life.

Living out Counterstories: Beginning with Familial Curriculum Making on the School Landscape

After the summer institute I returned to teaching grade two part-time in 2011-2012. It was an important year, and many things were happening simultaneously. I was, at this time, imagining an autobiographical narrative inquiry into my lived tensions between my familial and school curriculum-making worlds as the subject of my masters thesis. I was also invited to participate as a co-researcher in a SSHRC funded research project entitled *A narrative inquiry into the educational experiences of Aboriginal youth and their families*.

In the classroom, I knew, like Paley (1986), that “the rules of teaching had changed; I now wanted to hear the answers I could not myself invent” (p. 125) and looked forward to creating a sharing space in the classroom through daily peace candle meetings²⁶ alongside the children. I wanted to create a space of belonging, a space I had been missing on school landscapes. I also wanted to co-make a space where the 18 children and I were able to share stories of experiences alongside others, in a safe and

²⁶ Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2003) write of creating peace candle gatherings as “a way to move forward, to talk about how the children were making sense of their experiences, a space for children to speak their stories, to listen to others' stories” (p. 344).

belonging space²⁷. Most of all, I wanted to hear the children and create a safe storytelling space where the children and I could share our stories of who we were and who we were becoming, together. Greene (1993) speaks to the importance of giving children time and space to begin telling stories of “what they are seeking, what they know and might not yet know, exchanging stories with others grounded in other landscapes, at once bringing something into being that is in between” (p. 218). The ‘in between’ Greene speaks about is the meeting place that allows us to unfold who we are and who we are becoming. Similarly, Heilbrun (1999) describes such a space as “a state of necessary in-betweenness” (p. 98) and speaks of a space of “liminality” as an inquiry space which is “never designed for permanent occupation...[but as a place] between destinies...the place where one writes their own lines and eventually our own plays” (pp. 101-102). Similar to what I experienced in spaces such as the CRTED and summer institute, I wanted to create an ‘in-between’ space of belonging, a space in which to acknowledge and honour stories of experiences, while attending to the other worlds children lived in, their familial curriculum-making worlds.

In what follows, I describe an experience of how I began the school year differently and how I began shaping peace candle circles with the children.

I arrived early on the first day of school to prepare the area for our first peace candle gathering. I carefully laid out the Pendleton wool blanket in the center of the room with an unlit candle, a basket of rocks, and smudge material resting in the middle. I wanted to start our circle in a good way and an Elder who worked at the school was joining us to speak about coming together in a circle and

²⁷ Greene (1993) speaks to the importance of conversation and dialogue in classrooms and writes, “There can only be – there ought to be – a wider and deeper sharing of beliefs, and 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” (p. 213).

smudging²⁸ protocol. With the lights dimmed, Kokum²⁹ Lena and I sat visiting around the blanket and waited for the children to trickle in. As they arrived, I could tell some children were unfamiliar with entering a room this way and were unsure of what was about to happen. I asked the children to join us around the blanket once they hung up their heavy, overstuffed backpacks on a coat hook. Other children quickly made their way over to the circle, with backpacks still strapped on, and were told by other children to put their backpacks away. Some children sat quietly waiting for us to begin, some gave small waves to friends they recognized from grade one. Some were whispering about the smudge, telling us they too smudged at home with their families. Kokum shared lessons about respect for one another when coming together in a circle, and the importance of listening to what each person is saying, without interrupting, as well as the reasons for opening the circle with smudge. I introduced students to the basket of rocks and to the smooth wooden stick I laid in the center of the blanket. The items provided two different methods of sharing. With the passing of the basket of rocks, each child chose a rock and held it until they were ready to share by placing their rock in the basket positioned in the center of the blanket. The other method was the use of a stick. The stick moved in a clockwise direction around the circle and whoever held the stick was the only one talking. My goal was to create a comfortable space, a space of belonging where children could share their stories of experiences.

In the beginning, many children were unsure in coming together in this way and tried to pass their turn, some cautiously revealed aspects of their lives, saying few words,

²⁸ Smudging is an act of cleansing and prayer among many Indigenous cultures. Some of the traditional medicines used in smudging are sweetgrass, sage, fungus, and cedar, alone or together. The medicines are burned and the smoke that rises is wafted over one's body to cleanse, the body, mind and spirit. As you smudge yourself, it is believed that the rising smoke carries your prayers to the Creator. The school I worked in served mainly Indigenous children and smudging was common practice in the school, as well as a practice in my personal life.

²⁹ Kokum means "your" Grandmother in Cree, Nokum means "my" grandmother.

and others struggled to find their words. There were a few who welcomed the experience and began to share about their lives, most notably their lives within their familial curriculum-making worlds. I wondered if some children were afraid to share stories of themselves alongside others in the class. Were they afraid of how I, or others, would respond to their stories? Did they even see themselves as having valuable knowledge worth sharing? Perhaps, like me, they had learned to privilege the stories of school and were familiar with beginning school everyday reading silently, a practice I gave up as I imagined beginning with children differently.

However, as relationships grew over time, stories began to be told and in my efforts not to silence their stories of experiences, peace candle gathering circles continued until the first morning recess bell (i.e., approximately 1.5 hours of time). Children began to see themselves as holding knowledge and being knowledgeable by sharing experiences of their familial curriculum-making worlds. They were eager to tell stories of communities they were from, stories of who they lived with, and how, for some, this frequently shifted. Often children shared stories of having many home places and belonging to multiple communities. They spoke about people who were important and less important to them in their families and told stories of being alongside their siblings, relatives, and/or pets. They spoke about the addition of new siblings, as well as the losses of loved ones. Alongside the children's stories, I, too, shared my experiences. It did not take long before this process of coming together with the children in a space of storytelling and response became a sustaining space for me and I suspect for many of the children.

The children and I were eager to begin each school day in this way and stories of experience were already being shared as I greeted them in the morning before entering our portable classroom. As each person shared stories, others listened and resonated with others' stories and shared their own stories in relation to the stories told by others. Downey and Clandinin (2010) call this a "process of calling or catching threads from the

teller's story" (p. 392). In their sharing, children began directing their own learning and choosing what was important to them as we began to co-compose our school curriculum-making world around their familial curriculum-making worlds. It was a curriculum of lives³⁰ in the making (Clandinin et al., 2006; Huber & Clandinin, 2005; Huber, Murphy & Clandinin, 2005). Most days I allowed circle to continue without concern for time, however, there were times I felt anxious around the length of time³¹ we spent in circle, even though we were co-composing curriculum alongside each other. It was during these times, most particularly around reporting periods, I began to worry and to wonder if I had enough time to "do" or "cover" the mandated curriculum.

Familial Curriculum Making on the School Landscape: Encountering New Tensions

As a way to ease my worries with covering the mandated curriculum and with the time we spent in our circle gatherings, specifically in Language Arts, I intentionally began asking the children to share particular experiences in their lives as a prelude to writing narratives about themselves. Children began seeing their familial knowledge and the stories they carried as being important and chose to include stories of experience in daily writing practices, which became more meaningful and authentic writing experiences. The children worked very hard for two months to complete an 11-page book about themselves, complete with artwork and eight paragraphs. The subject matter was centered around their lives and their lived experiences alongside their families. They were comfortable sharing with others. The children engaged in the writing process by

³⁰ Clandinin et al. (2006) view a curriculum of lives as the interweaving of children's and teacher's stories to live by, it is a curriculum "shaped as children's and teacher's diverse lives meet in schools, in in- and out-of-classroom places. As children's and teacher's stories to live by bump up against stories of school and school stories, a curriculum of lives is, in part, shaped" (p. 135).

³¹ During a meeting with my administration I was sharing the importance of our classroom gathering circles and how it was shaping our curriculum making, particularly how it was shaping their reading and writing. In an effort to make sure I was covering the other curriculum the administrator put in front of me a container with multicolored popsicle sticks. The suggestion given to me at the time was to write each of the children's names on a stick and to pull five sticks a day so those chosen five children would be the only ones allowed to share in the circle. I acknowledged this suggestion and responded that I would continue to engage in daily circles with the children where every child was given time and space to share their experiences.

planning, creating a rough draft, editing, and then typing eight completed paragraphs in a word document. I was proud of the children's work and laminated and created a book for each child to give as a Christmas gift to their parent(s)/families.

A reporting requirement I was obligated to complete on their finished product resulted in my assessing each child according to their level of independence, as well as a measurable guided reading level. I was trying to find ways to assess differently, and because I had worked closely with each child, I had seen their growth in their reading and writing skills as children excitedly wrote and shared their books with others. The children's books became our classroom readings for free reading. I always felt a lot of anxiety in assigning marks during the first reporting period because of the short time I had with the children, and at times I experienced a lot of uncertainty. However, this time I felt confident in assessing their abilities because I had worked so closely with the children and knew their stories of experiences, both in our circles and through their writing process. However, a few days after submitting my progress reports to administration for signing, they were handed back to me in a folder filled with sticky notes attached to every child's Language Arts mark questioning the strength and validity of my grading. Each note questioned whether the mark *truly* reflected the child's abilities. On the front of the folder was a note that read, "Come and see me."

When I met with my administrator, I was questioned on how so many children in my classroom could have the marks I indicated on their report cards. I spoke about daily circles and the writing process we had engaged in over two months and defended how hard the children had worked. I also shared the reading levels I had assessed at their 'instructional levels', something I was very familiar with. I was then asked to justify my assessment, while being questioned: "If we were to compare these students to others in the district, would they fare so well?" During my ten years of teaching grade two, I had never been asked this question around assessing student abilities. I was unable to answer the question, but I knew where it was coming from. The children were viewed as being deficit before we even knew them; they were seen as having less knowledge and fewer

abilities compared to others because they were Indigenous. In some ways the unquestioning acceptance of this had the quality of a sacred story in the district³².

Given these sacred stories, the children had already been scripted into a story that labeled them as having lower ability and achievement because they were Indigenous, not the ‘other students’ in the district. It was a story I, too, had lived as a child, student, and teacher. I was trying to imagine otherwise, yet the story of school continued to shape the school landscape and I was now directly bumping against it. I did not know the other students in the district, only the 18 children I lived alongside in my classroom. I knew some of the complexities in their lives, the stories they were living outside of the school, the shifting of their home lives, along with sharing many of their hopes and dreams as they too began imagining themselves otherwise, as creators of books and seeing their experiences and stories as important pieces to write about and to share with others.

I felt incredibly small in the administrator’s office. I felt silenced, and began doubting my assessment because I was being asked to continue to live out the story of school, which positioned the children in my classroom as unsuccessful. Despite my argument for all the children’s work, I was told to change their marks, which reflected a lower grade for the majority of the children. As I began lowering the children’s marks I felt sad and guilty that I was cheating the children out of a mark that reflected their hard work and angry that I was forced to do this.

A few weeks later, during our student-led conference the children were eager to show their books to their parents/families. They beamed with pride and the parents/families were delighted in seeing the effort the children put into their books. A few parents then inquired, despite the work they were seeing and the praise I was giving,

³² Crites (1971) refers to sacred stories as unspoken resonances living in stories of the past when he writes, “and certainly the sacred story to which we give this name cannot be directly told but its resonances can be felt in many of the stories that are being told” (p. 311). Crites also writes of secret stories, as stories covered over and untold.

why had their child received such a low mark in Language Arts? I wished I could have told them that I was instructed to lower the marks and that it wasn't my decision, but I could not. I knew there was no need for concern but the mark indicated otherwise. I responded with a cover story and told the parents that I always marked harder in the first term and that there was no need to worry, the following term would reflect an improved mark. My heart sank when I told them this, but I felt I had no other choice. I was forced to become complicit in the story of school. I wanted to tell parents the secret story around why their children had received a low mark, but I did not know how I could possibly share that story with them as a teacher on the school landscape³³. Looking back now, I wish I had refused lowering the marks and expressed my concern in how Indigenous children had been storied on the school landscape, which had constructed them as deficit, incapable, and 'unsuccessful' compared to 'other' children. As I was becoming more wakeful to the tensions I was experiencing, particularly how Indigenous children, families, and I were positioned and silenced on the school landscape, I decided to leave the classroom the following year.

Coming to the Research Puzzle

My doctoral research continues from my master's research entitled *An Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry into the Lived Tensions between Familial and School Curriculum-Making Worlds*, where I inquired into, and made visible, the tensions I experienced as I traveled between my familial and school curriculum-making worlds (Swanson, 2013a; 2014). Looking back, I realize how the children's and my curriculum making had been positioned as being 'less than' on the school landscape even though our school curriculum making had been significantly shaped and enriched as we attended to each other's stories of experiences. Despite the children creating beautiful writing and art pieces that represented who they were becoming in our grade two classroom, their work

³³ Numerous studies show that as children and families interact with schools their lives are often ignored, silenced or used as a way to define them as deficit and in need of being changed or fixed (Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2009; Delpit, 2006; Guiney Yallop, 2012; Liska Carger, 1996; Mickelson, 2000; Miller Marsh & Turner Vorbeck, 2009; Steeves, 2006; Young, 2005a, 2005b).

was seen as not worthy of a grade reflective of the effort, work, and knowledge I had witnessed. When I completed my master's research I wondered about the possibilities if all classrooms created belonging spaces where children were able to share, alongside others, stories of their familial curriculum-making worlds. However, my experiences with assessment and requests of lowering the children's report card marks shifted my initial hopes of "including familial curriculum making in schools" (Swanson, 2013a, p. 78). I am unsure if schools are places where the familial curriculum making of children and their families will be honoured.

Pulling forward storied threads of my early experiences in my familial curriculum-making world, my early experiences as a student, and my experiences as a teacher, I wondered how other Indigenous children and families experience the shift from their familial curriculum-making worlds to the school curriculum-making worlds as they first enter school. I am reminded of the liminal, in-between spaces (Greene, 1993; Heilbrun, 1999) I experienced as I encountered bumping places and tensions while struggling to make sense of the contradictions "within, between, and across" (Huber, Murphy & Clandinin, 2011, p. 51) both familial and school curriculum making worlds. Huber, Murphy and Clandinin (2011) began wondering how familial curriculum making is negotiated within and shaped by institutional and social narratives shaping school curriculum making when they wrote,

because school curriculum has been privileged, we know little about familial curriculum making and how it shapes children's lives in school and children's lives at home, as well as the ways children, and sometimes families, negotiate lives in these two curriculum making places. (p. 51)

I am reminded of the stories of school curriculum making and how I have been shaped as I traveled back and forth between familial and school curriculum-making worlds. While Paokong and Rosiek (2003) do not use the concepts of worlds of curriculum making, they also wonder about children moving from a home culture into a

culture of school. They describe this move as crossing the “threshold” (p. 258) and having to give up a part of themselves to live in these spaces, both at home and at school. Their wonderings bring me back to my original thoughts of “at *what cost*” to children, families, and teachers as they cross the “threshold” everyday, travelling from one world into another. I too wonder how lives are shaped by experiences lived in and out of schools, particularly if school curriculum-making worlds are privileged over familial curriculum-making worlds.

Research Puzzle

As I return to my earlier tension-filled experiences as a young child, student, and teacher I am reminded of my wonders around ‘*at what cost*’ as I traveled between my familial and school curriculum-making worlds. I am reminded of what my granny and I had to ‘*give up*’ as we both privileged the school curriculum-making worlds in which I lived. I think about how I needed to ‘*shift*’ who I was as a teacher on the school landscape, and how I constructed children and families as being deficit. I think about the knowledge families carry of their children and how their constructions of their children are different than the constructions teachers and others might compose of the children. As I travel back to my worlds of curriculum making I am reminded of how I construct myself as a teacher and teacher researcher in early childhood education. I think about the multiple worlds in which Indigenous children and families live prior to attending school. I know something of those worlds from living within my family, with my friends and relations, and from my work in schools. I am interested in how other Indigenous children and families navigate and travel between these two, often conflicting, worlds of curriculum making. It is this in-between space which is the place of inquiry. I am interested because it is an in-dwelling place that all children and families are *expected* to navigate and to make sense of as children first enter schools. My doctoral research explores the experiences of three children and their families as they first enter formal schooling in kindergarten. Using narrative inquiry as the methodology, the focus of this study is to understand how familial curriculum making is lived out narratively, over time

and within various contexts and how this is shaped by their school curriculum making experiences. In the study I inquire into the early experiences of children and families of Indigenous ancestry as they compose their lives within their familial curriculum-making worlds and the tensions experienced by the children and families as they world travel between familial curriculum-making worlds and school curriculum-making worlds.

Chapter Two

Narrative Inquiry as Phenomenon and Methodology: Narrative Conceptions of Curriculum

Looking across earlier storied experiences I see the stories of curriculum I lived for much of my life as a student, and as a teacher, centered around understanding and applying the term ‘curriculum’ as a course of study, rooted in subject matter, prescribed, and implemented in schools through provincially mandated policies. However, during my master’s program I began to awaken to other ways of thinking about, conceptualizing, curriculum. The stories of curriculum I embodied began to shift. Inquiring into my experiences with the curriculum-as-planned, curriculum as mandated, curriculum-as-lived or the living curriculum (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Aoki, 1993) I was able to identify tensions as I realized the *costs*, particularly what I had to *give up* as I privileged the idea of the mandated curriculum, which silenced my lived and told stories of experiences, as a granddaughter, student and teacher.

‘Curriculum’ as a concept has been contested by many academic disciplines over many years. Beginning in the late 1970’s and through the 1990’s scholars began to reconceptualize curriculum. The following conceptualizations provide glimpses of multiple meanings for curriculum: the planned curriculum (Aoki, 1993), the enacted curriculum (Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992), the hidden curriculum (Giroux & Purpel, 1983), the lived curriculum (Aoki, 1993), the null curriculum (Eisner, 1994), the embodied curriculum (Bateson, 1989; Eisner, 1992; Greene, 1988, 1995) and the experienced curriculum (Dewey, 1938; Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, 1995; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Even this list of conceptions of curriculum does not acknowledge the scope and depth of the various meanings the term curriculum has come to hold. However, they do provide interruptions to the dominant notion of curriculum, that is, curriculum as a course of study. This dominant notion of curriculum is the one most commonly understood by policy makers, teacher educators, teachers, administrators, and

parents/families. This dominant conception of curriculum as a course of study silences the experiences of children, families, and teachers in schools as it keeps the focus on the course of study rather than on lives and experiences.

Curriculum as Course of Life

Shifting from the dominant conception of curriculum as a course of study, Connelly and Clandinin (1988) imagined curriculum as “becom[ing] one’s life course of action. It can mean the paths we have followed and the paths we intend to follow...curriculum as a person’s life experience[s]” (p. 1). Grounded in Dewey’s (1938) notion of experience where education is life and life is experience³⁴ and Schwab’s (1969) four curriculum commonplaces (teacher, learner, subject matter, milieu) Connelly and Clandinin developed the concept of personal practical knowledge as a way to understand teachers’ curriculum-making practices. Personal practical knowledge is an expression of a teacher’s knowledge “as a moral, affective, and aesthetic way of knowing life’s educational situations” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 59). They view personal practical knowledge as a teacher’s embodied knowing, knowing shaped by each teacher’s life-making experiences within life contexts including school contexts.

Clandinin and Connelly (1992) drew attention to each teacher as a curriculum maker although they noted that the “teacher [is] not so much a maker of curriculum but a part of it” (p. 365). In this way they suggested teachers are not ‘deliverers’ of curriculum, but are co-composing curriculum alongside children in particular contexts and times. Clandinin and Connelly (1992) suggested curriculum might

be viewed as an account of teachers’ and children’s lives together in schools and classrooms...[In this view of curriculum making] the teacher is seen as an integral

³⁴ Dewey’s (1938) theory of experience has two criteria of experience: continuity and interaction. He believed that past experiences interact with present situations, creating present experiences. The context in which a person lives is shaped by past experiences and continues to shape other experiences. Interaction comes into play as people are always in relation in the world. We interact with situations.

part of the curricular process...in which teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu are in dynamic interaction. (p. 392)

They developed their notion of curriculum, as living and as in the making, as they engaged in narrative inquiries alongside teachers in classrooms. While they were, at first, criticized for not attending strongly enough to social contexts in their early work on teacher knowledge and curriculum making, they conceptualized the social, the contexts in which teachers lived and worked, as a professional knowledge landscape in the early 1990's (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). A professional knowledge landscape was a metaphoric understanding of the contexts in which teachers work, including contexts in and out of classrooms. Within the professional knowledge landscape there were in and out of classrooms places. They described the professional knowledge landscape as having both aesthetic and moral qualities. In their narrative inquiries into teachers' lives (Connelly and Clandinin, 1999), they noticed teachers often spoke of their wonders about who they were and who they were becoming within multiple knowledge landscapes and in shifting relationships on and off their professional knowledge landscapes. They sought a way to understand the relationship between teachers' personal practical knowledge and professional knowledge landscapes through narrative understandings of identity. They developed the term "stories to live by" as a narrative conception of identity making, which links together personal practical knowledge and storied knowledge contexts (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4).

Building on these theoretical concepts, further narrative inquiries into the curriculum making of children's and teacher's lives in schools referred to the negotiation of a "curriculum of lives" (Huber & Clandinin, 2005; Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2005). Clandinin et al. (2006) wrote, "a curriculum of lives is shaped as children's and teacher's diverse lives meet in schools, in in- and out-of-classroom places. As children's and teacher's stories to live by bump up against stories of school and school stories, a curriculum of lives is, in part, shaped" (p. 135). Coming to understand curriculum

making as a process of composing a curriculum of lives shaped a counterstory³⁵ to the dominant social, cultural, and institutional narratives shaping lives in schools. A curriculum of lives attends to the interweaving of children's and teachers' stories to live by as expressions of their knowing in classrooms and schools. Such a view positions children, as well as teachers, as co-curriculum makers in schools. Understanding children and teachers as together engaged in curriculum making allowed understandings of the "complex interwoven nature of lives in school" (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 14) as a central aspect of this conceptualization.

(Re)conceptualizing Curriculum: Familial Curriculum Making and Familial Curriculum-Making Worlds³⁶

Huber, Murphy and Clandinin's (2011) focus as they worked to understand curriculum making as co-composing a curriculum of lives had, until 2011, named schools and classrooms as the central place of curriculum making. While the storied experiences of children, families, and teachers outside of school could shape in-school curriculum making, curriculum was co-composed in schools. They took up questions around places of curriculum making in a later study as they searched for ways to understand the experiences of children, families, and teachers in Western Canadian schools. In that search they returned to early scholars' writing about families' influences on curriculum. Cremin's (1975) notion of families having a curriculum offered support for reshaping their conceptualization of curriculum making (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011). Cremin (1975/2007) explores the importance of family life as an educative experience and as part of curriculum making when he writes,

³⁵ Lindemann Nelson (1995) defines counterstory as "a story that contributes to the moral self-definition of its teller by undermining a dominant story, undoing it and retelling it in such a way as to invite new interpretations and conclusions" (p. 23).

³⁶ Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2011) draw on Lugones' (1987) notion of "world" in understanding that a "'world' need not be a construction of a whole society. It may be a construction of a tiny portion of a particular society. It may be inhabited by just a few people. Some 'worlds' are bigger than others" (p. 10)

The important fact is that family life does educate, religious life does educate, and work does educate; and, what is more, the education of all three realms is as intentional as the education of the school, though in different ways and in different measures. Every family has a curriculum, which it teaches quite deliberately and systematically over time. (2007, p. 1549)

Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2011) reread field texts from their study of families' experiences of school curriculum making. Working with Schwab's (1969) four curriculum commonplaces, they began with the lives of children and families outside of school in order to begin to develop a concept of curriculum making as occurring in homes and communities as well as in schools. Huber, Murphy and Clandinin (2011) offered a conceptualization of curriculum making as including familial curriculum making defined as

parents'/families' and children's lives together in homes and communities where the parents and families are an integral part of the curricular process in which families, children/learners, subject matter, and home and community milieux are in dynamic interaction. (pp. 7-8)

Huber, Murphy and Clandinin (2011) show that children and families world travel³⁷ each day between two distinct worlds of curriculum making, the familial and the school. They write, "we came to see more clearly how what we had initially seen as two sites of curriculum making were more like two worlds of curriculum making...that are filled with multiple and often conflicting constructions of children," and sometimes families (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011, p. 110). Remaining with Lugones' notion of world travelling, they noticed, over time, as children traveled between the two worlds they were being constructed by others, as well as constructing themselves, differently

³⁷ Lugones' (1987) concept of 'world'-travelling is one where "those of us who are 'world'-travellers have the distinct experience of being different in different 'worlds' and of having the capacity to remember other 'worlds' and ourselves in them" (p. 11).

within what could be two distinct and quite different worlds (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011).

Narrative Inquiries into the Familial Curriculum-Making Worlds of Children and Families

Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2011) expanded earlier conceptions of a curriculum of lives to include the familial curriculum making of children and families alongside the school curriculum making. Their reconceptualization drew attention to the tensions experienced by children, families, and teachers as they traveled between their familial and school curriculum-making worlds. Since then, there have been four studies that have taken up the reconceptualization and inquired into the familial curriculum making of children, youth and families (Houle, 2012; Lessard, 2014; Lessard, 2015, Pinnegar, 2016; Siriboe & Harfitt, 2017). Houle (2012) engaged in a two year multiperspectival narrative inquiry into the early schooling experiences of two boys (identified as struggling readers in grades one and two), their families, and teachers. In her study she found many stories were kept silent as the children and their mothers moved between their familial and school curriculum-making worlds. Lessard (2014) engaged in a narrative inquiry into the experiences of two Aboriginal youth and their families and made visible the tensions they experienced in their familial and school curriculum-making worlds, and as they travelled between these worlds. His study also shows how youth and families keep aspects of their familial curriculum-making worlds silent as he writes, “many families have learned to stay silent and not question what is being taught in the world of school curriculum making” (Lessard, 2015, p. 12). Pinnegar (2016) inquired into the experiences of three children as they moved between their familial curriculum making worlds and the curriculum making worlds lived in after school programs. She inquired into the multiple ‘worlds’ each child travelled to as they moved from home to school to after school programs and to home again. Siriboe and Harfitt (2017) inquired into three children and their families’ experiences as the children entered pre-kindergarten and kindergarten and explored the secret, sacred and cover

stories that shaped silences and tensions for families and children. All four studies call for the need to create relational spaces that attend to familial curriculum making as a way to understand children's, youth's, and families' lives and their stories of who they are and are becoming.

To date, there have been no studies inquiring into the experiences of young children and families of Indigenous ancestry as they transition from their familial curriculum-making worlds and first enter urban schools. In this research, I narratively inquire into the experiences of three young children and their families who are of Indigenous ancestry as they first enter formal schooling.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as storied phenomenon, is, first and foremost, a way of understanding experience and a methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Connelly and Clandinin (1990; 2006) developed the following definition of narrative inquiry, which recognizes human beings, individually and socially, as leading storied lives.

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they are 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 a world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375)

Further, narrative inquiry acknowledges the nested nature of experience. As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) explain

Framed within this view of experience, the focus of narrative inquiry is not only on individuals' experience but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted. Narrative inquirers study the individual's experience in the world, an experience that is storied both in the living and telling and that can be studied by listening, observing, living alongside one another and writing and interpreting texts (pp. 42-43).

Narrative inquiry recognizes and honors the complexities of human experiences, lived over time, in multiple places, and in multiple relationships. Grounded within Dewey's (1938) philosophical view where education is life and life is experience, narrative inquiry is based on Dewey's two criteria of experience, *interaction* and *continuity*. The first criteria *interaction* draws attention to the relationship between the person and the contexts in which they live. This includes the personal and social conditions of an individual's experience, with attention to the situatedness of an individual within the world. Dewey (1938) wrote,

The statement that individuals live in a world means, in the concrete, that they live in a series of situations...An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment, whether the latter consists of persons with whom he is talking about some topic or event, the subject talked about being also a part of the situation . . . The environment, in other words, is whatever conditions interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had. (pp. 43-44)

Dewey believed that past experiences interact with present situations. The context in which a person lives is shaped by past experiences and continues to shape other experiences. In other words, we are always in relation in the world and our experiences

are both personal and social. Dewey's (1938) second criteria of experience is continuity, or the experiential continuum, He wrote, "every experience lives on in further experiences" (p. 27), noting that "the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies it in some way" (Dewey, 1938, p. 35). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explore this continuum through inquiring into experiences as part of our past, present, and future when they write,

the idea that 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. (p. 2)

Using Dewey's criteria of *continuity* and *interaction*, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) conceptualized narrative inquiry as working within a metaphorical three dimensional inquiry space with dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place.

The Three Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space

The three dimensional narrative inquiry space is rooted in Dewey's (1938) criteria of continuity (past, present, future), interaction (personal and social), and situation (place) and sets the basis for the metaphorical three dimensional narrative inquiry space of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The first dimension of temporality "points inquirers toward the past, present, and future of people, places, things, and events under study" (Clandinin & Huber, 2010, p. 3). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write, "when we see an event, we need to think of it as happening over time. Any event, or thing, has a past, a present as it appears to us, and an implied future" (p. 29). The second dimension is sociality, which draws attention to both personal and social conditions. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain personal conditions as "feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions of both the inquirer and study

participants” and social conditions as “the existential conditions, the environment, surrounding factors and forces, people and otherwise that form the individual’s context” (p. 50). The third dimension is place, which Connelly and Clandinin (2006) define as “the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place” (p. 480).

Searching for, and Meeting, Research Participants

When I received approval from the Ethics Review Board at the University of Alberta on February 18, 2015 and March 9, 2015 (Appendix E & F), I connected with various community organizations that provided different services to the Indigenous population of a large city in Western Canada. Within each organization I received approval to place my research project poster (Appendix A) and recruitment letters for community members (Appendix B) in highly visible places such as community bulletin boards. I was excited as I tacked up posters and information sheets in multiple areas of the city and anticipated I would soon receive numerous calls. At the time I worried I might have to turn participants away since I was searching for only three families. Months passed and I did not receive a single call or email response. I was worried I would not be able to find anyone interested in participating in the research quick enough to be able to begin conversations before the school year began.

As the beginning of the school year drew closer and I grew more worried and anxious. I shared my concerns with my supervisors, relatives, friends, and colleagues and inquired if anyone knew of any Indigenous families who had a child beginning school for the first time. Those closest to me already knew about my search for participants so I began sharing my research study with many other people I met with hopes of locating potential families. Finally I did find participants and I describe the way I met them in what follows. I also share how many research conversations we engaged in and when narrative accounts were negotiated. I describe meeting each participant in more detail in the narrative accounts in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Vince, Linda and Miranda

Vince and Linda were the first parents who agreed to participate in the research. During a meeting with a former colleague in August 2015, I shared my research study and worry that I had no participants yet. She shared she knew a family who had a daughter beginning in kindergarten and mentioned she would talk with Vince about the research. A week later she sent an email indicating that Vince was ‘very interested in the study’ and connected us via email. I emailed Vince and thanked him for his interest in the study and provided a summary of the research along with the recruitment letter for community members (Appendix B). Soon after receiving the documents, Vince suggested that he, his wife Linda, and I meet at a popular local restaurant for lunch. From August 31, 2015 - October 30, 2016 we negotiated each time we met over 13 months. We engaged in nine research conversations. Miranda and I also engaged in five research conversations separately. We negotiated the narrative account in January 2019, which was our final research conversation.

Mary and Naomi

Mary and Naomi were the second participants who agreed to participate in the research study. I learned of Mary through a friend, Trudy, who worked at the University as an assistant professor. She knew of my research and, in conversation, shared that she knew a relative who had a young child beginning kindergarten. I first met Mary and Naomi in their home on October 23, 2015 and continued having research conversations until March 21, 2018. We negotiated our meeting times via text and when it was convenient for Mary and her family. We engaged in twelve research conversations together. Naomi and I engaged in eleven research conversations. We negotiated the narrative account on January 24, 2018, and later on March 21, 2018, which was our final research conversation.

Denise and Kylie

Kylie and Denise were the third family. I was introduced to them by a former colleague and friend Lori who shared in conversation that she had a niece Denise who had a daughter Kylie who was currently attending kindergarten. Lori shared that she would talk with her niece to see if she would be interested in the study. She later connected Denise and I via text. I first met Denise on January 13, 2016, and later Kylie on March 29, 2016. We continued our research conversations until January 2017. Denise and I negotiated each time we met via text and engaged in three research conversations. Kylie and I engaged in six research conversations. We negotiated the narrative account in January 2019, which was our final research conversation.

Co-composing Field Texts

Relationships are at the heart of narrative inquiries and establishing trusting relationships were central as I engaged with participants. As a narrative inquirer, Clandinin (2013) reminds me, “field texts are always embedded within research relationships” (p. 47) and are shaped by the relationship. As I came into relationships with the children and their families, field texts were co-composed differently within each relationship. Meeting times and locations were always negotiated and took place within home and/or community places. Each participating family chose where research conversations occurred and where they felt most safe in sharing their experiences. Conversations with Mary and Naomi occurred mostly within their home and moved into different community places at their invitation. Vince, Linda and Miranda created space for me within their home to have conversations at the dining room table or in their living room. Denise and Kylie chose to meet within familiar community places such as Taekwondo, daycare, and restaurants that were close to home. Although I was never invited into the home of Denise and Kylie, I learned that there were multiple places where Kylie felt ‘at home’ in her community.

Each family also decided the length of time we would spend together. Initially I had indicated conversations would last about an hour and a half. However, over time, and as our relationships developed, I was invited to stay longer in conversation and participate in daily family activities, as well as special activities. This began to shift the amount of time I spent with each of the families and children. Mary invited me to join the family for birthday celebrations, accompany them on community gatherings, and often invited me to stay for lunch or dinner. Vince and Linda invited me to a historical community celebration that celebrated Métis culture and history. Denise allowed me to visit with both of her children as we ate at a local restaurant. Having conversations with both the families and the children, together and separately, meant the time I spent in each conversation also shifted according to the conversation. During the times I was invited to different places or events also shaped the length of time I spent alongside the families. It was challenging to participate in separate conversations with parents and children within the original planned hour and a half time frame. Time spent with each of the families was carefully negotiated and often discussed as we were engaged in conversations.

Multiple field texts were created. The form and kind of field texts varied from family to family. Clandinin (2013) explained,

[a]s we negotiate relational spaces with participants, including places and times to meet and events to become part of, we also negotiate a diversity of field texts. It is important as researchers to stay awake to the multiple ways to tell and live experiences. Field texts allow us ways to see how others make meaning from experience and may also point us to possibilities of diverse final research texts – that is, the diverse ways we might represent the retold stories. (p. 46)

Various field texts included field notes, written in a research journal, on observations and participation in conversations with children and families. Multiple conversations between the children and I occurred in places to which the child invited

me, that is, shared bedrooms, playrooms, living areas within the home, and community places. When possible, each conversation was recorded and transcribed. Conversations with each family sometimes involved the children. These conversations occurred in homes and/or in community places such as workplace boardrooms, restaurants, or community gatherings. Sometimes siblings were involved in the conversations. All conversations with families were recorded and transcribed. Conversations shifted according to family and community events.

Other field texts included photographs of children's artwork, of places we traveled to within their homes and communities, and of the participants. Other field texts included co-constructed annals (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) that included family genealogies as well as family stories each family chose to share. Co-composing field texts alongside children occurred differently than co-composing field texts with the families. Many field texts alongside the children were composed as we co-created art, played board games, and through their invitations into their worlds of play.

Through improvisation and creative play alongside the children many opportunities and invitations into their worlds of play were opened up, which were shaped by the places we visited together. As each relationship unfolded over time, more invitations were presented by the children as they showed me what was important to them in their lives. Most times I followed where the children led me such as to different places within their homes and/or communities. At other times I invited them to places where we enjoyed a meal together at familiar local restaurants.

Paley (1986, 1992, 1997, 2013) writes of storytelling and story acting as ways to attend to a child's experiences and his/her "ongoing narrative" (Paley, 2013, p. 44). As I engaged in 'play' conversations with the children about their experiences, I quickly realized there was no room for my researcher journal. I relied on my recording device and sometimes a camera to capture our moments together. For example, Naomi, the first child

with whom I engaged in play conversations with, was curious about what I was writing down. I wondered how this was shaping our relationship and wondered how I was positioned as someone she knew was a teacher. It was this wonder that led me to record and transcribe our experiences together. Naomi was often curious and wanted to hear herself on the recordings so I played back some of our conversations so she could hear them. I told her that recording our voices was a way for me to remember all the fun things we did and what we said to one another. I knew with my researcher journal in hand I was unable to remain awake in the moments alongside the children.

Moving from Field Texts to Interim Research Texts

The process of moving from, and within, field texts, interim research texts, and later final research texts is “marked with tension and uncertainty” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 47). Clandinin and Caine (2013) explained that moving from field texts to interim and final research texts is a challenging and iterative process “full of twists and turns” (p. 172). Choosing what field texts to include and which to leave out was another difficult task.

Conversations with my co-supervisors allowed me time and space to share what I was experiencing alongside the children and their families. I was often reminded to return to my research puzzle as we thought with the experiences the children and families were telling and living. As I read and reread transcripts, listened to voice recordings, and attended to the various artifacts I had collected, I was frequently reminded to pay attention to the three dimensional inquiry space. By attending closely to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, Clandinin (2013) shares,

The three dimensions in the inquiry space are interconnected and interwoven ... [a]s we compose and co-compose interim research texts, we awaken to the interwovenness of life experience. Sometimes new wonders become visible, and we go back to participants to inquire into photographs or memory box artifacts or to hear as yet untold stories. (p. 50)

As our relationships and time moved forward, my research puzzle shifted to focus mainly on familial curriculum making. Although I was interested in stories of daily school curriculum making, it was never my intention to go to the schools the girls attended. I did, however, ask the children questions about what school was like for them. I asked their parents similar questions. School was not a topic the children wanted to discuss with me. Responses to my questions about school were rarely answered. Their experiences in school were ones they wanted to keep silent.

As I came to the end of time with the families I had collected numerous transcripts and other field texts. Feelings of doubt and being overwhelmed emerged as I tried to make sense of the large quantity of field texts I had composed with each of the families. While the quantity varied depending on the number of conversations and the amount of time we spent with one another, there were many field texts. While some conversations lasted an hour and half, others lasted over five hours. As I prepared to write interim research texts, I organized the field texts including the transcripts chronologically in a binder for each participating family. This allowed me a way to see our relationships over time and offered insights into the shifting conversations with families and children. I also created a document detailing our conversations according to the months of the year so I was easily able to track the days I was engaged in conversations with the families and children, together and separately.

As I read and reread transcripts I wondered how to begin co-composing the narrative account with seven different participants, four adults and three children. Narrative accounts are a form of interim research text and are a way of looking across each set of field texts, being mindful of the three dimensional narrative inquiry space. As Clandinin (2013) wrote,

a narrative account, or perhaps narrative accounting, allows us to give an account, an accounting, a representation of the unfolding of lives of both participants and

researchers, at least as they became visible in those times and places where our stories intersected and were shared. (p. 132)

I struggled with how to begin and whether to co-compose separate narrative accounts of the family member(s)' experiences and the child's experiences. I decided, given their interwoven lives to compose one account for each family that included the experiences with the child. I began with the families as the starting place, particularly with accounts of my experiences as I began each negotiation. The narrative accounts, each unique from the others, all begin with the negotiations of entry. As can be seen from Chapters 3, 4, and 5, each narrative account shows the different ways I engaged with each family and child and how they engaged with me.

From Interim Research Texts to Final Research Texts

Once the narrative accounts were composed I looked across all accounts for resonant threads, a kind of echo that reverberated across accounts, so that I might understand how the children and families experienced tensions in their familial curriculum making as they entered the school curriculum-making worlds. In looking across the accounts, I discerned three resonant threads: familial curriculum making as grounded in community; children's invitations into their worlds of 'ease' and school as shaping children's familial curriculum worlds. Attending closely to the children's and families' experiences as they entered into urban schools for the first time allowed me to better understand how children and families composed their lives within their familial curriculum-making worlds. I also attended to tensions they experienced as they traveled (Lugones, 1987) between the two curriculum making-worlds and inquired into the ways in which their familial curriculum making-worlds were shaped.

Because narrative inquiry is deeply rooted in the ontological commitments of being in relation with participants, I remain wakeful in how I care for the storied experiences the families and children shared with me. Clandinin (2013) reminds me to

make visible the three dimensions (temporality, sociality, and place) while composing final research texts in order that I attend to the multiplicity and complexity of storied lives. This is one way I avoided smoothing over or presenting cover stories in the interim and final research texts.

Final research texts are not to provide final answers, but rather are “intended to engage audiences to rethink and reimagine the ways in which they practice and the ways in which they relate to others” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 51). I take this up further in the final chapter. A copy of the dissertation will be presented to the three families who were participants in the inquiry.

Honoring Our Stories of Experience: Attending to Relational Ethics

Attending to the experiences of Indigenous families and children as they first entered into school provides insight into experiences that have often been silenced by the dominant social, political, cultural, and institutional narratives that continue to shape schools. I returned to my earlier experiences with my granny and am reminded of how she wanted to help me with my school curriculum making. Returning to these early experiences also reminded me that I did not feel I honored her stories of experiences in our familial curriculum making, particularly as I failed to honor her stories when I was studying at the university. While her stories were ones I loved listening to in our familial curriculum-making world, when it came time to bring her experiences into my school curriculum-making world, I allowed myself to see them as less than. These memories of placing our tape-recorded conversation on a shelf and returning to the stories honored in the university curriculum textbooks, are difficult ones. I carry a deep sense of loss and regret. I now wonder how both our lives may have been shaped differently had I followed through with my original intention of bringing her stories of experiences and our familial curriculum making into the school curriculum-making world. I wonder what would have happened if I had the courage to disrupt the dominant narratives that permeated our familial curriculum making around privileging the school curriculum making I was

living. I wonder how we both may have been shaped had I remained true to her hope that one day her experiences would be written down for others to learn from. I imagine she would have been proud seeing her stories written down, much like she felt when she handed me the stories she wrote on scraps of paper.

King (2003) reminds me of the power stories carry and how they can sustain us, as well as how they can cause harm when he writes, “we both knew that stories were medicine, that a story told one way could cure, that the same story told another way could injure” (p. 92). He reminds me that stories come to us at a time when we need them the most and they have the ability to shift who we are and who we are becoming. Although I carried those tapes of our recorded conversation with me during many moves, it was when I engaged in an autobiographical narrative inquiry that I returned to our conversation. I did this at a time in my life when I needed to live differently as a teacher in the classroom, alongside children and families. When I returned to graduate studies I realized how I had resisted her stories of experience when I was an undergraduate student while I privileged school knowledge. As I did so, I engaged in retelling my stories differently and began to live differently alongside the children in the classroom. My experiences alongside my granny and what I learned as I resisted her stories remind me of the importance of remaining wide awake (Greene, 1993) to the stories children and their families shared with me. Even though I silenced my granny’s storied experience when I was younger, my experiences alongside her linger and remind me of how I could live differently.

While I attended to the ethical guidelines as set out by the university and ensured that all participants, families and children, are informed about the inquiry, there was much more to consider in ethical matters in a narrative inquiry study. Participants signed informed consent forms for family members (Appendix C) as well as informed consent forms for their children (Appendix D) and were informed of their right to withdraw from the inquiry at any time, up until the final negotiation of their narrative accounts. The use of pseudonyms in all final research texts ensured confidentiality of all participants. Once

these concerns shaped by the ethical review board were attended to, I thought more about the relational ethics of narrative inquiry.

As a relational methodology, Clandinin, Caine, and Lessard (2018) write “narrative inquiry is, at its heart, an ethical undertaking” (p. 2). Clandinin and Murphy (2007) encourage narrative inquirers to “learn an attitude of empathetic listening, of not being judgmental and of suspending their disbelief as they attend to participants’ stories” (as cited in Clandinin, 2013, p. 199). As I entered into relationships with the children and their families it was important to approach this research slowly and attend to the life making of participants, as well as myself. Clandinin and Caine (2013) write that narrative inquirers enter research relationships in the midst and as

participants’ and researchers’ lives meet in the midst of each of our unfolding complex and multiple experiences, [and] we begin to shape time, places, and spaces where we come together and negotiate ways of being together and ways of giving an account of our work together. (p. 170)

As each family and I began, each relationship developed its own rhythm. A dimension of relational ethics of narrative inquiry requires “the necessity of moving slowly in ways that allow for listening and living” (Clandinin, Caine & Lessard, 2018, p. 14). Beginning in place, our relationships were co-negotiated over time. Conversations began in the moments and within the complexities of what was happening in our daily lives, which shaped further conversations and deepened our relationships and vulnerability with one another. Relational ethics remained at the heart of the research and was always present over the time we were together and as we parted. Relational ethics continue to guide my writing of this dissertation. Clandinin (2013) writes, “it is important to understand narrative inquiry spaces as spaces of belonging for both researchers and participants – spaces that are marked always by ethics and attitudes of openness, mutual vulnerability, reciprocity, and care” (p. 200). I made visible many aspects of my life as I

entered into relationships, which allowed me to develop a sense of ease in the conversations.

There were, however, moments of dis/ease as well, specifically as I was positioned as researcher and teacher. Researchers [and teachers] are often considered to have expert knowledge and are often perceived as authorities within relationships (Huber, Clandinin & Huber, 2006). In moments throughout the inquiry there were glimmers of how I was positioned differently on the landscape as a researcher and as an elementary teacher. Although I named myself as both a teacher and a researcher, I did not expect to feel these moments of tension when I was viewed as the expert on a landscape as a beginning narrative inquirer. Two moments come to mind: one where I was asked if I was *getting what I was looking for* as a researcher and another when worries about a child's assessment were asked of me so that I might offer my professional opinion as a teacher. These moments created tensions for me and I was uncertain of how to respond. I wondered how the participants took up my uncertainty and how our relationships were being shaped in these moments.

Clandinin, Caine, and Lessard (2018) highlighted five interrelated dimensions of relational ethics within narrative inquiry. The five dimensions are,

the necessity of engaging with imagination/improvisation/playfulness/world-traveling; the necessity of moving slowly in ways that allow for listening and living; the necessity of ethical understanding as always in process, in the making with wide awakesness to ongoings of experience; the necessity of always engaging with a sense of uncertainty and not knowing that acknowledges living ethically as living with liminal spaces that position us in places of dis/ease; [and] the necessity of understanding that ethical relations are always lived embodiments that ask us to be still and attend carefully to, and with, silence and with contemplation. (p. 14)

The five dimensions of relational ethics were illuminated as I lived alongside the children and their families and as I wrote the narrative accounts and the final dissertation.

In chapters 3, 4, and 5, I include the three negotiated narrative accounts with each family and child. Chapter 6 contains the three resonant narrative threads across the narrative accounts. Chapter 7 explores the significance of this research.

Chapter Three – Mary and Naomi

*These children have been gifted to give you messages
and you need to pay attention to what the children are teaching you.*

Elder Gloria, personal communication, April 2017

As I begin this narrative account I am drawn to the wisdom of Elder Gloria, whom I asked for guidance and support as I engaged in the research alongside children and families. As we ate dinner and visited with one another (April 2017) she shared stories of living alongside her two granddaughters as well as the youth she works with in a provincial Youth Care Facility. She shared the importance of praying, speaking, and writing from the heart while living, and working alongside children and families and the need to remain wakeful always. Sharing her stories, from her personal practical knowledge nested in both her personal and professional knowledge landscapes, she gently reminds me of the importance to remain attentive to the lives of children and the importance of listening to what they had to say. Her words stay with me as I return to the many conversations, interactions, photographs, field notes, and artifacts I have been honoured to be part of as I come alongside Naomi's and her family's worlds and to pay attention to what she has been teaching me. I have been gifted with time and space in both their home and within local community spaces. I have been privileged to be alongside Naomi, her mother Mary, two younger sisters Grace and Lou, and sometimes her dad Bryan, as I came to understand her familial and school curriculum-making experiences as she traveled back and forth between home, community, and school.

Our time together began in the midst of Naomi's kindergarten year and continued throughout grade 1. Naomi invited me to places in her home that were significant and, as I came alongside her, I tried to remain wakeful to the shifts that occurred over the two years of our field work. She also invited, and guided me through some of the community places that were important to her. These included the local community playground, her grandmother's home, and the community store.

Each time I went to see Naomi, I had conversations with her and conversations with Mary. Naomi's and my research conversations took place over a two-year period from October 2015 to March 2018. We had a total of twelve research conversations. Our conversations lasted between 1.5 hours and 5 hours. I was invited to family gatherings such as birthdays, which were not part of the research conversations but reflected the importance of our developing relationships. As Clandinin (2013) noted, I was becoming not only a researcher, but a person, a character in the stories of her life as she was becoming a person, and she was also becoming a character in my life. It was an honour to be invited along to attend family gatherings outside of the home and outside of the research study and I accepted these opportunities to join. All three of Mary's children were part of our conversations as the children's lives were central in the familial curriculum making. The children themselves shaped our conversations as their needs and inquiries were always attended to first.

Meeting Mary and the Babies

Mary and I "met" in early October 2015 via text messaging. I was introduced to Mary through Trudy, an assistant professor at the University. Trudy knew about my doctoral research and of a family whose child had just started kindergarten. She initially contacted Mary to see if she was interested in participating in the research study and, I imagine, shared broad strokes of who I was and what the research was about. Mary agreed to meet me and Trudy gave me Mary's contact information. Trudy assured me Mary was a 'texter' and sending a message via text would be okay. I promptly sent Mary a message introducing myself and shared a little bit of the research context with her. She responded right away stating that she was interested and would soon let me know when we could meet and speak further about the research study. Two weeks passed slowly for me without word from her. On two occasions, I sent gentle reminders of the possibility of setting up a time to chat either in person or on the phone about the research project. There was no reply. I grew anxious in waiting for her response and wondered if she had changed her mind about participating in the research. I worried I might be bothering her

with my texts so I was careful not to send messages too frequently. I was reminded by my supervisors of the busyness of the lives of families and children and was encouraged to be patient. While I understood this, their words did not alleviate my worries about finding research participants. I finally heard back from Mary after my third text. She responded immediately indicating she had intended to send me a text the week before but had forgotten in the day-to-day activities of her life and suggested a date to meet in her home. I was instantly relieved to hear from her and filled with joy that she was still interested in meeting me in her home. We met three days later for the first time.

On October 23, 2015, I made my way to her house to meet at 10:30 a.m., the time Mary had suggested. She suggested we meet first while Naomi was in her morning kindergarten class. I arrived ten minutes early and waited in my car outside of her small bungalow house. As the minutes moved forward I was filled with excitement and wonder about who this family was and if Mary would agree to be a part of the research with her daughter. I wondered if her daughter would like me and feel comfortable with me. As I scanned the front yard and the house, I noticed the attentiveness to children's lives and playfulness. Halloween decorations peppered the front yard: orange pumpkin-themed garbage bags sat amongst the many fallen leaves, and decorative stickers were placed on the front living room window. The house reminded me of one of the many houses I had lived in with my mom and older brother. I sent Mary a text letting her know I had arrived and made my way towards the front door. The air was crisp and the leaves crunched under my feet as I made my way down the sidewalk towards the front door.

I knocked on the door and Mary greeted me with her baby in her arms and invited me in. I made my way through a small neatly organized entranceway with many shoes and jackets into the living room and was invited to sit down. Mary thanked me as I passed her a coffee, saying how much she *needed it*. I told her I too loved coffee and disclosed that I too *needed it*. We both laughed and I began to feel at ease as we began to create a shared space of enjoying our morning coffee.

Mary sat on the sofa, holding baby Lou. I sat on the single chair closest to the large living room window. She shared that her second youngest Grace, 2 years old, was napping with her partner and that we needed to be quiet while we talked. As I organized my belongings I was immediately drawn to the multiple spaces created for her three children. There were multiple toys in a bin, a book corner, games centre, and colored bins that were filled with items for children. As I looked upwards, I noticed children's drawings, family photos, artistic creations, personal greeting cards, hockey mementos, and holiday decorations geared towards children, which were prominently displayed throughout the living room on walls and higher shelves. I shared how I loved her home and how comfortable I felt being in this space with her. Mary smiled at my comment and mentioned how she is just so happy being a mom and creating a stable home for her girls.

As I settled into the chair, her presence and the welcoming place, put me at ease. I knew Mary was comfortable with me. During our visit she breastfed her baby as she sat on the couch and told stories. While drinking our coffees she shared how her home of 13 years was in constant flux and changing with the needs of her daughters. She also spoke freely about her earlier life, meeting her partner, and her journey of becoming a mother. I shared fragments of who I was, where my family was from, even though I had lived in different cities for most of my life, and that I was a teacher, as well as a doctoral student. We soon realized we shared many similar stories of growing up in single parent households and of living in various parts of the city. I also learned we were close in age and that Mary was also Métis. Even in those first moments and frequently over the time of the research, I realized that she loved to share aspects of her life in detail. Many times we found ourselves laughing together at our shared experiences. Mary's laugh was infectious and I enjoyed her humour and the detailed stories she shared – I saw her as a gifted storyteller.

Later during the visit, I saw other rooms and again saw that the three girls' lives were the heart of the home. Every corner, nook, and cranny was deliberately designed and decorated with the girls in mind. The kitchen fridge was covered with photographs,

art, a monthly school newsletter and magnetic letters. A bench rested against the wall and two chairs hugged the kitchen table along with a highchair for baby Lou. I remember feeling surprised that a family of five lived in a two-bedroom house.

The time passed quickly as Mary and I visited in the living room. Suddenly she noticed the time and how late Naomi's school bus was. Our conversation quickly turned into one filled with worry and panic as she became anxious that Naomi had not returned. Mary called the school to inquire about the school bus and was informed that the bus was running late. I learned at this time it took Mary six weeks to have the bussing changed so Naomi could be picked up and dropped off in front of her house. Prior to this change, Mary walked Naomi to a bus stop a block away, with two young children in tow. Mary seemed grateful for this change, especially before the snow had fallen. However, I wondered why had it taken so long to reroute the yellow school bus so it picked Naomi up at her home.

In later conversations I learned about Mary's first experiences with school, particularly her experiences in kindergarten, and learned how she wanted a different experience for Naomi. In our first and third research conversation Mary spoke about being in kindergarten remembering, "I didn't want to be there", and decided to leave the school to return home (Conversations, November 25, 2015; March 2, 2016). For Mary, this early memory of school flooded back as she thought about Naomi's experience with beginning school. She shared, "My mom took me to kindergarten and I remember I didn't want to be there. But I knew where I lived, just across the field. So she left and I thought, this sucks. I went and put my jacket on and my boots and walked all the way back to the apartment building" (November 25, 2015). When she unexpectedly arrived home, her mother called the school to inform them that they "weren't keeping an eye on her for her to wander out" (November 25, 2015).

I imagine for Mary, her memory of leaving the school unnoticed to return home entered her mind as she worried about Naomi's travel to and from school. Still later on I

learned Mary's experience had a profound impact on Naomi attending school for the first time. She shared, "The moment [Naomi] walks out of here to the moment she's back in this house, my mind is going. Even the bus. Somebody can pull over and hijack the bus, right? Like my heart's racing until she's back home with me again. I'm constantly thinking, thinking, thinking" (March 2, 2016). These stories emerged as we came to know one another and Mary shared her own experiences and her worries for her daughter's safety when she would leave the safety and security of her home.

Meeting Naomi

Although I did not know Mary's thoughts and fears about the bus ride to and from school at the time, I sensed her worry and I began to worry as we waited for Naomi's yellow school bus to bring her home from her morning kindergarten class. I continued sitting as I watched Mary move between the kitchen and front door while speaking with the school receptionist. I grew more anxious when Mary told me this was the first time this had happened. Moments later the school bus slowly inched its way to a complete stop in front of the house, the door opened, and out bounded Naomi. Mary, still on the phone with the school, confirmed Naomi was home. She hung up and waved to the bus driver and to Naomi as Naomi made her way towards the house.

As Mary held the door open, Naomi ran in, flinging her pink back pack on the chair closest to the front door, and sharing her excitement that she was picked up late for the bus at school. She shared that, while waiting for the late bus, she and her fellow bus mates gathered and threw leaves up in the air while running under them in front of the school. She still had a few leaves stuck in her hair. While it was an exciting time for Naomi, I saw the worry on Mary's face. Mary shared that she was anxious whenever Naomi left to go to school, even though school seemed to be a safe place and a space where she could develop her sense of community and friendships.

In the midst of the leaf throwing and being late excitement, Mary introduced Naomi to me and we exchanged quick hellos. I complimented her pink and black skirt and Mary mentioned she is a little *fashionista* and loves clothes and dressing up. Naomi agreed and told me that she had a costume for Halloween and wondered if I would like to see it. I said I would and Naomi ran to her room to change into it. In a few short minutes, Naomi returned with a black cape and a tiny black and purple hat that clipped onto the top of her head. Black netting covered part of her face. She said she was going to be a vampire. I told her that I was very impressed with her costume; one of the nicest I had seen. Naomi began twirling around in her costume and playing with her younger sisters. I was reminded of the excitement of dressing up and remembered myself at this age, and my love of dressing up, imagining myself as somebody else.

After Naomi's arrival, I discussed my doctoral research with Mary and gave her the consent forms (Appendix C & D) and recruitment letter for community (Appendix B). I wanted to give Mary the space I believe she needed to read the forms carefully. I felt uneasy asking her to sign the forms during our first visit without time to consider this after meeting me. I did not record our first conversation and felt tension even suggesting that as a possibility. It was important to establish a relationship before asking for her formal participation in this research.

Creating a Home and Sense of Community

As I inquired into this first meeting and subsequent conversations with Mary and Naomi, I often returned to my feelings of comfort in the ways Mary and Bryan, her partner, created spaces within their home for their children. The house inside and out appeared to be shaped by, and for, the girls. Each time I visited over the two years the contents and arrangements of the house had shifted. Mary shared that it was important for her to create organized spaces for the girls, as it was important for Mary to make the space "work" for her and her family. Despite living in a two bedroom house with three girls ages 6 months, 2 years and 5 years old at the outset of the research, Mary's

dedication to creating a stable and enriching home was evident throughout all conversations. For Mary this was important and was shaped by her experiences of growing up in a single parent home in multiple areas in the city of Edmonton while having “little to next to nothing”(January 20, 2016). For Mary, creating the stability of growing up in one home and in one community was important for her. She wanted her girls to experience a sense of community, much like she had desired. She wanted her girls’ lives to be different from her own.

Reminiscing on her experiences of growing up, Mary remembered a time when affordable housing was offered to her mother during a pivotal time in her young life. She recalled,

When my mom got us into Métis urban housing it totally changed our lives...my mom got to pay a fraction of the rent so she then still had money for us and it was an awesome neighbourhood. It was one of those types of childhoods where you got to play hide and go seek with two blocks worth of kids until like 10:00 at night. You weren't just hiding in one yard; you were hiding in a two-block radius, playing hide and seek, right? It was a lot of fun. Both my brother and me still have friends from when we were young that we've held on to, you know? It's just not often anymore; I'm finding kids don't get a chance nowadays. They're either moved too often so they're not getting that – that stability. I guess that's the best way I can word it. (Conversation, January 20, 2016)

Mary’s description of being in a home as a child where she and her brother could play safely with other neighbourhood children is a strong memory for her. She cherished that time in her childhood.

Mary also shared earlier stories of when she was younger where she imagined a different life than the one she knew, that is, of being, “a mom on welfare with kids, and probably no dad in the picture” until she met her partner, Bryan. She met Bryan when she was 20 years of age (January 20, 2016). She shared these stories because she envisions

her daughters, and herself, living a life different from her own. She wanted to ensure that she was able to create a loving and stable home for her girls in a community in which she and her daughters are a part.

Importance of Living in, and Creating Relationships Within, Community Spaces

It was important to Mary that she was able to live in environments where her daughters could thrive. She chose a community preschool operated within a community church, which was 7 blocks from their home. Naomi attended the preschool beginning when she was 3 years old and continuing for two years with other community children. She attended the program for three days a week for two hours. Mary began to build a web of relationships with the children and their families and spoke lovingly about her experiences with Naomi's preschool teacher Yvonne and how this relationship shaped her family.

Teacher Yvonne has been there for twenty-some years and she just totally fell in love with Naomi and she was really excited when I had Grace, and then I was ending my pregnancy with Lou when Naomi was finishing preschool with them. So yeah, they got to, kind of, be a part of all this with us, they are growing with us too. (Conversation, January 20, 2016)

For Mary, it was important to develop connections so that her daughters would feel a strong sense of belonging through relationships with others in the community. Mary felt a sense of gratitude and excitement as she was reminded that she would continue to experience the “wonderful women who love being around little ones” as her second daughter, Grace, transitions into the community preschool. Mary shared the following about her experience visiting the preschool.

Once a month we would supply snacks for the twenty kids that were there. I'd volunteer for two hours when it was her snack day. It was nice to see how they

ran things and how the kids were. And it was really neat because some of the kids she went to preschool with are now in kindergarten with her. So, like, these are relationships that she's building. I'm a very sentimental person. Things mean a lot to me. Friendships, and stuff, and - and building those foundations.
(Conversation, January 20, 2016)

For Mary, having Naomi, and eventually her two younger daughters attend the community K-6 school was also important to her. Providing a strong foundation for her daughters to attend one school throughout their early years was rooted in Mary's sense of the importance of developing and maintaining strong and stable relationships with other children and families in her community. Having the girls shifted Mary and Bryan's relationships within the community. Mary stated, "before we had kids, we didn't talk to anybody in the neighbourhood. It was, like, we didn't need to" (March 2, 2106).

Mary spoke fondly about neighbours who had children close in age to her daughters and with whom she formed strong relationships. Mary connected with others at the community playground, which provided an additional space for Mary and her daughters to create friendships that carried forward into the school landscape. Having Naomi begin kindergarten with many of the community children and families she went to preschool with created a sense of ease for Mary as Naomi left home to attend formal schooling.

Making relationships and knowing the community shaped how Mary wanted Naomi to experience school. During our second research conversation, Mary spoke about her experience of attending the family winter fun night at Naomi's school. Although she shared her initial disappointment of Naomi not having a traditional Christmas concert like she had when she was young, Mary spoke about how she enjoyed the "interactive" nature of the evening with Naomi, her youngest daughter Lou, and her mother. She said, "we had so much fun in the two hours we went and participated in making reindeer food, antlers, ornaments, listened to stories, and sang Christmas carols. Each classroom had

something different going on” (January 20, 2016). Mary also shared she had spent a portion of the evening meeting the teachers, principal, and other parents. For Mary, the events of the evening shaped a “new way to start my girls’ education journey” and a way to honor the time and ability to “just make memories” for herself, her daughters and her mother. (January 20, 2016).

As she shared her experiences of the winter fun night, Mary returned to memories of when she was younger and how preparing for, and performing in, the Christmas concert was a positive event in her life. She reminisced about how Christmas concerts were an exciting time where she dressed up and performed on stage. For Mary experiencing the evening at Naomi’s school shaped a new rhythm for her and the family. She shared how she talked with her mom about how they enjoyed the evening and reminisced about how they used to “sit in a dark gymnasium...almost falling asleep” while they were forced to remain in the gymnasium for the duration of her nephew’s Christmas concert (January 20, 2016). For Mary, spending time in Naomi’s school, creating new memories with Naomi alongside others, seemed an expression of how she saw herself in relationship with others. This was also a new way to celebrate being with her daughter on the school landscape, alongside others.

Beginning in Familial Spaces

After our initial meeting, Mary, Naomi and I had our first research conversation in the basement of their home on November 25, 2015. Even though our first meeting was wonderful, I wasn’t sure how our first research conversation would go. I learned the basement, a shared familial space where the family often gathered, served many purposes. As soon as we entered the space we were transported into “Naomi’s house”, which had been created for, and with, the girls, particularly for Naomi, as she was the eldest. A large desk was placed in a corner along with an oversized leather sectional couch where the family gathered to watch television and movies together. As Naomi invited me into this space over time, I noticed the play area for the children shifted. I

noticed how larger items were removed and replaced with more children's toys and furniture. It was a comfortable and playful space to be in.

I imagined our conversations would occur organically and would be rooted in how we came together in relationship. I wanted to be flexible and wakeful to the lives of Mary and Naomi and to 'just go with the flow' by engaging in conversation as we were just coming to know one another. It was difficult for me to always stay in the moment and to be wakeful to the experiences while remaining attentive to the ebb and flow of multiple conversations between the three of us, conversations that sometimes occurred all at once. During our first few initial conversations Mary made space specifically for her and I to have conversations, with as little distraction as possible, such as when Grace was scheduled for a nap. However, over time, our relationship grew into one of me being a 'family friend' and I found myself immersed in various aspects of their lives such as birthdays, and community gatherings, as well as sharing many meals together.

Coming to Know Naomi

In the months that followed our first meeting on October 23, 2015 Naomi and I spent time together in 11 research conversations. Naomi welcomed me into her life and invited me to join her in places where she felt 'at ease'.

Invitation into Worlds of Imaginative Play

Beginning in a 'comfier' Place

Cindy: What do you like to do for fun when you come home from school [kindergarten]?

Naomi: I usually, when I get home from school, I go right under there.

Cindy: And what is under here?

Naomi: My office.

Cindy: Your office? What happens in your office?

Naomi: I work. I work over there and I have some books that I read under there. And I have two sleeping places...I'm just wondering what I can put here so it'll be comfier.....And I have lots of books here. And behind this box, that's also some of my books. (Transcript, February 10, 2016)



Figure 3.1. Naomi's 'office' in the 'crawlspace', January 20, 2016

This was one of many photographs I took in the places to which Naomi invited me. We entered this particular place in her bedroom during our second one-on-one conversation, which took place during my fourth visit in her family home (February 10, 2016). I felt excited yet anxious and uncertain as to how our one-on-one conversations would unfold. I had been looking forward to exploring the new place that was created for Naomi and, I imagine, by her. I wondered if the place below her bed was created so she could play with her two sisters and her many cousins, or spend time alone in a place designated for 'just her', within her home where 'spaces' were sometimes taken up by family members.

During my previous visit (January 20, 2016) I hoped to spend some time alone with Naomi playing in her kitchen/house area in the basement. However, unlike what I anticipated, Mary and I spent the majority of our time together in conversation at the kitchen table, while Naomi cleaned up her play area in the basement. When it came time for Naomi and I to visit there was only a short time and few available places to ‘play’ in her house. Because her father Bryan was home from work and needed to use the basement, Mary, the children and I stayed on the main floor. Naomi asked Mary if we could move to her bedroom but Grace was experiencing a transition to sleeping alone and needed to have a nap in her own bed for the first time so Naomi and I were unable to spend our time visiting in the bedroom. Because we were not able to find a place to ‘play’ what Naomi had planned, we settled on a painting activity at the kitchen table. Since our time was shortened, Mary, Naomi and I later negotiated my next visit would be spent mostly with Naomi.

During my second visit, the first research conversation with Mary and Naomi, I learned that Naomi loved drawing, “*all the time*” (Naomi, Transcript, November 25, 2015), and using my oil pastels was a new experience for her. She liked the “softness” of the oil pastels and enjoyed “*making blush-ish*” colors when we rubbed the pastel markings on the paper with a napkin (Naomi, Transcript, November 25, 2015). With this knowing, I purchased a new package of oil pastels³⁸ for her to color with in a subsequent conversation and with the hope these would provide an opening space for me to enter into her world of ‘play’.

The place pictured in the photograph above was referred to as a “crawlspace” by Mary (Transcript, January 20, 2016; February 10, 2016). However, Naomi did not use this word to describe the place; she transformed the place into something else, a place

³⁸ It was shortly after this visit I created an art bin with various art mediums to engage in play and conversations with each of the participants. Items included play doh, art paper, oil pastels, crayons, markers, smelly markers, bubbles, sidewalk chalk, tempera paint, various paintbrushes, stickers, drawing paper, and painting canvas. Items were added each time I visited at Naomi’s request.

which changed over time. On this particular day, it was her ‘office’ and on a different day it became her ‘house’ (March 23, 2016). It was cozy and inviting. Her items were organized and displayed with care and thoughtfulness and nothing seemed out of place. I noticed the foam base on the floor, which gave extra padding and comfort, as well as the many pillows that lined the wall and the red blanket, which provided her with “two sleeping spaces” (Naomi, Transcript, February 10, 2016).



Figure 3.2. Naomi’s ‘house’ in the ‘crawlpace’, March 23, 2016

Naomi’s ‘office’ was the first place she went when she returned from school. For her it was a large space and I was amazed at how she moved in, within, and out of it with incredible ease. With excitement, I made my way towards her office and shifted my body as I crouched to make myself small enough to enter. My transition into her ‘office’ was not as graceful as Naomi’s. Once inside, I hunched down as I settled in against the

pillows leaning against the back wall. Physically, I am quite tall and the area was clearly meant for children. I made myself as small as I could to join her invitation to enter alongside her. I wondered if Naomi sensed my awkwardness while I adjusted sitting in the small space, as she said, while pointing to an empty space beside me, "*I'm just wondering what I can put here so it'll be comfier*" (Naomi, Transcript, February 10, 2016). I wondered if she was trying to make it comfier for me. I imagine for Naomi having an adult join her in her space was a new experience and she was careful to make sure I felt welcomed. Even though we were still very early in coming to know one another, I learned over time Naomi was very attentive to details and aware of those around her. Naomi's attention to creating an inviting comfortable and safe space for our visit seemed to mirror what I experienced when I first met Mary in her home. I sensed Mary was teaching Naomi, through her familial curriculum making, of ways to create a warm and inviting home for family and friends within the community, something Naomi was recreating within her shared bedroom place with her sisters. Creating a comfortable space for herself and others is important to Naomi as I imagine she spends a lot of time in this place. I also imagine being the eldest sister in the family and a helper with her younger siblings has shaped Naomi's sensitivity and wide awakesness to the experiences and needs of others by creating a welcoming space.

Once we settled into the space under her bed, she shared many items that had been carefully organized in colored bins on the shelves. There were many reading books stacked on one shelf; on another were multiple notebooks, which according to Naomi were "*my books*" (Naomi, Transcript, February 10, 2016). Naomi also shared her many coloring materials that were each organized separately such as markers, pencils, coloring pencils, along with a few stuffies and headphones. Once she shared stories of where or from whom she received them, as well as when and what she used each of them for, she returned all of her belongings to their rightful place.

I shared with her how "cool" I thought her office was. I yearned to tell her how much I loved being invited into her 'office' world. For Naomi, moving into her 'office'

world was easy, whereas I had to expend more effort to shift who I was as I travelled into her world, even though an ‘office’ world was familiar to me. For Naomi, her office world consisted of soft lamp lighting with soft foam to shield us from the floor. Blankets and pillows were on top of the foam pieces and shelving held the things she needed in order to do her ‘work’. There were no desks or chairs such as the ones I find in my office. However, for Naomi, creating an inviting office world, comfort was what was central. Physically, I needed to shift my body so I could fit in the space. Emotionally traveling to her world reminded me of an earlier time when I, too, created a place for myself to imagine myself differently, a place where I went to “work”.

When I was in grade two I loved my teacher and, at my request, my dad purchased me two wooden school desks. Using the two desks I transformed the main room in our family basement into my classroom. Like Naomi, I, too, was careful of where I placed my items. I, too, enjoyed sharing my belongings with anyone who visited. I was proud of my classroom. It became a place for me to transform myself into someone else. Physically having the desks allowed the place of school to enter into my home. Playing school in my “work” place allowed me to become a teacher, rather than student. I wonder now if, when I was a child in my basement pretending to be teacher, I had been searching for a creative place to become someone else. I was searching for a place which allowed me the sense of control I experienced teachers having over me and the other children in the classroom. Teachers always decided what ‘work’ we would complete. I remember using the worksheets I brought home from school, reliving what I must have experienced in school on those days.

In contrast to my Grade 2 office, Naomi’s ‘office’ world was one of creativity. It was a place she was proud of, a place where she neatly stored her special belongings and items she used to create ‘books’ and art pieces. It was a place for her to draw images and practice printing words such as family names she learned at home, and names of friends she was learning in school. On this particular day she named her place under her bed as her office, her place to “work”. I imagine for Naomi, having a special place to ‘work’,

allowed her to have control of her special belongings and allowed her the freedom to create what she loved. For Naomi, being playful and creating colourful art pieces was her ‘work’ and she was eager to show me many pieces of her completed work that were in her notebooks, cover to cover.

While I had already learned (November 25, 2015) Naomi enjoyed drawing and creating art, it was in her ‘office world’ that I discovered Naomi named herself as an artist. While she shared her notebooks, carefully taking them out one by one from a neatly organized pink bin she also pulled out multiple individual sheets of paper. I noticed Naomi was very organized while taking care of her belongings and was particular about ensuring they were returned neatly to their spots on her shelves. Organized spaces seemed to be woven throughout the home where Mary created specific areas for the girls to could easily locate items for play and learning. I imagine Mary, in her familial curriculum making created thoughtful, easily accessible organized spaces, a practice Naomi seemed to live out in our meeting places and many conversations.

I was fascinated by the artistic creations Naomi had drawn on each paper in her notebooks and how careful she was in making sure to show me all her pages in her books. Every page was complete with a colorful image and/or some text. When I noted how many different colors of hearts peppered the pages, she responded, “*hearts are my favorite*”, (February, 10, 2016). With Valentine's Day quickly approaching, I noticed more and more hearts were appearing next to names of those she loved. Naomi’s books were filled with names of her family and school friends, who were often rooted in many of the stories she shared during our times together. For Naomi, ‘work’ was creating, filling her books with images and names, where eventually certain pages filled up the space between the floor and the bottom of her bed, beginning with the art we drew together.

“A good imagination like I have”



Figure 3.3. Co-composing art with Naomi, January 20, 2016

We had left her ‘office’ and moved to the round table Mary had set up in the middle of her bedroom in anticipation of our visit. Four chairs encircled the table where Naomi had set up two stuffies in the vacant chairs to join us, as we prepared to draw and color pictures together. I was uncertain how this would unfold. I had colored many times with children, mostly using coloring books where there was a black and white image waiting to be filled in. Without delay, Naomi set down two pieces of blank bordered paper on the table and stated, “you draw me a picture and I’ll draw you a picture”. Using the oil pastels I had brought for us to play with, I began drawing a picture of Naomi and I in the mountains and she drew a picture of her friend Aiden, also in the mountains. I had just recently returned from a trip where I had spent some time in a town nestled in the mountains and shared this experience with Naomi while we were drawing. Encouraged

by my completed art, and without hesitation, Naomi passed me another blank piece of paper and inquired, “I wonder what you’re going to draw this time?” (Naomi, Transcript, February 10, 2016). Unsure of how to answer Naomi’s question the following conversation took place.

Cindy: What should I draw this time? Can you give me some ideas?

Naomi: Do you want to draw, like, a party? Draw a party and put a unicorn in it?

Cindy: [GASP] I was thinking about a unicorn earlier! Now I have to think about how to draw a unicorn. [pulling out cell phone]

I had been thinking about unicorns from our experience together in her ‘office’ as I was reminded of my earlier landscapes. As I travelled back to a much earlier time in my life I remembered I adored unicorns too. While I did not mention this to Naomi, her invitation to draw a unicorn brought me back once again to a familiar time reminding me of how I, too, once believed in and dreamed of unicorns. They were beautiful, magical, and full of mystery. I was reminded I drew them all the time when I was younger but somehow the memory of how to draw them had faded. I had become uncertain about how to draw a unicorn and immediately referred to my phone, searching the Internet for an image of a unicorn I could copy. I did not know this moment would continue to work on me as I think about this research and coming alongside a 5 year old girl.

Our conversation continued:

Naomi: I know how to draw a unicorn! See? I’ll just draw one on the back. See? Look. You do that. Do a head. Do a horn. Do some eyes. Draw a mouth. And draw four feet on each side. See? Look! There’s a unicorn!

Cindy: Mmm hmm [searching online for unicorn images]

Naomi: I’m going to make...ooh, my mountains are unique. How do you say that?

Cindy: Unique?

Naomi: Yeah. My mountains are unique and I have fire coming down from...my raindrops are unique and they—and, also, fire comes down from the sky, too.

Cindy: Look at these unicorns. Which one should I try and draw? [showing her possibilities on my cell phone]

Naomi: Hmm. Choose that one. [pointing to unicorn picture on cell phone]

Cindy: That one?

Cindy: Whoa. All right. I'll try.

In this moment, I found myself continuing to grow anxious about drawing a unicorn. I began to slowly copy the lines from the image onto the paper. I must have appeared uncertain and I suspect Naomi noticed the worry on my face.

Naomi: If you can't, just draw whatever unicorn you can do.

Cindy: Whichever one I can do?

Naomi: Yeah.

Naomi: There. I'm done my unique mountains that you will never see. And see? If you can't, you can also do—you can also draw this one. See? I'll leave this here, if you can't draw, draw that one. So, there. You can draw mine if you don't want to draw that one [referencing the unicorn picture on my cell phone].

Naomi: I'm going to get another piece of paper.

Naomi: I think I'll draw a birthday party, also with a unicorn. But I'm not as good a drawer as that [pointing to my cell phone picture]. So I'm just going to draw my own unicorn.

Looking back at this conversation, Naomi was excited to teach me how to draw a unicorn and was quick to point out the importance of play and imagination in her life and how they are inextricably linked to one another, especially with how she named herself as a creative artist. I was not wakeful to this moment in my attempt to make sure I drew a unicorn that was right, something that resembled a unicorn that I had known only as an

adult and not one I had known when I was younger. Somehow, in this moment I was unable to travel to Naomi's world of drawing a "unique" unicorn and remained focused on what I could see in the images on my cell phone, rather than on what I could imagine. Looking back at this conversation, I wondered how Naomi had suddenly named herself as "not as good a drawer as that" when she saw the image I was using. However, she remained confident in her abilities to draw when she quickly added she would just, "*draw my own unicorn*".

Cindy: I need to look at a picture to help me. But you can draw it right out of your imagination.

Naomi: Yeah. Because you—when you were a kid you had a good imagination like I have. But, now, you're bigger so—'cuz you don't play any more. You have to work now.

Cindy: Yes, that is a very smart observation.

Naomi: So, now you don't get to play anymore and remember—and think about stuff that you like. You think about stuff that grown-ups like. So now you don't know what to draw because you haven't drawn for a long time 'cuz you're not a kid anymore. (Naomi, Transcript, February 10, 2016)

Naomi's words continued to work on me throughout my time with her. Much like Mary invited me into her home, Naomi invited us to be together as she welcomed me into her world of imagination and creativity as she laid out the sheets of paper for each of us to draw on. However, rather than accepting her invitation to travel to her world of playful creative imaginings, I was dis/eased. Naomi, sensing my dis/ease, tried to make me feel more at ease with our activity as she worked to help me understand that I could just try from my imagination or I could copy her drawing. I wonder if Naomi was able to travel to my world through her encouragement and instructions on how to draw a unicorn. She reminded me that I was once young like her, that I once had a 'good imagination' like she had, and that I had lost it in my 'work'. For Naomi, imagination and play are lost or forgotten when one becomes a grown-up. Naomi had introduced me to her 'office' as a

place where she did ‘work’. However, for Naomi her ‘work’ was still play and it was her play that became her work.

Looking backward, I imagine I once freely drew the many worlds I traveled to using my imagination. Yet now, as an adult, I relied on an image to copy. It was Naomi’s words that awakened me to recollecting how a very important part of who I was, and am, had been shaped by drawing something *right*, rather than something that was playful, creative, and something that was *my own*.

“Every art is beautiful”

Even though Naomi noted I was a “grown-up”, she continued to invite me into her world of imaginative play. In this way, Naomi and I were able to share stories with one another and, through her imagination, she created a portal for me to move into her world to try to understand her familial and school curriculum making experiences. The kitchen table had become an artist’s table where we first explored painting a piece of art together. During my third visit in the home and second research conversation with Naomi, we engaged in the following conversation as we painted.

Naomi: I haven’t painted in a long time.

Cindy: You’re doing a great job.

Mary: You are. Remember what momma said?

Naomi: Every art - every art is beautiful. (Naomi, Transcript, January 20, 2016)

Naomi seemed to be living out the familial curriculum making Mary was creating in the home where all artistic creative imaginings were beautiful. Naomi lived with the knowledge she was able to use art to express herself and felt confident and capable in creating art. Mary organized places in her home specifically for Naomi to be creative though art and play and, over time, created a specific area that held various materials used to create multiple artistic expressions. In this way, Mary was ensuring that Naomi

and her sisters would always have materials and a place to find materials they could use to be creative. I imagine Naomi was involved in the negotiation of what materials were chosen and where they would be accessible in the home. In the brief exchange, Mary reminds Naomi, and Naomi reminds herself, that her art work, her creative expressions, are all beautiful.

“I help with the babies”

Over time, in many of Naomi’s and my conversations, her two younger sisters, Grace and Lou, were present. Naomi often shared stories of herself as helping and taking care of ‘the babies’. During my third visit, and second conversation with Naomi, Grace began to join Naomi and I in our conversations. This was the rhythm of the house and there were few times when Naomi and I spent time alone, except when we left the home to spend time in community places. Naomi took being a big sister seriously and was awake to her sisters’ needs, making sure they were safe and included in our time together.



Figure 3.4. Naomi and 'the babies', July 6, 2016

In our second conversation, we had settled into a painting activity at the kitchen table. I had brought mini canvases as a Christmas gift for Naomi. Grace stood quietly and watched us move our paintbrushes on and off the canvas for quite some time. She did not choose to participate and, while we were engaged in the activity, Naomi noticed Grace's body language and stated, "*Grace is getting tired of standing*" (January 20, 2016). Grace had been silently watching us at the table and had not verbalized her discomfort. However, Naomi noticed and made room for Grace to join us. I had not been awake to Grace's discomfort because my focus had been on Naomi. It was also during our painting time together when Naomi called the paint water "juice" and jokingly stated, "*I will drink my juice now. Actually, I'll pour out my juice just in case somebody drinks it because if somebody drinks it, they'll be drinking paint*" (January 20, 2016). Naomi was clearly thinking about Grace in this moment and worried she could mistake the paint water for juice if we left it on the table. I learned early on in our conversations that Naomi was very careful and watchful of her sisters. In this moment, Naomi was able to travel to her sister's world by attending to her needs in creating a space for her sister to sit down as well as preventing her from accidentally drinking the paint water she playfully named as 'juice'. Naomi knew by playfully naming the water 'juice' Grace might have believed the paint water was actually juice, a word she was familiar with. Naomi, in this moment, was teaching Grace that paint water was not safe to drink and moved it away to an area she could not reach.

Over time, Grace and Lou began to feel more comfortable with my presence. For Naomi, being with, including, and taking care of her sisters was rooted in the familial curriculum making Mary was living daily. By living out the familial curriculum making Naomi was able to show a deep sense of relational responsibility and care when it came to her younger sisters. Naomi was also creating a 'comfy' space for her sister by making sure our space was organized and safe, a story line she was living out shaped by Mary's familial curriculum making. Over time, Naomi welcomed her siblings more and more by remaining wakeful and attentive to their needs through her invitations into our worlds of play. In this way, Naomi was able to imagine what they were experiencing as they

became more comfortable and curious with Naomi's and my activities. In having them join us in our play and conversations, I noticed how attentive she was to creating a welcoming space, something that was important for Naomi. Naomi loved to show me how much her sisters meant to her and what it meant for her to be named as someone who "helps with the babies" (January 20, 2016).

Creating Portals of 'Imagination'

Imagination and play were ways Naomi and I came to know one another and how most of our conversations began and were often sustained. During our visits, Naomi created portals of imagination and invited me to enter so that I was able to meet her in the worlds she had created. For Naomi, the portals represented a shift from the world in which we met each other into worlds of imaginative playfulness. While I found travelling to her worlds more difficult physically and sometimes emotionally, Naomi shifted easily into worlds of imaginative play. During our fourth research conversation, Naomi cleaned and prepared the basement for our visit. Resting at the base of the stairs was a small child's tent in which she was able to quickly crawl through into her 'home' world. The tent provided an entry, a physical manifestation of a portal, into Naomi's "house" in the basement where she often played with her sisters, cousins, and friends. For Naomi, creating a physical portal for both of us to move through seemed important, a necessary step for us to move through the physical world into her imaginary world. For a brief moment I considered trying to fit my tall body into the tent before I affirmed that I was unable to fit. I apologetically stated I was too tall to crawl through and offered to walk around the tent in order to join her. Although Naomi did not mention anything at the time, I wondered if she was disappointed I was unable to physically travel to the worlds she was inviting me into? I wondered if Naomi was simply used to adults being unable to move through the smaller spaces she was able to move through more freely and whether this was something she had learned to accept.



Figure 3.5. Naomi's portal she created to shift from one world to another, March 2, 2016

As we sat at the table drinking our iced tea and eating cupcakes we talked about her upcoming birthday party and about the many items in her 'house'. Our conversations changed multiple times during this visit as Naomi shifted who she was in this place. Always as she shifted the storylines around which her worlds were built, she invited me along. In one moment she left the room through the tent and became a visitor as I sat at the table in her move to play 'house'. Travelling back through the tent, Naomi stood on the stairs and knocked on the wall, which became a door through which I invited her inside. Suddenly, she shifted who she was and became a world explorer who recently returned from visiting places such as China and Paris with her cousins and her 6 children, who were at school and daycare. She explained in detail her visit to Paris where she travelled to nice hotels that had swimming pools and walls painted the "blue and green

color of Paris” (March 2, 2016). I wondered where she learned about these places and how she knew there was no snow in Paris, even though it was wintertime. Later I learned snow in Paris was a rarity. However Naomi shared this knowledge in our conversation. She then quickly changed into a ballerina costume obtained when she was three years old and twirled around. She showed me a forward tumble she named as a somersault and a cartwheel, movements she had learned in her Gymnastic classes. Within minutes Naomi shifted who she was, revealing the multiplicities of her worlds and how she was moving through the space by becoming different characters.

She also began shifting the physical space, changing the space to fit new story lines she was creating. In these moments, Naomi was the agent in charge of the stories and worlds she was creating, casting me into the various storylines she was creating. She invited me to play ‘explorers’ with her as she imagined the basement as a campsite, and us as explorers of the environment. The following conversation took place as she moved the tent to the centre of the room and crawled in.

Naomi: Do you want to play explorers? Here Cindy, come in here. Cause then we can pretend we are sleeping in the woods and this is our tent.

Cindy: I can't fit in there. I'm tooooooo big.

Naomi: Like the pop up bear!

Cindy: I can put some blankets in there so you can sleep in there.

Naomi: Why can't you fit in here?

Cindy: I'm too big.

Naomi: You will take up the whole space and then there would be no room for me?

Cindy: Yes, but I can kind of sit on the outside.

Naomi: I have an idea. You might be in the tent with me. I just need two chairs and two blankies and maybe kind of a light pillow.

Cindy: Maybe next time I come we could make a fort.

Naomi: And maybe we could make the fort and it would be like a big tent and we could both fit in there. Ooooh I got an idea. See this is Lou's little thing. [Naomi brings a play pad with a curved cover]. See this can be a tent.

Cindy: Oh, this is great! Perfect! (Naomi, Conversation, March 2, 2016)

Naomi often shifted her worlds of play and carried within her a deep sense of agency, as she created and shifted the worlds she imagined. However, whatever the world she was imagining, she always invited me to join her. She wanted to include me in her world travelling as she created multiple new worlds we could inhabit together and often accommodated my size. Seeing my difficulty in fitting into the tent with her, Naomi travelled to my world and imagined a way forward, a way for future play together. She created another physical portal to allow me to enter her world of camping. She suggested I could join her by imagining her sister's covered play pad as my tent. As she sat in her tent and I rested my head underneath the curved cover, we were transformed into campers and explorers who hunted for food such as "deer meat" while seeing "wolves and hibernating bears that sleep for the whole winter, but wake up in summer" (Naomi, Conversation, March 2, 2016).

Naomi's portals of imagination reminded me of a childhood experience. In our family home my dad created a physical portal for me to move through, unknowingly. He had built a small door in our basement that lead into a crawl space below the extension he built on our trailer. We first lived in a trailer and, by the time I was three, my dad had built an extension around three sides of the trailer to accommodate our growing family. The doorway to the crawlspace was located next to the classroom I had created. Years later, as an adult, I returned to the house where I grew up and the current owners allowed me to tour. When I made my way into the basement where my classroom and the door were, I was astonished at the smallness of the door. It was the perfect entryway for a young child but incredibly tiny for an adult. I had fond memories of travelling through the door and playing in the crawl space. I recalled running along the wooden boards that

encased many sections of dirt. The space became a portal for me to move from my home into other worlds I created: sometimes the space became a cave to explore in my quest for treasures; sometimes the space was filled with games of chase for my brother and I, making sure we did not fall into the dirt transformed into water. In this place I was able to lose myself and imagine all possible worlds, worlds I inhabited alone or with my brother. It was easy for me to imagine things as being different. Naomi reminded me of this as she invited me into her worlds. Looking back, this was one of the portals I created for myself as a young child, a place where I could become anyone, and a place where I was no longer in my house, but rather transformed through my imagination. I do not remember any adult joining me as I travelled through the doorway. For my dad, it was a space he needed to crawl through to deal with the maintenance of the house extension that sat above it. The physical place was my world of play and my dad's world of work. Now as I think of my worlds of imagination and Naomi's worlds of imagination I see how tied they are to familial curriculum making: Naomi's familial curriculum making shaping her stories of making people feel comfortable and creating a welcoming space.

“I know my way around”

The community was a place Naomi often explored with her family. She wanted to take me into her community to help me understand the places that were part of her worlds. She often took me to the neighbourhood park, a block away from her house. Naomi spent some of her summer engaged in activities at the ‘Green Shack’, a summer program in the park that operated during the weekdays for children of all ages.

As we made our way to the park, Naomi pointed out neighbours and friends she knew, paying close attention to who had yards that allowed children to visit. She pointed out one neighbour who had developed a park-like setting in their front yard with plants, trees, and bridges. She was fond of the person and mentioned that she was allowed to visit and play in their yard. I sensed Naomi spent a lot of time walking around her community with Mary and the babies. Making community connections and developing

Naomi's confidence to travel within her community was important for Mary and she worked to create opportunities for Naomi to become a member of her community.

During this trip Naomi encouraged me to move into other areas of the community as she proudly shared her knowledge of navigating the many places she knew. The following conversation took place while we were at the park, spending time playing on the swings, monkey bars, and slide when our visit at the park had been cut short. A large group of high school students made their way onto the apparatuses Naomi had been on:

Naomi: Did you bring any money?

Cindy: I have a dollar in my pocket. See?

Naomi: Is that – is that enough money for anything at Lucky Joe's?

Cindy: I'm not sure. Where is that?

Naomi: Just follow me. I know my way around part of this.

Cindy: Is it far?

Naomi: Nope, nope, nope. This way. It's a bit far. Actually, we can go through the park because it's way closer if we go through the park.

Cindy: This way?

Naomi: Yeah. You just follow the leader. Lucky Joe's is close to my Grandma's house.

Cindy: Ok.

Naomi: If you don't know which one is my Grandma's house, I can show you. And then, maybe, if Grandma's home we can knock on the door, and if she is home, we can say hello to her. (Naomi, Transcript, April 20, 2016)

Naomi was confident in knowing her community landscape and assured me she was knowledgeable in locating the store if she followed the way that passed by her Grandmother's house. Naomi was proud of herself as a knowledge holder of her community as she showed me how to navigate the community places she visited: the park, her grandmother's house and eventually the store, which were several blocks from

her home. Naomi knew a shorter way to the store, which passed by her grandmother's home, a place she often visited with her family. Naomi carried with her a deep knowing of who she was and her stories to live by as a knower of her community, as well as a member of her community, creating a sense of agency in her knowledge of certain landmarks and pathways to important places. This was rooted in her familial curriculum making as she often traveled in the community to places that were important to her and to her family. Her family, who also visited other places in the community, encouraged her to develop her confidence and knowledge of who she was in her community. This was an important aspect of the familial curriculum making rooted in Mary's stories to live by, that is, seeking out community events and places so Naomi would know the familial landscapes and feel the connectedness to her community in places that were of importance to the family.

A month earlier, when Mary and Naomi invited me to Naomi's birthday party, I met her grandmother. Mary shared that her mother, Bev, was close to the girls and, through her frequent visits, involved in their lives. For Mary, it was important that she lived in the same community as her mother. In this way Mary hoped that her daughters would develop a strong sense of familiarity, community knowledge, and connectedness with others. In Mary's familial curriculum making, she created opportunities for her daughters to be active members and knowledge holders of, and within, their community. As Naomi guided me to the store, I saw her living out Mary's familial curriculum making. Naomi showed me how confident she was as we walked through her community and as she named herself a *leader*. What was visible at the time was Naomi's sense of ease as she guided me to the store and encouraged me, letting me know that by following her we would not only make it to the store, but would be able to stop to visit her grandmother.

What became visible to me later was how Naomi was able to world travel to my world of unfamiliarity and to encourage me to *follow* her; she was taking care of me in a

place she was familiar with. Lucky Joe's was close to her grandmother's house and Naomi shared this knowledge with me to, in a way, reassure me. I am reminded of Mary's earlier stories of creating a safe environment for her daughters who would eventually know the places and landmarks. In this way, these community places would support their sense of belonging to a community, something Mary shared as she spoke about her earlier experiences when she and her family settled in a home within a community she grew to love, through the friendships and connections she made, and the places she felt free to explore at a young age.

“We've been in preschool with each other for a long time”

Naomi shared how important her relationships were with her friends both in the community and at school. Our conversations about school were centred on her relationships with her friends, beginning with how long she had known them. For Naomi the continuity of being with the same friends and developing strong relationships was important, something Mary encouraged within her familial curriculum making. For Mary, these sustained relationships with children in her community were important for her and her daughters to develop a sense of belonging. Mary shared, “it's really important that the girls stay at Sunshine school and carry these relationships through school. These are friends that she's going to have right until she graduates” (September 22, 2016).

In all conversations, Naomi often spoke about her friends, particularly the ones at school and how long she knew them. In sharing about Cara and Ben, Naomi stated, “*we've been together for a long time, since we were in preschool*” (March 2, 2016). Naomi spoke of other friends; identified as people she met on her first day in kindergarten, with whom she shared common interests. For example, Naomi talked about one friend who “*likes coloring, like me. We're both artists*” (March 2, 2016). Naomi was drawn to others who shared her creative interests and enjoyed similar activities at school. She also shared that in kindergarten boys and girls often did not play with each other due to individual interests in activities. The following conversation occurred.

Naomi: The boys don't really play with the girls that much.

Cindy: What do the boys like to play?

Naomi: The boys like to play – we – both have something different that we like to play. The boys like to play Lego, Play-doh or action theatre and the girls like to play clipboards or calendar or ponies. So the boys don't really do what the girls choose and the girls don't really do what the boys do. (Naomi, Transcript, March 2, 2016)

When I further inquired into the activities Naomi enjoyed at school she spoke specifically about playing calendar with her friends. She said, “we point out the days and then we pretend we’re students,” and named these activities as being “all kinds of *schooly* things” (March 2, 2016). For Naomi, playing teacher was something she and her friends enjoyed at school and eventually she began living and acting as teacher at home (September 22, 2016). Naomi created a classroom in her basement where she had a poster board on the wall that became an imaginative smart board complete with a “pointer” she used to demonstrate with and to emphasize the words she was learning in school. During this particular visit Naomi transformed herself into her teacher, Miss. B³⁹, who read stories and enjoyed visiting the gym. During our time together Naomi asked me to play the role of student, and I gladly accepted. I returned to my earlier memories of playing school and becoming the teacher and wondered what Naomi would share about her school curriculum-making world.

During this time Naomi was in her first month of grade one and used a picture book to create a story from her imagination and said, “I don’t know how to read yet” (Transcript, September 22, 2016). Although there were ways Naomi brought school home such as through her stories of being with friends and through sharing school artifacts, this was the first time I saw Naomi bring her teacher home and wondered how this was shaping Naomi.

³⁹ Ms. B was Naomi’s kindergarten teacher and grade one teacher.



Figure 3.6. Naomi as her teacher, Ms. B, September 22, 2016

Dragons at the park



Figure 3.7. Naomi running from 'dragons', November 15, 2016

Actually.
The sand is hot!
Quick Cindy!
The dragons are chasing us!
We need to run away from the Dragons!
They're blowing fire!
THE DRAGONS ARE BLOWING FIRE!!!

(Naomi, Transcript, November 15, 2016)

Naomi shouts these words of warning as she leaves my side and launches forward into a full run from the concrete edge that encircles the sand park. In the blink of an eye she leaves me alone, standing still on the edge of the playground, while I watch her dart across the sand towards the swings. I remain on the periphery, watching, until she invites me into her world of play and to imagine alongside her. She calls me to enter into this imaginary new world filled with fire breathing dragons. For a moment I hesitate because I am not able to shift from one world into another as quickly as she. But with her invite, I launch myself off the concrete border onto the land of hot sand. With long strides I run to avoid burning my feet and the imminent attack from fire-breathing dragons like she had just experienced moments before. We are both laughing as we made our way across. The creation of this world and her invite happened spontaneously. Had I not been paying attention, I most certainly would have missed it.

As we shifted and moved across the concrete boundary into the playground sand Naomi transported both of us from one world into another where we began living out a new story, a story where we were no longer confined to rules and talk of what it meant to be a 'good girl' in school.

I catch up to Naomi who is smiling and giggling while she leans forward over the base of the swing moving back and forth with her feet hovering just above the burning sand. She reminds me that I too must keep my feet off the sand. We were no longer at the

playground, but she had transported us to an imaginary world where dragons blew fire and chased us across the hot flaming sand. We were safe on our swings. In this moment, a little over a year after we first met, I was more comfortable in accepting Naomi's invitation into her world of imaginary play. I was able to let myself go and shift so I felt more at ease in her imaginary world, and I imagine Naomi sensed this shift too. As we lingered on the swings laughing, Naomi and I were celebrating our safety and victory from the imaginary dragons. I was drawn to Naomi's willingness to continue inviting me into her worlds of play as we imagined together. Naomi and I both remained hopeful about my ability to learn and remember how to become playful and imaginative. While Naomi was the creator of her imaginative, playful, and safe worlds, she always extended an invitation to join her, despite my size and grown-up ways. Her approach was one of gentleness, enthusiasm, and trust as she reassured me in many ways her world was a safe one, even though we might be burned by fire breathing dragons. Naomi had been teaching me all along by inviting me into her worlds, worlds she created through the worlds she lived and experienced, in her home, community, and school, and the many worlds she lived and played out through her imagination.

Moments earlier, Naomi and I had been talking about school as we walked from her home to the community playground. I was curious about her experiences in grade one. I noted, as we talked, she often asked, "now can we go and play?" (Naomi, Transcript, November 15, 2016). Although she chose the activities such as painting, coloring, and spending time in her bedroom during our visits, I wondered why she had not seen our activities on this particular day as 'playing', as she had in the past. I wondered if it had been my questions around school that caused her to be concerned about getting enough "play" in with me. None of what we had been doing seemed to be playing for Naomi. Determined to take me out outside she suggested we leave home for the community park. As we walked to the park I was determined to continue talking about what school was like for Naomi. I began by asking her how grade one was different from kindergarten and she explained:

Naomi: Now we have to read. We do get to play but we only play on Friday. The teacher said if the class is good we can have free time Friday.

Cindy: How do you have to be good?

Naomi: I don't know.

Cindy: What does it mean to you when your teacher says you have to be good.

Naomi: Well, when she claps like this [clap-clap/clap-clap-clap] you have to clap also. When you don't, you get taken away Math game Monday, or gym, or recess, or free time Friday. So all of our classmates know that when Ms. B claps and they don't, they get one minute taken away from free time Friday, or recess, or lunch, or whatever.

Cindy: Something fun?

Naomi: Yea, she doesn't take away anything from me because I'm usually good. I clap and listen pretty goodly. So here we are, at the park!

Cindy: What do you want to play?

Naomi: Can you push me on the swing?

Cindy: Sure!

Naomi: Actually...the sand is hot... (Naomi, Transcript, November 15, 2016)

Looking back at this moment when Naomi shifted from stories of being 'good' in grade one to living out a story of being free amongst imaginary dragons, I realized that I had tried to shift our conversation by focusing solely on what she was experiencing at school. In this moment, she was done talking about school. For Naomi, school was not playful and I imagine my questioning was very adult like and perhaps a bit teacher-ish. Rather, Naomi was comfortable to invite me into her worlds of playful imagination and when I tried to enter her world of school she seemed less at ease. The school world was a world I was familiar with and for Naomi the school world was filled with new experiences, experiences I was curious about. Naomi was showing me how at ease she was in her worlds of playful imagination, worlds I was not at ease in. When I tried to shift the conversation towards school Naomi was not at complete ease because this was not a

world she wanted to travel to with me. Instead Naomi saw me as a friend to travel to more exciting, imaginative playful worlds. Her lack of ease for inviting me into her world of school occurred because she saw me as someone to play with and for Naomi, school was becoming a place where she had to ‘work’ and be ‘good’ and lived with the threat of punishment rather than being and living out characters freely in her playful and imaginative worlds.

Many times during our visits and research conversations, I tried to travel to her school curriculum-making world by asking her questions and sometimes she allowed me the occasional entry into this world she rarely spoke about. She often shared stories of her friends and what they did together and moments of what she did inside and outside the classroom. Naomi would share glimpses of her school curriculum-making world. However they were often brief, and when I would push for more information, Naomi would shift the conversation into more playful and imaginative ways.

After I pushed Naomi on the swings and had her swinging at a quick pace, I eventually started swinging myself. It was in this moment, she placed her arms around the swing chains and clasped her hands in front of her and said, “this is how I sit at my desk” (Naomi, Transcript, November 15, 2016). We laughed as I mirrored her clasped hand, while we continued to swing. I saw this moment as an invitation into her world of school. It was short lived as Naomi interrupted my questions to share what was important to her in the moment.

Cindy: So tell me more about school.

Naomi: Well. You have to sit like this. You have to tell the teacher you’re going to the washroom. You have to control yourself properly. I’m supergirl with my legs up in the sky! (Naomi, Transcript, November 15, 2016)



Figure 3.8. Naomi before shifting into supergirl, November 15, 2016

Naomi's brief opening into her world of school closed quickly as she suddenly opened another world, one where she became "super girl" who flew in the sky. I learned more about her school curriculum-making world from conversations with her mother.

Mary: Her teacher totally raves about her. She calls her...what does Ms. B call you?

Naomi: A star student?

Cindy: What's a star student?

Naomi: A star student is when you're the best student. Hello from down there! I can touch the roof from here. [Sitting on her mattress on the top bunk bed]

Naomi: And a solid citizen.

Cindy: A solid citizen.

Mary: Yea.

Naomi: And a star student.

Mary: Ok, don't jump up there please. You're making me nervous. (Conversation, February 10, 2016)

Mary names herself as, "a work in progress but this is what I'm doing, as a mom to make sure Naomi has a fantastic day" (January 20, 2016). She later went on to share,

I never wanted Naomi in an environment where she was just saturated with so much information...and I'm kind of glad that kindergarten is still fun...I was really glad meeting the teacher, finding out how they do things, and realizing they have a lot of fun in the few hours she's there everyday. (Conversation, January 20, 2016)

As Mary reflected on how the teacher named Naomi as "star student" and "solid citizen" Naomi began to bounce on the top bunk bed in a manner that worried Mary and I. I wondered in this moment if Naomi agreed with the words Mary was using in the home that she had not heard before on that landscape. I wondered if Naomi wanted to be

seen this way at home. As time moved on, Naomi became known as someone on the school landscape, as someone who helps those who are struggling or need extra support, and someone who notices the needs of others, all of which she lives out in her home with her two younger sisters.

During our times together, I noticed Naomi changed from her school clothes into her home clothes when she arrived home from school. When I inquired into this during one of our visits, Mary stated, “oh yea, she does that a lot. Sometimes she will come home and change straight into her pajamas” (November, 15, 2016). Mary also shared, “sometimes she comes home and she just has these meltdowns. I think it’s because she is trying to hold it all together at school. I don’t think it’s because she’s had bad experiences of school, I think it’s just a release” (Transcripts, November 15, 2016).

Naomi’s kindergarten year was over when we played in her backyard and I asked her a familiar question about her school world. As Naomi responded, she showed me what was truly important to her in her school curriculum-making world, a world she lived in, and travelled through daily. Being allowed to play in a big tent with toys and with friends like Shale seemed the most important features of her school curriculum making. In her words,

Cindy: What was your favourite part about kindergarten? What will you miss the most?

Naomi: I will miss the most about having our camp.

Cindy: Your camp?

Naomi: We have a camp.

Cindy: What do you mean?

Naomi: We have big tents, and pillows and stuff that we can play in it.

[PAUSE]

Naomi: My favourite thing, that I will miss the most when I go to Grade One, will be playing with—with Shale.

Cindy: Won't Shale be there with you in Grade One?

Naomi: Yeah, but I don't know if she's gonna be in my class.



Figure 3.9. Naomi's desk, July 6, 2016

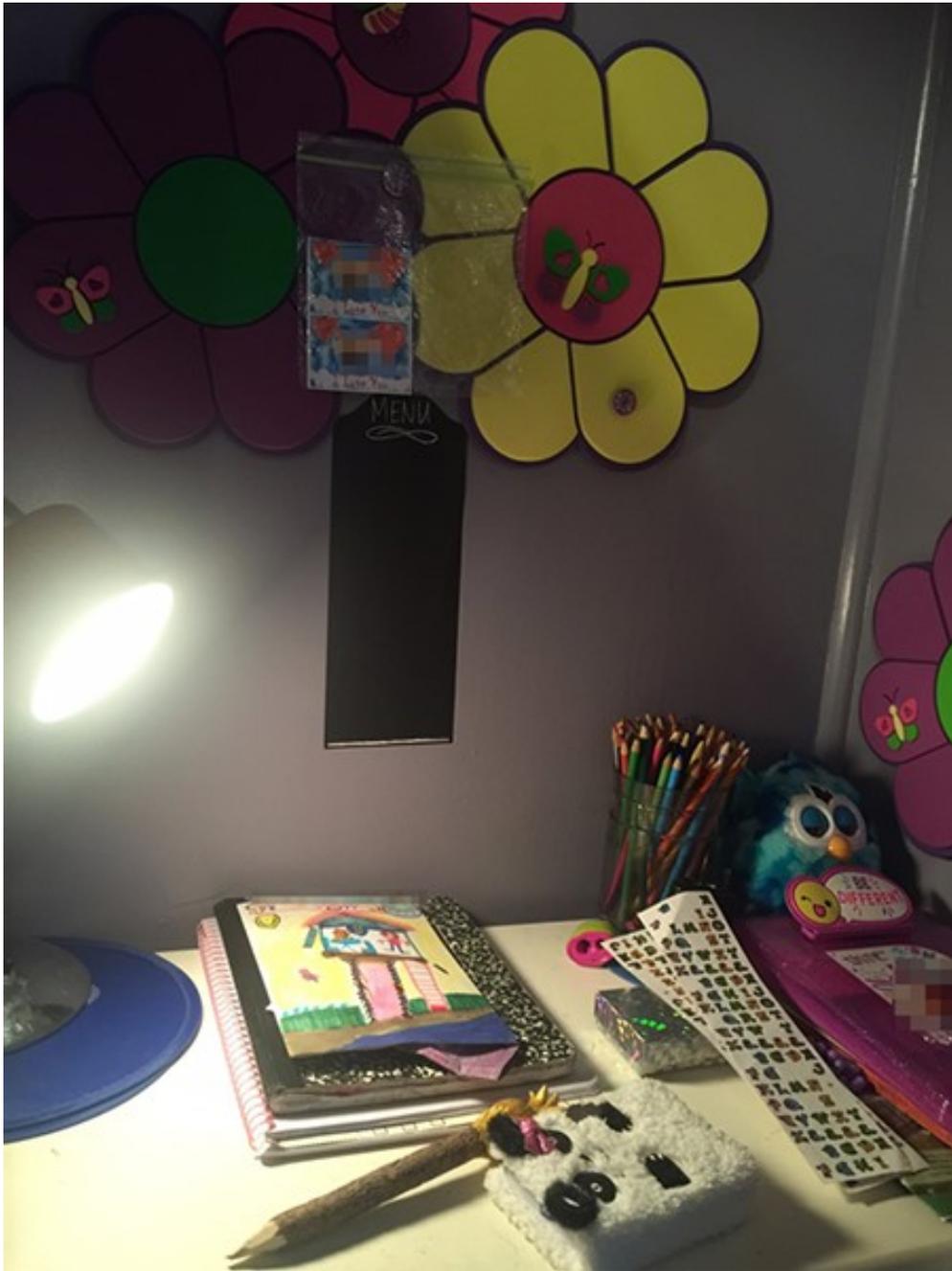


Figure 3.10. Naomi's desk, September 22, 2016

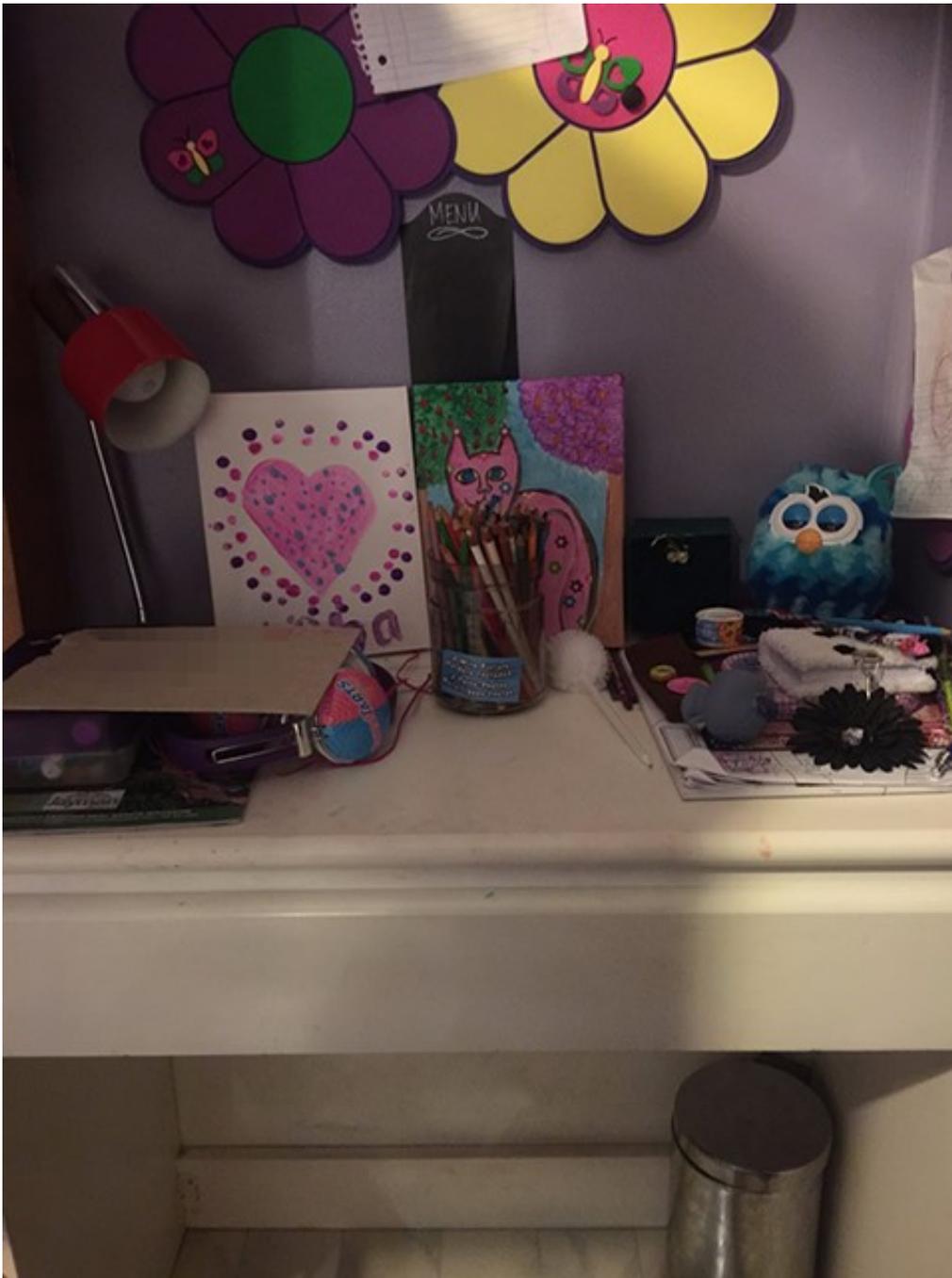


Figure 3.11. Naomi's desk, November 15, 2016



Figure 3.12. Naomi's desk, March 30, 2017

Chapter Four

Vince, Linda, and Miranda

The sun was shining as I made my way down the busy street through the heart of the downtown urban centre towards the restaurant where Vince and Linda had made lunch reservations for our first meeting. I was happy Vince had chosen this place because of its proximity to my home. I had not been to the restaurant he suggested since it was relatively new but I knew it was a busy and trendy place. I was nervous meeting Vince and Linda for the first time because I had not seen Vince for many years. While I knew of him, I did not know him and wondered if he remembered meeting me many years ago.

A former colleague, who knew of my research and search for participants, and my lack of success with the poster invitations I displayed within urban Indigenous organizations, supported me to connect with Vince. I was growing anxious that I would not have participants since the school year was beginning and I wanted to hear stories of experience before child participants entered kindergarten. She mentioned Vince had a child about to enter kindergarten and thought he might be interested in the research. She later sent an email to Vince, copied to me, in which she introduced me and shared a bit about the research study. Shortly after, I responded to Vince through email, introducing myself with a bit more, as well as the research project. He promptly answered that he and his wife Linda would love to meet and discuss the project and recommended we have lunch together.

I arrived ten minutes early and mentioned to the hostess that I was meeting a couple and wondered if perhaps they had already arrived. When she asked for the name under which the reservation was made, I promptly gave her his last name, then first. She scanned her reservation list while I peered at it as well. There were seven names on the list; however, none were close to Vince's name. She confirmed there was no reservation under that name and wondered if the reservation was for a different location. I began to

worry. Perhaps I was in the wrong place, and they were waiting somewhere else. I quickly calculated how long it would take for me to drive to the other location. I worried I might be too late to make our lunch meeting. I pulled out my phone, opened my email inbox and searched back to our email exchange to try to confirm the location, date and time. Perhaps something had come up, or they had forgotten. Since I was a bit early, I thought I would give it a bit of time. I noticed the restaurant was not full yet so I knew we would still be able to get a table. I sat on one of the red leather chairs closest to the main doors to wait.

I met Vince in my previous work as a summer student with an Indigenous organization while I was completing my undergraduate studies. I worked with the organization for two summers on an Aboriginal youth education conference and served as the youth representative for the Métis National Youth Advisory Council for the Métis National Council from 1995-1998. I had not met Linda, so I did not know what she looked like. As I waited, a woman entered by herself and immediately walked to the hostess. She was petite and had light brown hair and blue eyes. “Is this Linda?” I wondered. Our eyes met, and we both smiled. I stood up as she made her way towards me. She reached out her hand and said, “you must be Cindy,” and I responded I was very happy to meet her and shook her hand. While it was only a few minutes past the agreed upon meeting, it felt as though I was waiting much longer. I was relieved the time and place were correct. She mentioned Vince was parking the car and he would be in shortly. I thanked her for meeting me and for her interest in the research. She said she was thrilled when she read about it.

The hostess asked if we would like to be seated while we waited for Vince. As we waited for the hostess to find us a spot, I wondered where she was from. She responded that she was from High Prairie. I mentioned that my family was from Grouard and, with High Prairie being so close, I felt an immediate connection to her place. When people say they are from an area close to where my family is from, I wonder if somehow members of my family are part of their familial knowing. I become excited when I meet people

from my family's area because, while it is a place I have not lived, I know it from familial stories, particularly ones told by my granny. I often wonder if people who are from or lived close to, Grouard may even be relatives, even distant ones. I asked if Linda or Vince may be related to my familial relations since I had relatives who had similar surnames, names common in the North. We talked about our relatives and realized we were not related. Linda shared she attended school in a Northern community where my relatives lived and is Métis as well, but lived with her paternal non-Indigenous grandparents. Beginning in place has been a common theme in meeting new people, and our shared connection to a place in the North allowed me greater ease in meeting Linda for the first time.

Vince arrived just as the hostess was ready to seat us. He was wearing a suit and smiled as he shook my hand. He mentioned it was a long time since we had seen each other and I agreed. We settled into a booth, with me sitting across from Vince and Linda. They shared they were both excited to begin this research, and the timing of it was perfect. They shared they had experienced this transition into schooling before with their other children; however, it was different this time with Miranda, their youngest child.

Vince and Linda both spoke freely about their lives, where they met, and about their children and familial connections. Miranda was their seventh child between them however, she was their first, and perhaps only, child together. I learned Vince had four adult sons from a previous relationship and Linda had two older children, a daughter and a son, also from an earlier relationship. Vince's sons all lived near Vince and Linda. Linda shared that her daughter was studying at university in another province and her son was transitioning into grade ten at a nearby high school. I also learned while we were visiting, he was attending his first day of high school. I sensed Linda was carefully attending and wondering how her son was experiencing his transition into a new school. I imagined this was on her mind since she had just spent the greater part of the morning registering their daughter, Miranda, in kindergarten and carried with her the registration package from the school they had chosen. As our conversation continued I heard of the

many tensions they both experienced around Miranda's schooling and the research they conducted to decide where they would send her to school. As Linda and Vince shared part of their journey in selecting the right school for Miranda, I sensed this was a difficult decision for them as they spoke about the multiple daycares Miranda attended and the many important qualities of the various schools they considered.

Time moved quickly as we shared stories of our lives, stories of where we were from, and our dreams and hopes for our lives. Our conversation lasted two and a half hours. We visited for over an hour before we realized we had not yet ordered our food. It felt natural to share the familial stories of our lives with one another.

After lunch, I again thanked them for agreeing to participate and gave them the consent forms to read over (Appendix C & D). A week later, I sent them an email to set up a second meeting for the three of us, our first research conversation. Since I did not record our first conversation, I was feeling quite anxious that so much was shared and wondered if it would be good for us to meet again for an official research conversation which would be recorded and transcribed. I was also wondering how being in conversation with three people at the same time would unfold. I wanted Vince and Linda to feel comfortable with me and the research study, which is why I suggested the three of us meet again, without Miranda. I also wanted to gain a sense of their experiences with Miranda as she made the transition into formal school, kindergarten.

Coming Together: Continuing the Conversation

We met again on September 29, 2015, at an office building in downtown Edmonton, which was our first research conversation out of eight. Through email, we arranged to meet at the location, and I offered to provide lunch for us. I ordered and picked up chili, salad, dessert, and sodas from a favorite restaurant and carried it into the building. I arrived a few minutes early and asked the receptionist if he knew where the mezzanine level was. He began guiding me towards the elevators. As I followed, I

noticed a woman sitting in a chair typing on her phone. I did not recognize it was Linda until she looked up and saw me. She smiled and stood up. We hugged as soon as I placed the box of food down. As I explained the lunch, we both chuckled at how large the box was. We were both surprised at how much food there was for only three people. I felt a sense of ease in seeing her again as she smiled and seemed happy to see me. She shared that Vince was running late and he would meet us shortly. While we waited, I told her about work and school and shared that I was now teaching part-time and how busy the start of the school year was. She mentioned she too was very busy and had shifted from working full time to part time work to accommodate Miranda now that she was in kindergarten.

I learned Linda worked in the downtown area a few blocks away and had walked over. Vince appeared a few moments later, and we made our way into the elevator and then towards the conference room he had booked for our meeting. We entered the room, which had a large table in the middle with leather chairs around. It was quite dark as there were no windows. Shortly after we sat down, Vince mentioned he needed to leave within the hour to attend a previous commitment. I suggested that we could eat and talk at the same time, as we had in our first meeting. I also shared I would be recording the conversation on my phone, which they both agreed. They signed the consent forms (Appendix C & D) and returned them to me. We began by talking about Miranda and her first month of school; about how it had been going and how quickly time had passed since we last saw each other. Linda shared,

I think it's going well. The only noticeable thing about her is that she's very shy...she was the only one that needed a hug and was, kind of, clingy and stuff. It's been that way in the past once and awhile. Some days are better than others. But that's the thing. That's the last contact you have with her, and then she goes into this void, and you don't know what [is going on] so I've been trying to, you know, make all the contacts I can. (Transcripts, September 29, 2015)

Vince and Linda shared the process about choosing a school for Miranda as they, “began researching schools months ago” (September 29, 2015). Linda shared that they researched multiple schools and spoke of the tensions they experienced in choosing the best one for Miranda. I constructed our conversation as a found poem⁴⁰ from the recorded transcripts of our conversation.

Linda

*We knew this was happening and we needed to make a decision
I wanted French Immersion because my other two kids have French Immersion,
We decided on our neighborhood’s French Immersion school and registered there
But we couldn’t get into the daycare attached to the school.
We got the call, “you’re not on the daycare list”
Ok, we’re just going to look.
And we opened it right up.
We ended up registering her in the next neighboring French Immersion School.
She’s on a waiting list for a charter school, which is more academic focused
She’s also on the lottery waiting list at a music focused school.*

Vince

She was accepted at the Cogito school.

Linda

*Which is our closest school.
We went for orientation there.
She had an assessment for half an hour and did tests.
I got the sense they really wanted us.*

Vince

And then we had school X.

⁴⁰ I developed this found poem to include the voice of Miranda, as retold by Linda. Miranda was not present during our first research conversation, however Linda shared moments where Miranda’s voice and thoughts were included, which were added to show the complexities in their decision on where she should attend school.

Linda

*School X is a Catholic school. We didn't actually register her there.
It's a small, Catholic, English School.*

Vince

Small class size and a focus on leadership.

Linda

*Small class size...
They do really great things with kids.
It was really impressive.
We went to their open house, and Miranda loved it!
Out of all of them, that's the one she remembered.
We asked her, "Which school do you want to go to?"*

Miranda

The little small school with the BIG heart!

Linda

*That was tough because you know, in a lot of ways, what we know about her personality,
it probably would have been a very good fit for her.
But we also wanted these other things and it's sort of going blindly into the future.
We all want these things for her.
I have no idea what it's going to look like in the day-to-day.
She's learning some French words.
She's already come home, and she's quite happy about that.
She's counting to eight, seven, already.*

Vince

French started in daycare.

Linda

After the first day she loves it.

She loves school!

Because of the staggered entry she found out she had to go to daycare for the rest of the week.

Miranda

But I LOVE school!

Vince

We were worried about it because we have learned not to say that she is shy.

We're supposed to say she is reserved and focused.

Linda

We've been googling stuff.

"How to help a shy child?"

And since we've been reading,

I've noticed that people do say that in front of her...

Vince

...and we're supposed to discourage it.

Linda

It's a real family project.

It's a real family experience.

We're trying to do what we can to build her up.

We don't really know what's happening in the classroom.

Vince

That's my biggest concern right now.

Linda

We ended up registering her in the Catholic, French Immersion, International Baccalaureate School.

I've been doing my recon with the playground moms and dads.

There's three in the kindergarten class that travel quite a distance...

So this must be a good school.

The other thing is her teacher has been teaching for 18 years or something.

And she's a really great teacher.

Vince

My friend's daughter had her as a teacher.

She had really good things to say about the teacher.

I kept thinking about this project here,

Where we're thinking about how -

What shapes the child.

And you leaving or handing your child with these people,

who are going to have their influence over your child.

And what your child

learns and becomes,

It becomes a concern.

We don't want good enough.

We want excellent English skills.

Linda

We will monitor and supplement if we need to.

I've put a lot more thinking and participation into my third child,

It will all be fine because the other kids did fine.

Knowledge is power and you just have to be aware of all the things...

Just watch them and see,

what their character is, their personality, their skills and strengths.

As I return to our first research conversation (September 29, 2015), I am struck by Linda and Vince's experiences as they researched, visited, and registered Miranda in different schools before settling on one that met their needs and concerns. Linda and Vince carefully considered all options and, together, made thoughtful decisions while attending to their educational dreams for Miranda. They examined many factors in deciding which school was best for Miranda. While they wanted their neighborhood community school for Miranda, a lack of space in the adjoining daycare shifted their decision. The decision between French Immersion and regular English classes seemed to

be a difficult decision between Linda and Vince. Linda shared earlier experiences with her other children who attended French immersion school and felt comfortable that Miranda would also be successful in a bilingual environment. Vince worried if her instruction was in French that she might not reach her full potential in speaking, reading, and writing in English. However, they both agreed the school should be Catholic.

From the stories they shared, Miranda participated in visiting some of the schools Linda and Vince selected. Although Miranda was not present during our conversation, I imagine from her five-year-old perspective she viewed school differently from her parents, and chose the school with the *big heart*. She imagined this school as a place where she would feel welcomed and comfortable. She imagined this particular school as a place where people loved and cared for one another and a place where she would feel loved. Although they did not choose the school Miranda ‘loved,’ their choice was also a practical one that met their needs for Miranda’s before and after-school care and their work schedules. Additionally, for Linda and Vince there was much more taken into consideration in choosing a school that would provide Miranda with the necessary skills to become bilingual in French and English, as well as one that focused on strong academic achievement and increased diversity.

More than a year later, Linda shared her earlier experiences about her two older children who participated in IB during their high school years and how this helped shape their experiences with visiting and living in other parts of the world as “opening their horizons” (October 30, 2016). Recalling these earlier experiences, Linda shared, “So it’s nice for Miranda, that, you know, she’s in this kind of stream all the way from the beginning,” which was a big decision in choosing the school Miranda would attend” (October 30, 2016). She continued,

For us, it fits in with what we want, the IB aspect of her school. It’s well-rounded and will shape her as a person that knows about the world. In kindergarten, I think it was 4 or 6 projects she worked on. Learning about yourself and then

learning about your community. I think it's something. And so they try to get this global sort of thing, but a big thing about IB is the reflection, you know, thinking about things. Learning about something but then asking questions about that. (October 30, 2016).

Choosing a school that allowed Miranda to develop her curiosity about herself, others, and the world around her was important for Linda and Vince. The IB programming at the school and the information they were learning about it helped ease some of the tensions they experienced in choosing which school Miranda would attend. For Linda and Vince, the IB program fit into their long-term life-making curriculum they were imagining for Miranda. Linda later shared her experiences of participating on the school council and reflected how this helped her to feel more at ease with their decision regarding their school choice for Miranda.

It's been nice. I think it's given me a real comfort level with the role. Just about everything happening in the school and what's going on because I can see behind the scenes...I certainly found it helpful to know the big picture. For example, at the first school council this year they had an Alberta IB coordinator come and give a presentation about what IB is and what it means for elementary grades, and this is what it will progress to. So, yeah, it was really helpful. (Conversation, October 30, 2016)

They also spoke of Miranda's 'shyness.' They both seemed worried about how others would construct stories about Miranda as someone who was shy and afraid to leave what is familiar to her. In sharing their experiences, Linda and Vince were seeking ways to create a new story of Miranda's quiet demeanor as signifying that she was thoughtful, "reserved and focused" (September 29, 2015). I am reminded of Ben Okri's thoughts about stories to live by that are planted in us early or along the way. He writes,

we live by stories, we also live in them. One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, we are also living the stories we planted - knowingly or unknowingly - in ourselves. We live the stories that either give our lives meaning, or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives (Okri, 1997, p. 46).

Returning to our beginning conversations, I wondered how being called ‘shy’ was taken up by Linda, Vince, and Miranda. I returned to one of Linda’s first comments about Miranda being shy as she entered the ‘void’ of school. I imagined how Miranda, leaving the familiarity of being with Linda and Vince, might have experienced the moment as intimidating and filled with uncertainty. Perhaps this is why she was seen as being shy. I listened to them speak of the many ways they worked to (re)story how Miranda would be seen within the school landscape, as well as in the community and how shifting the story of how she was seen became “a family project ... a family experience” (September 29, 2015). In that family project, research and thoughtful steps were being taken to counter the label of being shy. They were concerned Miranda might begin to think of herself as shy (September 29, 2015) and did not want this story planted in her. They are trying to plant different stories of who she is, stories of being thoughtful and careful.

Linda and Vince were active in taking precautions to prevent the story of Miranda as shy from being firmly planted in her by creating opportunities for her to participate in activities where she would be seen otherwise. By encouraging her to participate in these different activities, she would not be able to story herself as shy. Linda and Vince were creating a counterstory in that they provided opportunities for Miranda to participate in activities such as Beavers, Gymnastics, Taekwondo, soccer, piano, singing, and dance (September 29, 2015). Looking back, I am drawn to the performative nature of many of these activities and wondered if they chose these activities to allow Miranda to see herself, and be seen by others, as someone who would be comfortable and confident with others. Linda noted shortly after listing all the activities how they were still negotiating “schedules, bedtimes, making the lunches, and doing the 20/25 minute drive to school”

(September 29, 2015). As Linda shared their busy schedules we negotiated that Sunday would be the best day of the week to continue our research conversations. We also decided it would be easiest to communicate via text messages to arrange future meeting times.

Invited Home: Meeting Miranda

We arranged to meet again on November 29, 2015, at their home via text message. I followed the directions on Google map to an area in north Edmonton that was new to me. At around 2:00 p.m. I turned off the main road slowly into a cul de sac while I searched for their house number. I was nervous because I would be meeting Miranda for the first time and visiting their home. I was uncertain about how the meeting would unfold, and most importantly, I wondered if Miranda would like me. I knew a lot about her and was worried she might not feel comfortable around me, a stranger in her home. I was comfortable being alongside children, however being a researcher alongside children was entirely different from being a teacher in a classroom with young children. I was also filled with a lot of uncertainty with how the conversation would happen with all four of us.

It was easy to locate the house numbers on their large two storey house. I noticed a man shovelling snow on the driveway. I parked my car, gathered my bags and made my way towards the front door. He stopped shovelling and smiled as I said hello. He responded, with a smile, "I'm J.W. ... the maintenance guy". I could tell he was teasing as he named himself this and we both laughed. We exchanged how nice it was to meet one another and shook hands. He knew I would be visiting and said, "I think someone is waiting for you inside." I wondered if he was talking about Miranda and if she was excited to meet me. I wondered what stories were shared about who I was and why I was visiting their home. I thanked him and made my way up the three steps towards the door. Just as I arrived, Vince opened the door and welcomed me inside. As I entered the foyer, Vince was on my left and Linda and Miranda were in front of me. Linda and I hugged

each other, and then I turned to Miranda to say hello. She stood very close to her mom and, at one point, turned her face into Linda's side. She seemed tall for her age and had long light brown hair and beautiful bright greenish blue eyes. I told her I was very happy to meet her. She did not respond but instead leaned closer to her mom. I was a stranger to her.

I turned, shook Vince's hand, and began taking off my winter boots. The foyer was open to a large living room/dining room area, and I was struck by their beautiful home with everything neatly arranged. I shared that I had brought Tim Bits and Linda mentioned that Miranda liked them. Miranda did not respond but continued to watch me. I noticed right away a large west coast carving and an Alex Janvier⁴¹ painting hanging on the wall. I commented on how beautiful both art pieces were and how lovely their home was.

I inquired if their home backed onto a lake and mentioned I saw one on google maps. We made our way past the dining room into the kitchen and towards the window that faced the lake. Vince shared they were in the middle of a renovation project and that there were a couple more upcoming projects planned throughout the house. We noticed J.W. walking in the backyard. Vince said J.W. was his mother's brother, his uncle. I found out later J.W. is one year older than Vince and they grew up together. As we stood looking out the window talking, Miranda remained very close to Linda and was carefully watching me.

Vince wondered if I wanted to meet his mother, Ellie, who lived with them. I thought this would be lovely to meet his mom, whom he had shared stories of during our first two visits. I imagine this was important for Vince to introduce me to his mother. I followed Vince, Linda and Miranda down the stairs. His mother slowly made her way

⁴¹ Alex Janvier is a Dene Suline/Saulteaux artist from Cold Lake First Nations and is recognized worldwide for his artistic style and contributions. He is commonly referred to as a member of the "Indian group of seven" and has received numerous awards and celebrated exhibitions nationally and internationally.

through the living room toward us. I could tell she was happy to have company. I shook her hand and gave her a hug and a kiss on the cheek. She reminded me of my granny. I shared how happy I was to meet her, and she responded with how happy she was to meet me. I commented on how spacious her place was and on her beautiful view of the lake. She agreed. Vince shared that she was alone for most of the day while they were at work, adding that she travelled a lot to spend time with her other children. I noticed her speech was a bit slow and silently wondered about this. Vince later shared she had some recent health issues, however despite this she would travel often to the First Nations community where she lived for many years to see family and friends. She was a respected Elder in the First Nations community she lived in for many years even though she did not originate from the community. He also spoke about family members who often visited her in her home to help with her care. Ellie was proud to show me her framed photographs of her nine children, noting that Vince was the eldest. Vince shared it was important for his mother to be living with them because she is the “only living grandparent left,” for Miranda (November 29, 2015). I learned that familial relationships were significant for both Vince and Linda to maintain their connection to their Métis culture and roots (language). It was also during this time I learned that Vince, and his mother spoke fluent Cree to one another. After meeting Ellie, we made our way upstairs and settled at the rectangular dining room table. While there was a tray of appetizers on the table, I was too nervous to eat. Linda offered me tea, which I accepted.

Wonderings at the Dining Room Table

Linda sat on the chair closest to the kitchen with Miranda on her lap for most of our time at the table. Miranda immediately brought over many different containers of small plastic items called Shopkins. I wondered if she wanted to share them with me. I was not familiar with these toys and began to ask questions about them. Miranda slowly responded to my inquiries, naming the Shopkins. At first, she was whispering to her mom and not directly responding to any of my wonders or questions. I constructed a found poem using transcript of part of the conversation (November 29, 2015).

Linda

*I had a conversation with the FNMI lady at the school today.
I explained to her that we didn't want Miranda to be pulled out,
and standing out as a 'special' sort of thing.*

Miranda

[Brings out plastic containers filled with small objects]

Cindy

*Oh, are these Shopkins?
What are these? Can you explain these? What do they do?*

Miranda

Ummmm

Cindy

Is each one different?

Linda

Do you remember the names of some?

Cindy

*This one looks like a little house. And what is this one?
Is that a strawberry?*

Miranda

Pepper

Cindy

A pepper! Oh, ok.

Miranda

Jemma

Cindy

*Jemma is her name?
And what's this one?*

Miranda

Hair Dye

Cindy

So how many do you have?

Miranda

Nine....Eight!

Vince

Can you count them in French?

Linda

Oh, yeah, can you do it in French, Miranda?

Vince

Can you count out loud?

Cindy

I think, I can only count to eight in French.

Miranda

No response

Linda

Honey, what's your favorite thing to do at school that you're learning with Madame?

Miranda

French...and coloring

Vince

Which raises interesting questions around methodology in teaching.

That whole thing around Inspiring Education.

Are they implementing that to some degree?

Some, or all?

Certainly they are doing that in math, right?

I'm trying to learn as much as I can about Discovery Learning.

*If this is what my daughter is going to learn, or,
if this is just the method through which they're going to teach her,*

I'm very concerned about it.

Cindy

Are you talking about project-based inquiry learning?

Vince

That's another term they use for Discovery Based learning, I suppose

Constructive? Constructiveness?

You know what I mean?

Cindy

I'm not familiar with what happening with that [Inspiring Education] document.

Linda

That's one question we can ask her [Madame] when we see her on Thursday.

Vince

I don't know if you know that Linda got on school council?

Cindy

Wow, that's great. You're on a few now, right?

Linda

For her and for my son's high school one.

A few moments later, Miranda invites me to play with her for the first time.

Miranda

Feel, Cindy [holding out a cookie she made out of play doh so I could feel it]

Since this was my first meeting with Miranda, I wanted to connect with her and I wanted her to feel comfortable around me. I brought along pastels, paper, and play doh as a way to connect and interact with Miranda. I thought she might be interested in these various elements. I did not yet know what she liked, but imagined, as many children like these things, that play doh would be an opening into conversations with her. I knew I was a stranger to her but, as I was familiar with being with young children, I was hopeful that my approach with items I saw as fascinating to children might help Miranda see me as someone who her parents accepted, and who she might accept as well. There were many times during the conversation around the dining room table where our adult voices were more present than Miranda's as Vince, Linda, and I engaged in multiple discussions

around schools, families, educational policies, politics, and policy implementation. There were many times she tried to engage with us by inviting us to play. I wondered if it was difficult for Miranda to sit at the table while the adults spoke around her about things that directly and indirectly affected her, particularly the stories we shared about school and what was happening there. I wonder if Miranda was often included in intergenerational conversations and if this was part of the familial curriculum making intentionally created by Vince and Linda. Having her present during adult conversations may have been important in their familial curriculum making even though she may, or may not, be able to understand completely.

It was important for Vince and Linda to create opportunities for Miranda to show me what she knew. They were both excited to show the many things they did in the home to support what Miranda was learning in school. However, I sensed Miranda's hesitation to answer some questions, particularly related to school. I wondered if this was because this was our first time meeting, or because she knew I was a teacher. I also wondered if she didn't want to talk about school at all. She did seem to want to connect with me on her terms, which included bringing her toys to the table and beginning to use the pastels and play doh I brought.

I did recognize small instances where Miranda invited me into her world of play. As she brought the Shopkins to the table, I sensed that Miranda wanted to create a space where she was comfortable and could invite me into her world. I responded to her invitation by looking at, and wondering about, these small plastic toys. I was unfamiliar with them. As she shared the names of the nine Shopkins, she showed that she was at ease in this world with the Shopkins and wanted me to join in playing with them. However, there was a shift when she was asked to count the Shopkins in French. She hesitated and became silent. I wondered if her silence was because I was a teacher sitting at the table and she didn't know me very well. Had the request to count in French changed her world of play with the Shopkins into one where she felt less at ease? Was she resisting the notion of counting in French while the adults spoke English? In that

moment I attempted to shift her experience back to one of ease as I said I was able to say a few numbers in French and could also count. As I counted to eight in French, she did not join in but instead gazed back and forth between Vince and Linda. She did not seem to be very impressed that I could speak a few words. Apparently a world in which she was to show her school knowledge was not a world Miranda wanted to invite me into. As we continued to talk at the table, Miranda began to open up the different colors of play doh. Vince and Linda encouraged her to say the different play doh colors in French, and she did name a few colours. I sensed that Vince and Linda wanted her to speak in French so she could practice what she was learning, and show me what she was learning in school. However, I also wondered if they wanted her to speak French so she could take the part of expert student sharing what she was learning in school to both Vince and Linda, who did not speak French.

Tensions around Miranda's Assessment

During our fourth meeting and third research conversation on February 7, 2016, I could sense that Linda and Vince wanted to talk about their recent experiences of being at Miranda's school. As we settled at the table again, Miranda joined us and sat between Linda and me. I had brought a large coloring pad with markers, and Miranda chose to bring this to the table. During the conversation, Miranda and I engaged in coloring together and played a card game. Linda shared some troubling concerns regarding the assessment outcomes and first Celebration of Learning she and Vince participated in before the Christmas break. The following conversation took place, and I have used their words to show the conversation that occurred around the table between us all.

Miranda

[Coloring a poster with colored markers at the table]

Linda

You know, I think we're still in a space where we haven't had enough feedback about Miranda and I think both of us are, kind of, uncomfortable...

We're lost...like, she goes away...and does this stuff.

And we don't know what she's doing...

Especially, since we made a real conscious attempt to find out about the school, itself...

IB and sitting on council...

But, still, my point was even though we—like, I see that part of it and that's bringing me a comfort level...

But, still.

We've had the Celebration of Learning

So, it was mostly just...she's doing OK.

But it's not like they have, you know, an actual report card or anything like that.

So, I'm getting the sense, and I don't remember this little from my other kids, but I'm getting the sense that it's only at the end of Kindergarten that you'll be able to have a little bit more idea of...and I don't want to say academically, because they don't even really do a lot of...structured stuff. I mean, they do, and they don't.

But, I mean, at some point the—the teachers will be able to tell you.

And I think it'll be very general.

Like, yeah, she's going on to grade one, and she'll be fine.

Or, she's going on, and you'll have to look at this and look at that.

So, one thing that we just talked about yesterday

when she was in her Taekwondo class

there's a learning centre...it's a tutoring place

so, we're thinking about getting her to go for that.

Vince

For her reading and math.

All prompted by the teacher's message on her,

what do you call that?

What you saw with the teacher?

Linda

That assessment? Yeah. It was that E-whatever?

Vince

Where she's weak.

Cindy

Oh, did you have an opportunity to look at the EYE-TA?⁴²

Linda

Yea, it was sitting there on the table, that assessment.

She didn't give it to us.

It was sitting there.

We were sitting at her little table for our ten-minute meeting at the Celebration of Learning.

And I said, "Oh, can I see that?"

And I just, basically, took it.

So the main finding, or whatever, everything else was good except for alphabet and recognizing beginning letter sounds and that kind of thing.

And from the wording in that actual assessment, when you look at it, it's—it's, sort of, "We have found that children who have a stronger base coming into the school system, IB Kindergarten, does help them right?"

Obviously, I mean that's common sense...but, psychologically, I have to say, it's not—It's awkward, and it's not a very good tool....

It's still, sort of, a—a...you know, it's like a pass or fail thing.

It just—it just didn't feel right.

Like, it just didn't feel good.

And we felt—and I think we both felt, sort of, like, "Oh dear, we failed."

Like, we failed.

⁴² The Early Years Evaluation - Teacher Assessment [EYE-TA] is used by kindergarten or grade one teachers during the first few months of school. Five aspects of the child are assessed: awareness of self and environment, social skills and approaches to learning, cognitive skills, language and communication, and physical development. The EYE-TA is used to identify children who are experiencing difficulty and who may be in need of close monitoring or further assessment. The EYE-TA results are depicted using three colour codes: green, denoting appropriate development; yellow, experiencing some difficulty; and red, experiencing significant difficulty and provide the starting point for contact and discussions. . Retrieved April 10, 2018 from website <https://www.earlyyearevaluation.com/index.php/en/products/eye-ta>

Cindy

Had you not seen it, do you think it would have been brought up?

Linda

Yes, because she—it was part of her thing.

Like, she showed it to everyone.

Miranda

[Bringing card game SkipBo]

Play.

Play cards. (Recorded conversation, February 7, 2016)

As I sat listening to Linda and Vince share their concerns I was struck by the overall sense that in some way they had left the celebration meeting with Miranda's teacher feeling as though they had "failed" in preparing and supporting her as she began kindergarten. The EYE-TA shaped the in-between space between Linda, Vince, and the teacher. It also shaped the in-between spaces between Linda, Vince, and Miranda. It was difficult to hear the dis/ease in Linda's voice as she expressed concerns and uncertainty in whether they made the right choice of school despite all the effort she and Vince had placed researching where to send her. Despite joining the parent council and making connections with other parents, it was clear Linda and Vince were uncomfortable with the level of communication regarding how Miranda was achieving academically in the classroom. For Linda and Vince, hearing that Miranda was "doing okay" seemed vague and provided them with no direction in how best they could support the school curriculum making at home.

I wondered in this moment how the results of the EYE-TA assessment and the teacher's words shaped Linda and Vince's view of Miranda, as well as themselves as parents, who only wanted to provide their daughter with every opportunity to be successful.

As Miranda quietly sat at the table listening to our conversation, I wondered how she felt hearing the stories that were being told of, and about her. I wondered what she thought of attending additional tutoring to support her with the English, or if she even knew what this meant at all. I wondered if Miranda brought her game SkipBo into the conversation as a way to shift the conversation we were having about her to one that involved her. The results of the EYE-TA assessment began to shape some of the familial curriculum making at home as school moved into and began to shape their life making in the home.

Bringing School Home: Shifting the Familial Curriculum Making

Linda and Vince continued to feel uninformed in Miranda’s educational experiences at school. The ‘void’ they were experiencing at the beginning of Miranda’s journey into kindergarten remained and transformed into feelings of being “lost” and not knowing “what she is doing” in school (February, 7, 2016). The following conversation took place, which I developed into a found poem to share the tensions that Linda and Vince were living in this moment.

Vince

Because there is—there is Kindergarten curriculum, right?

And my concern has been, how do I know that...

based on the curriculum

that she’s doing well enough?

Or, in our case,

we want her not to just do well enough,

we want her to excel.

Miranda

[Begins playing SkipBo with Linda and invites me to play with her during the conversation]

Vince

So how do I know that?

I have no way of knowing that.

There's nothing that's demonstrated to me, through her, that she's at par with the curriculum.

So I went out there and I, actually, went and bought a book...Kindergarten curriculum.

Linda

Did you get it from the teachers' store, the educational store?

Vince

Yes.

So, the idea being, I thought, in my mind, was to bring it home

And she can get a look at it, or work through it.

And do the exercises in it and see how she does.

And she has been doing that.

I bought a few other learning materials.

Miranda

Lots of books.

Vince

And she's been working with—with her mom through it.

She's quite eager to do it, from time to time.

And then, ok.

So...so far we seem to be satisfied that she seems to fill in the exercises

and she does it correctly.

We pretend we're the teacher and she's handing in her assignments.

She gets stars and whatever.

She seems to - when she's in the mood for it, she likes doing it.

Miranda

Fun!

Cindy

Playing school at home.

Have you ever done that before?

Vince

No.

Linda [*Brings items from upstairs*]

These are all the things we've been playing with...

*It really helps me because I get a sense of what she's really good at,
and what she needs help with.*

And I've been working with her on the Alphabet.

And it's not easy.

It's taking her a while to learn her letters and sounds...

And I've said this with all my kids,

English is such a stupid language.

It's so hard when you're first learning it.

Vince

So the strategy, I guess,

before she goes into grade 1,

is to put her in that one week intensive,

at the start of the summer.

And then go from there weekly after that

because there are one hour sessions in math and reading.

(Recorded conversation, February 7, 2016)

As I listened to their experiences as they shared how they created a space for Miranda to play school in their home, I thought of my own experiences as a child. Linda and Vince were careful and thoughtful in the materials they chose for Miranda, making sure the majority of the curriculum books they purchased were aligned to the curriculum Miranda was living out in her school, as well as ensuring they were created with Canadian content. I remembered when I played and lived out the role of teacher in my basement using the worksheets I brought home from my teacher's prize box in our classroom. The materials I used as 'teacher' were ones I was familiar with and living out

in school. Vince and Linda sometimes played the role of teacher encouraging Miranda's learning to be enjoyable at home by rewarding her with stars while she completed work. Miranda seemed to enjoy playing the student at home when she shared that it was "fun" (February, 7, 2016). Miranda's older sister also worked alongside her in completing math puzzles when she visited during the holidays, something they both seemed to enjoy together. I imagine Miranda chooses the moments she wishes to play school as Vince shared that she enjoys it, "when she's in the mood" (February 7, 2016). In this instance, it was clear their familial curriculum-making world was significantly shaped by the school curriculum-making world, which was, "prompted from the teacher's message" (February, 7, 2016) around Miranda's assessment of the curriculum she was learning. Linda and Vince were navigating the school landscape by exploring different methods to lovingly support Miranda's school learning to meet the expectations and standards created within the school curriculum-making world. For Linda and Vince playing school in their home allowed them to understand more of Miranda's strengths and areas they saw as needing growth, something they were missing from the teacher's feedback that Miranda was "doing OK" (February 7, 2016).

Returning to Early Home Stories and School Stories

During all our conversations, Vince and Linda travelled backward and forward through time as they freely shared fragments of their lives. I suggested we create an annal together as one of our field texts, which illuminated earlier memories and stories they carried with them (November 29, 2015). I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of their earlier experiences both at home and school. Vince shared he was the eldest of nine siblings and was born and raised in a Métis settlement. He spoke fondly of being raised by his great-grandparents from age two and a half to eleven and spoke only Cree at home, with a little bit of French. Vince shared his mother had told him, "when I gave you to my grandma, it was like handing her a gold brick. She was so happy" (November 29, 2015). He shared his great-grandmother spoke many languages, Michif, French, Saulteau, Ojibway, and Cree, but spoke mainly Cree in the home. He shared a memory of when he

was healed through her knowledge of local plants used to make traditional medicines. I learned neither of his great-grandparents spoke English. I sensed Vince was proud to have been able to maintain his fluency in Cree, a gift he and his mother still shared with one another. Vince later moved to live with his maternal grandparents when he was eleven until he left the community to attend high school in grade nine at the age of thirteen.

Living with his great-grandparents, and later his grandparents, shaped his familial and educational values and beliefs. He shared many lessons and rules his great-grandparents encouraged him to live by as a young boy. He shared they told him, “you can’t miss school. You can’t be late, and you got to go early” (February 7, 2016). Vince shared his great-grandfather would often send him to school too early as a young child and would often be told by the teacher to return home to wait until school started.

He enjoyed school from an early age and spoke fondly about his experiences. He shared his community school did not have a library and “there wasn’t a lot you could take home to read or read at school. You just had to read some other books the teachers brought, or whatever she felt you were going to do” (February 7, 2016). Vince was recognized by his grade one teacher as someone who was eager to read and felt encouraged by her acknowledgement and interest in his life and reading abilities. He shared it was the familial curriculum making at home that developed his love for reading and his curiosity about the world. It was his cousin who taught him his “ABCs and numbers,” and how to read before entering grade one. He said, “I think he recognized that my great-grandparents were not in a position to help me [learn to read], so he was trying to help” (February 7, 2016). Vince furthered his interest in reading by reading comics he bought and magazines his cousin shared such as Maclean’s, National Geographic, Readers Digest, and the Bible, “because I had nothing else to read” (February 7, 2016). Vince excelled at school in grades one and two and recalled being “moved to the other side of the classroom because of his higher level in reading and numeracy” (February 7, 2016). When he finished grade two, he was placed directly into grade four.

It was later when he moved with his grandparents that the narratives around schooling shifted for Vince. He stated that his grandparents, “didn’t really value education. They would always say things like, ‘well, I can hardly wait until you turn fifteen because you can quit school and come on the trapline with me...they didn’t encourage me or promote me to go to school or finish school. But I didn’t live with them until I was eleven going on twelve” (February 7, 2016). Developing a love for school and learning early on helped Vince develop a counter narrative to the one he was living and hearing in his grandparent’s home. Working on the trapline was a livelihood for his grandparents and a traditional lifestyle that he was encouraged to follow. I imagine these messages were difficult messages to hear especially when his two uncles who were similar in age left school as soon as they turned fifteen. Although messages to quit school were not said directly to Vince, he “would be listening to it” (February 7, 2016). When I think more about the stories Vince shared about leaving school at the age of fifteen, I wonder if these might have been shared because his grandparents knew he would need to leave the community to continue his education. I wonder if this may have also been a reason they encouraged him to remain at home in the community, and to remain with them. When he was thirteen, he moved hours away from his community to attend grade nine and to room and board with non-indigenous families. I imagine leaving the community to attend school after grade eight was not an option available for many people, where the alternative was high unemployment or to live on the trapline. He became the first person from his community to graduate from high school.

Linda shared she too was raised by her paternal grandparents in a small Northern farming community in Alberta. This shared history was a connection for her and Vince when they first met. Although she grew up in a non-Indigenous home close to where her Indigenous relatives lived; she did not develop relationships with her Indigenous family and community until she became an adult. Linda learned early the division between the farming community and neighboring Indigenous community and shared her tensions,

As a young girl growing up and you see these things, and you're trying to make sense of them. And you're going to school and there's white kids and there's native kids, you know? I fit in better with the white kids. But all the families in X community knew my background. (February 7, 2016)

Linda's grandparents discouraged her from developing relationships with her Indigenous relatives in the neighboring community, both at home and at school. Linda recalled her grandparents did not allow her to participate in the hot lunch program offered at her school during grades one to eight. Linda shared, "she [grandma] felt strongly about this one issue ... we [brother and her] were the only kids that brought our own lunch, and I just don't remember what that was all about" (February 7, 2016). As she reflected more on this earlier experience, she continued,

There was always a - well, maybe more prejudiced, sort of, element to it, because there was always - growing up - there was always this, sort of, you know, [reference to] the 'native people' and they would say, 'no good for nothing. Lazy. Drunken'. And one time at the supper table, when they were saying this and I was just very young, like her [Miranda] age or younger. And I turned to my grandma and I said, 'Grandma, did you know that I'm native?'

Linda shared the messages she received from her grandparents about school were similar in "they knew the value of education...you've got to get to school and attendance was important" (February 7, 2016). Linda travelled 45 minutes everyday to school and due to the distance was unable to participate in any afterschool programming or additional activities with her friends and peers.

She recalled her first-grade teacher visiting her grandparents in their home and hearing her tell them, "Linda is so smart. She's the type of child that if you put her under a tree with a book, she would learn" (February 7, 2016). For Linda, this early message her teacher shared with her grandparents left a lasting mark on her as she considered

becoming a teacher herself until she was exposed to other occupations when she moved to the neighboring town to attend grade nine and high school. It was in university when Linda began to explore her Indigenous identity through her relationships with friends and family members.

Living A Strong Métis Identity

During our time together, I learned both Vince and Linda were firmly connected to their respective Indigenous communities and contribute significantly within the Métis community. Their identity and involvement was shared through the many images and items in their home such as a black and white large framed photograph of the arrival of the Red River Carts in Calgary in 1884 and a Métis sash draped across the length of their mantle, as well as many historical genealogies and contemporary books in their home. They are involved with Métis gatherings and activities, and it was essential for them that Miranda develop a strong sense of her Métis heritage by including her in opportunities that supported her awareness. For Vince and Linda, Miranda's involvement was embodied in their familial curriculum making by intentionally, and unintentionally, including her in social, educational, and political conversations and events specific to Métis identity, culture, and traditions. Being knowledgeable in the historical and present-day Métis activities was part of their daily life. They also sought opportunities and activities specific to young children so Miranda would learn more about who she is becoming as a Métis person, such as participating in jigging events and providing opportunities and lessons for her to develop an interest in, and learn to play, the fiddle.

Invitations into her Multiple Worlds of Curriculum Making

Over time, Miranda and I began to spend more time alone, and it was during these times I was invited into her different worlds. Sometimes there were small openings she shared with me and other times she would, with great enthusiasm, live out what was important to her. It was in these moments, sometimes with her family and sometimes

with just me, she extended an invitation to enter into her worlds of play. There were moments where I had planned activities before our visits to create openings into my imagined worlds of play where I invited Miranda to participate, however, these moments were fleeting and unsustainable. I brought items I believed Miranda would be interested in; however, these times often seemed forced as she entertained my ideas of play. Instead, it became Miranda's invitations which created the openings into the worlds she felt at ease in, both real and imaginary where I was allowed entry.

Conflicting Worlds of Imaginary Play

During my third visit to their home (March 6, 2016), I asked Linda if Miranda and I could spend some time outside in her backyard. Linda agreed and shared she would watch us from the living room window as we ventured in the yard. Being outside was our first time alone together, and I wanted to learn more about the worlds Miranda lived in and traveled to. I left the house with Miranda hoping she would share multiple stories about the activities she engaged in her backyard that backed onto a large community lake.

During my first visit in the home as I was given a tour, I noticed a large playhouse in the backyard and was excited to revisit this space alone with Miranda. While I peered through the windows, I excitedly inquired what she did in such a beautiful house and if she loved playing in it. At that moment I imagined myself as a little girl and the excitement I would have had playing in a house such as hers and wondered if Miranda had similar stories to the ones I remembered living as a young girl. I imagined Miranda and I one day playing in the house together in the spring or summer. Miranda did not appear as excited about the house as I was. I remember feeling disappointed that we did not connect on the idea of playing house and wondered how much I was projecting my earlier experiences onto the stories and experiences I had hoped Miranda would share with me, stories I had lived out when I was her age. At that moment I was seeking a way to connect and imagined Miranda and I would share this experience. There were other moments during our visit outside together where I tried to shape the activities Miranda

and I engaged in, worlds where I was at ease, however they were worlds Miranda seemed uncomfortable in.

I bought a child-friendly digital camera a few days before our visit hoping Miranda might take photos of some of her favorite activities in her backyard. I showed Miranda the camera and how to take photos with it and asked her if there were any places she loved in her backyard. Miranda snapped one photograph of the lake but did not seem to enjoy what I was asking her to do. I realized in this moment that perhaps she did not spend as much time in this space as I had imagined and was more comfortable in her home. She appeased my request to take a photo and pressed the button once of the frozen lake. She did not seem excited at the thought of using a camera to show me the different places she engaged in, and I wondered if perhaps the digital camera was old technology for her since the photo was blurry and grainy on the small screen and took some time to appear on the tiny display screen. I imagined for Miranda photos were taken with newer technology and taking pictures with the camera was not exciting. I too was disappointed at the quality of the photo and quickly put the camera back into my pocket.

I found a plastic orange ball hiding in the tall frozen cattails where pond ice met the backyard. It appeared to be left over from a previous hockey game the neighbors next door had played on the ice. I could tell from a space on the lake that was cleared of snow. In an attempt to continue to spend some time alone with Miranda I then suggested we play catch with the ball. Miranda was hesitant but agreed to participate in my activity, and we tossed the ball back and forth for a few minutes until it was too cold to stay outside. I began to sense Miranda did not spend much time in the backyard during the colder months. I had imagined our time outside being much differently and wondered what Miranda thought about my attempts to connect with her. I had imagined Miranda would be interested in the activities and topics I believed she would enjoy and talk about. I wondered if Miranda sensed my confusion and feeling of disconnect as we made our way back the house. When we returned to her home, Miranda removed her outside clothes and immediately began to show me the worlds she enjoyed living in and invited

me, along with Linda, to participate in, such as playing piano, drawing and coloring, and playing games, both real and imaginary.

Playing Piano

Miranda loved to play the piano and participated in weekly private lessons. Each time I visited she would, sometimes at the encouragement of her parents, play a new song she had learned from her instructor. It was shortly after she began piano lessons, Linda and Vince gifted Miranda with a new piano which rested prominently in their living room. Before this, she played on a stand up electric keyboard. During our visit on March 6, 2016, and after our venture outside, Miranda immediately ran to her piano and played me the song she would soon be performing to a broader audience. As we shifted from being outside, Miranda moved from the worlds where she felt less at ease into a world where she was the expert. I learned Miranda was preparing for a solo public performance organized by her piano teacher at a popular restaurant. It was a gathering to showcase all the piano student's who were taking lessons. Miranda was the youngest to perform that day and seemed excited at the thought of dressing up and performing for her family. This was a world Miranda was at ease in and a world she would often open up and invite me into as I listened to her play. During a later visit (May 1, 2016) while Vince and Linda spoke about Miranda's performance and shared a photo of Miranda playing the piano, she sat at her piano inviting us to ask her to perform. While we were admiring the picture, the following conversation took place.

Linda

Do you know your new song?

Miranda

[Begins Playing song on piano]

[Clapping when song ends]

Cindy: What song is that?

Miranda: Merrily we roll along?

Cindy: *Mary had a little lamb?*

Miranda: *Merrily we roll along. This is Mary had a little lamb!*

[Begins playing song]

Cindy: *Oh, they sound so similar.*

Vince

*I was confused at that song,
so I was trying to show her how to play Mary had a little lamb.*

Linda

I know! [Laughing]

Vince

I'm saying, "you're missing notes."

She's saying, "No, I'm not!"

[All Laughing] (Research Conversation, May 1, 2016)

For Miranda, sharing her abilities in playing the piano was encouraged and celebrated in the home, and over time she became more comfortable in sharing her world with me. It was this world she seemed most proud of and one where she became the expert in her home. For Miranda, I wondered how her experiences of performing shaped her and how it was shaping the stories she was planting in herself as the expert piano player in her home and someone who enjoyed sharing the songs she knew with audiences. Vince, Linda and I sometimes carried on in conversations regarding multiple aspects of education in Alberta from Miranda's school to larger narratives surrounding provincial initiatives and Miranda often reminded us to return our attention to her. She was determined in these moments to reclaim our attention as she continued to play many other songs she had learned, encouraging us to participate in choosing the songs she played through a voting process she created or simply reminding us to pay attention as she playfully stated, "you know I'm playing already and you weren't listening to me! Now I have to start all over and it's really hard [laughing]" (May 1, 2016).

Playing the piano also seemed to ease some of the tensions Linda was experiencing at the beginning of the Miranda's school year when she shared,

I feel better about it [school] right now, and it's mostly just watching her get more of a grasp on her letters and numbers. And the other stuff she is doing like music and practicing the [music notes] flashcards, so more than anything I am thinking she is doing fine. (March 6, 2016)

Over time, Miranda's piano instruction lessons shifted to a different instructor at a local music academy and began to shift the familial curriculum making in the home. Linda shared, "the other area of our lives that we're getting a little bit more disciplined about is piano. Because we started a new piano school and they're pretty intense. I have to learn stuff too. I have to take notes while she is in her lessons. And, we [adults] have group lessons, and we have workshops, and we just had a fall workshop" (October 30, 2016). In supporting Miranda's piano lessons, Linda was also expected to learn the basics of piano playing alongside other parents, which I imagine increased the amount of Miranda's playing in the home. Linda continued,

There's a CD that we have we're supposed to play as much as we can during the day, to just hear it in the background. We do that on the way to playing piano and we talk about what we need to work on. I'm, you know, the musical helper. (October 30, 2016)

It was also in this space on the floor, next to her piano, where Miranda began to open up other worlds of play and imaginative worlds while extending an invitation to join her in these worlds. We spent most of our time sitting on the living room floor together, and as time moved forward, we spent time together where she created openings in the worlds she wanted to show me. I was excited to travel to her worlds of play, but I did not always feel at ease in them. Despite my awkwardness, Miranda was always ready to help

me. It was these worlds Miranda created the rules on how to play and where I was a willing participant.

Invitations into her Worlds of Imaginary Play and Games

Miranda loved playing games in her home and invited me to play along with her multiple times. Her first invitation on March 6, 2016, to play games included Linda, and over time she became more comfortable playing games alone with me (April 3, May 1, July 3, October 30, 2016). Some of the games we played were SkipBo, Game of Life Junior, Charades, a Shopkins board game, as well as drawing and coloring. Miranda's games were an invitation into her worlds of play, worlds she was familiar with and participated in her familial curriculum making with Linda and Vince. Since many of these games were new to me, Miranda confidently taught me how to play them, ensuring I would be able to participate in the worlds she was opening for me.

Miranda's World of Taekwondo

Taekwondo was a strong story that lived in both the home and the dojo. Miranda first invited me into her world of Taekwondo during my second visit in their home (February 7, 2016) and in subsequent visits to the dojo (April 3, 2016; May 1, 2016; July 3; 2016). It was during my second visit Linda invited Miranda to show me how she practiced kicking and punching her targets. Miranda ran upstairs and changed into her Taekwondo uniform⁴³ and belt and rejoined us on the main floor of their home. I sensed Miranda was proud to wear her dobok and shifted who she was in that space with me. I also sensed it was during this time that Miranda began to see me as someone who she might trust and share her world of Taekwondo with me. As I rested on my knees on the floor holding the black padded target Miranda raced across the room and used her foot to

⁴³ Taekwondo uniforms are typically called a dobok and are usually a plain, white, v-neck heavy cotton top with pants that have an elastic waist. Her belt was marked with color bands indicating the levels she had moved through.

kick it while yelling “Ai” loudly (February 7, 2016). I sensed in this moment Miranda had become the expert in the room on how to use the target as both her and Linda were teaching me where to hold a padded target in my hand and explained what she would do. This was also the first time I physically moved my body to the floor to meet Miranda at her level, and I imagine Miranda enjoyed having a partner to practice with. The following conversation took place as we continued with this practice for almost 10 minutes.

Cindy: Oh. Do I hold it [target] and you kick it? Oh oh. Oh!

Linda: [LAUGHTER] Pretty intense, eh?

Miranda: [Hold] That in your hand.

Cindy: Ok. What do I do?

Miranda: I need to kick it.

Cindy: Are you're going to run from over there?

Miranda: I need to kick it.

Cindy: Are you going to do a running kick? What?

Linda: Yeah, just hold it down, about, like...

Cindy: Here?

Linda: A little bit lower. Just a little...yeah, about there.

Miranda: I'm going to need to run.

Cindy: Like this? Or higher? Or lower?

Miranda: In the middle.

Cindy: Ok.

[PAUSE]

Miranda: [Kicks the target and yells] Ai!

I was surprised by Miranda's loud voice while she continued to kick the target I held in my hand. She enjoyed showing me multiple times her abilities in striking the target. It seemed her voice became louder as time moved forward. Over time, I began to drive Miranda to her Taekwondo class and watched as she participated in the different moves the class was taught. During this time I watched Miranda move into powerful

looking poses and yell loudly along with the other children in the class. The children's responses were directed by the instructor with each move and hit.



Figure 4.1. Miranda practicing Taekwondo in the dojo, July 3, 2016

While I watched her from the other side of the glass alongside other adults who were also observing their children, I witnessed her transform herself into someone who presented a loud and powerful voice. I sensed Vince and Linda imagined Taekwondo as

an activity that shaped a counter narrative to the stories they were being told of her being a shy child to one that helped her use her voice in a forceful way alongside other children. Linda shared in Taekwondo class, “they learn discipline and, you know, just being part of something. And they have to say an oath every time and a pledge to the school. And she has to speak up and say, “Yes Sir!” (February 7, 2016). Although Miranda did not speak in detail about her experiences in participating in her Taekwondo classes directly to me, I watched her shift herself into powerful poses in unison alongside others and yell out different words with each striking move and pose. I imagined Miranda enjoyed belonging in a group alongside other children that allowed her to use her voice and body in a different way. Living and being seen differently was an important aspect in Linda and Vince’s familial curriculum making that was shaped by their dreams that Miranda will one day be a future leader in the Métis community with a strong presence and voice.

Co-composing a World Through Hopscotch

Miranda and I began spending more time together outside of her home sometimes visiting different community playgrounds, traveling to and from Taekwondo classes, stopping at the local convenience store for a snack, and sometimes having lunch at McDonald’s. Although Miranda would often engage in play with me at the playground showing me how she would play in the equipment, encourage me to chase her on the equipment, or show me different ways to blow bubbles, it was only when we began to draw out and play hopscotch on her driveway where both our worlds came together with ease. Hopscotch was an activity I remembered playing as a young girl and later as a teacher alongside my students and one Miranda had previously played. It was a game we both knew and the rules were simple and familiar. We played hopscotch during two visits (May 1, 2016; October 30, 2016). In this space, we co-composed a world of play where we were equal participants, a world we co-created for ourselves.

The first time we played hopscotch on May 1, 2016, I brought along a large box of sidewalk chalk, and while we were outside, I brought up the topic of hopscotch and

asked Miranda if she had ever played and if this were something she would enjoy. She shared she had played before and together we began to imagine how we would draw the hopscotch on the driveway. She liked the idea of co-creating a play area using the chalk as we each selected different colors to use to draw out our large play area and together we drew hopscotch all the way up the driveway to the number 10. We began taking turns throwing a rock Miranda found and hopping up and down the hopscotch as we would often laugh while we made our way through each turn. Miranda's grandma Ellie came out to watch us play, and I could tell Miranda enjoyed having her watch while she hopped up and down the squares, collecting the rock she threw on her way back to the first square. Though Ellie did not say much, I could tell she was quite proud as she smiled and watched Miranda move more quickly through the squares with each turn.

During my 8th visit on October 30, 2016, Miranda wanted to play hopscotch again. As we designed a new playing area together, she asked me to help her complete all the squares up to number 27, with four square 'rest' spots drawn with hearts. When we began playing Miranda began counting each number in French as I made my way up to the top and was able to count to number 23, forwards and backwards. Calling out the numbers in French was how Miranda changed up our first game of hopscotch and something I was able to do since I too could also count up to 10. Eventually, Miranda stopped counting in French as she knew I could only count up to ten. As she made her way through the hopscotch, she asked if I could count in English instead. For Miranda, it did not seem to matter what language we used while playing the game, this was not important to her. Miranda modified the game in multiple ways as we continued to take turns such as placing the rock on any number instead of throwing it and inviting me to hop along the game together at the same time where we each took turns being the 'leader'. It was easy for Miranda and I to feel at ease in our world of hopscotch.



Figure 4.2. Hopscotch game Miranda and I co-created, October 30, 2016

After we finished playing hopscotch Miranda wanted to continue using the chalk to draw on the driveway to show the people who were important in her life. The following conversation took place:

Miranda: *I'm going to draw a humongous heart all over the driveway. Can you draw one side and I will draw the other?*

Cindy: *Ok! [Draws the left side of the heart]. Woo!*

Miranda: *[Draws the right side of the heart]*

Cindy: Whoa! That's awesome! That's look amazing!

Miranda: What should we draw inside....Cindy: What should we put inside...[at the same time]

Miranda: I know. Can you write all of the names of my friends? And I want to start the first letter. Can you put Miranda's Best Friends on top?

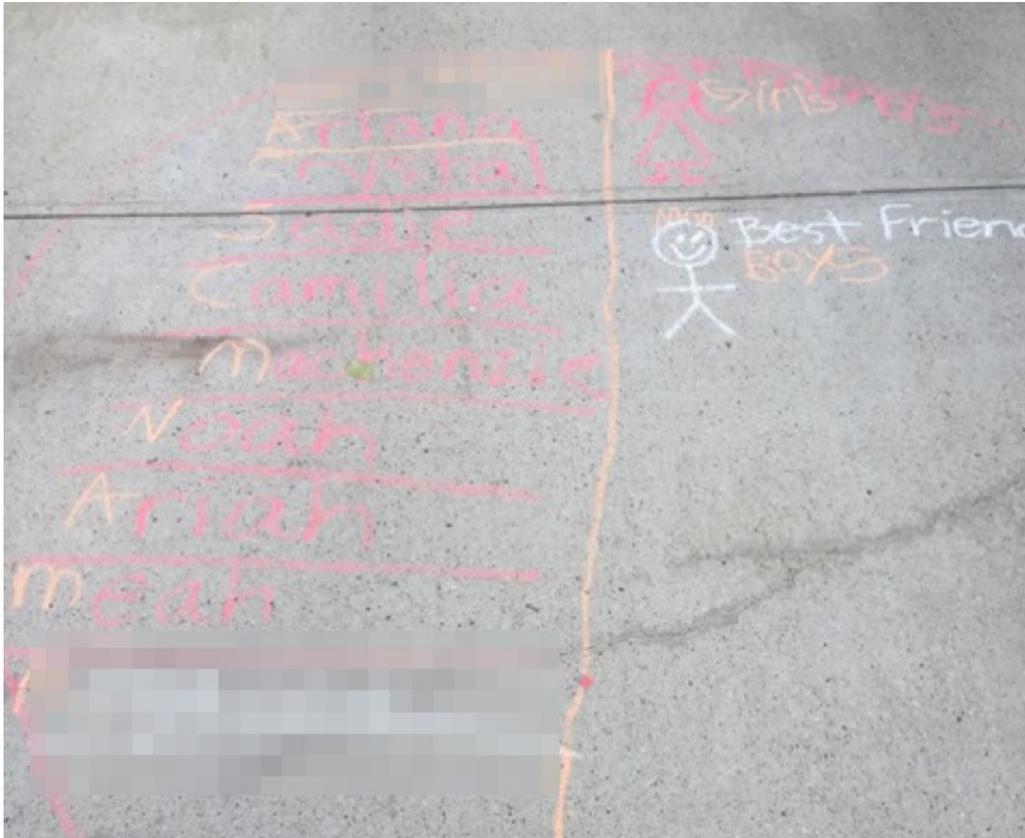


Figure 4.3. Miranda and I writing her friends name with chalk, October 30, 2016

When we finished, Miranda looked at all the names and stated, “Look at how many friends I have” (October 30, 2016). As Miranda shared the names of her best friends at school, she was quick to point out some of them were not in her class but her daycare. Although she was now in grade one daycare continued to be an important place for her to continue developing her relationships with those who were placed in a different class. This was the first time she brought up the topic of school during our times together, without any prompts from me. I saw this as an invitation into her world of school and

asked her what she liked to play with her friends at recess. The following conversation took place:

Cindy: What do you and your friends like to play at school?

Miranda: In the field or in the park?

Cindy: Both. In the field...what do you do in the field?

Miranda: I just.... Why are you asking me that?

Cindy: I was just wondering if you get to do things like this with your friends there. Do you get to draw with your friends at school?

Miranda: You don't draw there.

Cindy: Do you have any place to draw when you are there?

Miranda: [Shaking head no] (Recorded Transcripts, October 30, 2016)

When I began to inquire what she and her friends did at school suddenly the world of school was closed again. I wondered aloud if perhaps Miranda might want to take the chalk we were using to share with her friends at school, however for Miranda there was no place for her to use it there. For Miranda, school was a world she did not seem to want to share with me except sharing the names of those who she cared about and played with. I imagined having someone to play with was much better than talking about what happened at school, a place far from home and from our experience together drawing on the concrete driveway.

Miranda drew her family on the other side of her heart and asked if I would help her illustrate and write the names of her family members. Miranda did not share much with me about her siblings and grandma, however they were important people in her life. Much like writing the names of her friends at school Miranda enjoyed drawing the people she loved. While we were drawing and writing each of the names she invited me to draw half of her grandma while she drew the other half.



Figure 4.4. Miranda and I drawing her family with chalk, October 30, 2016

Returning to the Table



Figure 4.5. Photograph taken at the table with Miranda, October 30, 2016

Eleven months after I first met Miranda, we all gathered around the dining room table for what would become our last research conversation. Vince, Linda and I each took our usual seating places, which was our rhythm whenever we sat in this space. I noticed Miranda stood by my side and was curious about the items in the art bin I usually brought into our conversations. She pulled up a chair and sat beside me. As we all spoke of the new school year, Miranda invited me to play alongside her through the play-doh, colored markers and paper. She reminded me of what was most important in her world as I became her helper with the play-doh containers, giving her the colors she needed to make her snowman family and helping her with some small pieces. When I wondered if she was making a whole bunch of snowman Miranda was quick to point out “except for the grandma, and brother, and sister, I have a mommy, daddy and imaginary kitty here”

(October 30, 2016). During my visits, Miranda stayed very close to her family, listening very intently, often bringing different games and invitations to enter the different worlds she lived in while we all visited. She gently reminds us to remain wakeful to her playfulness, to always be curious while holding on to our sense of humor as she points out during one of our visits.

***Miranda:** Look. Look under there.*

***Cindy:** Look under where? Where?*

***Miranda:** You said Underwear!*

[All Laughing]

***Linda:** She got Mommy and Daddy with that one!*

[All Laughing] (Recorded Transcript, May 1, 2016)

Chapter Five

Denise and Kylie

I learned of Denise and her daughter Kylie on December 1, 2015 during a casual phone conversation with a friend I was reacquainting with after many years. I was telling her about my doctoral research and how I was engaged in conversations with two families but that I was searching for one more. I explained I was quite worried since the school year had already begun and I had exhausted all my other connections in finding participants. She shared her niece Denise had a daughter named Kylie, who began kindergarten in September. I was excited about the possibility of finding a third participating family and asked my friend if she would speak with Denise to see if she would be interested in participating in the research. She called me shortly after and shared that Denise was willing to speak with me more about the research project and shared her contact information with me. She assured me Denise was someone who often used text messaging to communicate so I connected the following day. After a few texts back and forth, we spoke on the phone for approximately 15 minutes on December 2, 2015 while I sat in my car. Even though I was driving, I did not want to miss speaking with Denise so, shortly after answering my phone, I pulled over and parked my car while we spoke.

I shared a bit about who I was and how I knew her Auntie, my friend, and about the research. During our call Denise seemed unsure she would be a ‘good’ participant and named her children as “being mostly white” (phone conversation, December 2, 2015). She briefly shared her partner was non-Indigenous and I wondered if this was the reason why she named her children in this way. I was unsure of where this story of her children being mostly white came from and whether this was something she believed or had been told. Despite naming her children in this way she agreed to meet with me once the holidays were over. She shared she was beginning exams and with the holidays so close it would be best to meet in the new year. While I had just finished two research

conversations back to back with the other two families and welcomed the suggestion to begin in the new year, I was excited to meet her in person. We exchanged a few texts to confirm a day and place that would work best for her. We met for the first time on January 13, 2016, at the community college she attended.

I made my way to the college with coffee for both of us. Denise suggested we meet during her break between classes at 10:00 a.m. in the college library. I arrived and entered the lobby which was bustling with students. There were many tables set up with information for students about the different services the college offered to students. As I made my way across the lobby and joined many others in the packed elevator, I received a phone call from Denise. She shared she had moved to the basement instead of the library to work and gave me directions to find her. I remained on the elevator and watched all of the students exit on various floors and eventually made my way to the basement. I exited the elevator and made my way down a long hallway. Many people were sitting at different workstations situated along the long corridor against the wall, mostly eating and visiting with one another. I did not know what Denise looked like but I saw a young woman with long brown hair sitting by herself gluing pieces of paper into a notebook. I inquired if she was Denise. She stated she was and I introduced myself and pulled up an empty chair next to her and sat down.

I shook her hand and thanked her for taking the time out of her busy day to meet me. I offered, and she accepted, one of the coffees. She mentioned she didn't drink coffee very much but mixed in the cream and sugar and sipped it slowly while we visited. Denise shared she had a long break between the five classes she was taking for the term and, since she lived far from the college, she stayed at the college to catch up on work instead of traveling the long distance home for the break. She finished gluing her class notes into a notebook from her previous class as I settled in.

Denise spoke about her educational goals and her return to school to complete an eight month accounting administration certificate program. Prior to returning to school,

Denise was a medic in the oil and gas industry and had worked in a community three hours away from her home for many years. She needed a change. She shared she felt “like a glorified Band-Aid and being a medic was so boring because all you do is sit around waiting for a call” (Conversation, January 13, 2016). She later shared she knew she did not want to continue working in the healthcare field because of the high number of people she knew who developed mental health issues from experiencing so much trauma from the people they were treating although she stated, “I’m pretty strong, I don’t let a lot of things bother me” (April 26, 2016).

Denise reflected on being a medic in the oilfield and what it meant being away from her family for 25 day shifts. She shared that she didn’t mind working away from home, however it was no longer sustainable for her family. She shared her partner preferred she find “a regular job, a job where I can work from 9 to 5 in the city” (Conversation, January 13, 2016). Denise spoke about furthering her education and shared her dreams to enrol in the accounting diploma program once she completed her certificate. She knew she would need to work for a while before returning for the diploma program and, due to financial constraints, she couldn’t “wait too long” to return to work full time. Denise shared the struggles she experienced as she negotiated being a mother, wife, student, and someone transitioning from being the primary financial earner in the family. However, she remained hopeful when she said “somehow things just work out like they always do” (Conversation, April 26, 2016).

The research study wove in and out of our conversations around our lives. Denise shared a conversation she had with her partner the evening before we met the first time. As she spoke about meeting me, she shared that he wondered what they could possibly say that would help me in the research. I was worried that she might decide not to participate and reminded her that I was interested in her and her daughter’s early curriculum making experiences, in both the school and alongside her family. Denise wondered if Kylie and her experiences would be enough, valuable, or add to the research. Again, I was reminded of her comment during our first telephone call of her kids “being

mostly white.” I wondered what Denise meant about her children being ‘mostly white’. I wondered if, for Denise, naming her children in this way allowed them safer access within the community where they were living in.

I was drawn back to my earlier experiences of growing up in a community where there were clear divisions between those who were non-Indigenous and lived in the city along with those who lived in the neighboring First Nations community. I returned to an earlier time in my life where the notion of insider/outsider existed in the community I grew up in. In an earlier piece I wrote, “sometimes I was able to negotiate entry into both communities; however there was always a sense of uncertainty as I tried to earn my status as insider and full acceptance into either world. Most often I teetered on the edges, rarely having been granted complete participation, particularly in my earlier years” (Swanson, 2015). Although I do not focus my experiences on my Métis identity, there was always a sense of not belonging within the different places. When I would visit friends who lived in the neighboring First Nations community, because I wasn’t from there, I wasn’t seen as belonging there or being “Indian” enough. It was in this community I heard the term *apple* for the first time. At first I didn’t understand what it meant, but later on I would come to learn of its meaning. Growing up in my community, I didn’t feel as though I completely belonged within either.

When I attended to Denise’s words of her children being “mostly white”, I wondered if I was imposing my earlier experiences on the experiences of Denise and her partner. Perhaps their meaning was something entirely different. This made me aware of how important it is to return to Denise to allow her to make meaning for herself and what she meant while remaining wakeful to not categorizing their experiences as one way by assuming what she meant by this. I was apprehensive when I responded that everyone’s experiences were unique, and that I was not looking for a specific type of *Indigenous* person or experience.

This seemed to ease her concern as we continued visiting for over an hour, however her words stayed with me. While Denise continued to share more about her life and her children, time seemed to move quickly as I gradually realized the hallway and work areas became quiet and empty. As Denise and I talked with one another it felt like visiting an old friend and there seemed to be very few pauses in our conversation. Classes resumed and I did not notice the hallways were cleared. Denise noted she was now 20 minutes late for her class and packed up her belongings. I felt terrible and apologized for keeping her so long from class. I grew anxious that she might be in trouble from her instructor, but she assured me this was not a problem for her. Before we parted I shared the consent forms (Appendix C & D) with her and asked her to read them over when she had time and to connect with me if she had any questions. During our conversation there seemed to be no clear way to bring up the consent and I felt anxious in having her read over them while I was there. I wanted her to take the time with her partner to read more slowly even though she agreed to be a participant and shared she enjoyed our conversation. I sensed I would be speaking primarily with Denise and thanked her again as we parted ways.

We met again a few months later. I knew she was juggling many demands with being a full time student, mother and wife and I wondered how I could find some time in her busy life to have a conversation. It seemed so much time had passed and I was beginning to feel anxious as spring was quickly approaching. From our previous conversation I knew Denise lived in a community bordering the edge of the city and sometimes took an hour and half bus ride to attend the college from home and other times she would drive her truck and park illegally in the shopping centre parking lot a few blocks away from the college or pay for street parking, when she was able. I sent Denise a text message and asked her if I could pick her up from college in the next week or so and take her out for lunch or dinner. Denise responded and we made arrangements for our next visit to occur on March 21, 2016 when her classes were finished for the day. I picked her up shortly after 3:00 p.m. and we made our way slowly towards her house as we looked for a place to stop and eat.

During our drive, Denise shared she often ate at IHops with her family and it was one of their favorite places to eat. I suggested we stop and shared that I had never eaten there and that all day breakfast places were my favorite as well. As Denise directed me to the restaurant, we shared many parts of our lives with one another. Although there seemed to be a lot of time between our first and second conversation, it felt easy sharing with Denise and time moved quickly. As I drove, I shared different stories about myself as we passed areas I was familiar with and where I had, at one time, lived. The areas stirred up memories as we passed two separate places I worked at during the same time for a year before entering university. I shared how being fired from two jobs in the same week woke me up to creating a better life for myself after my year off after upgrading college. I shared that I hated stocking shelves and that was part of the job at both places where I worked. I worked at a large toy store and a large movie rental store. I disliked returning movies to their places on the shelves and stocking the shelves at the game and puzzle section. When a new game came into the store, whoever was on that day would have to move the whole wall of games and puzzles to make space for the new one. Since they were displayed in alphabetical order, it was a monstrous task, one I balked at when ordered to by supervisors. Not one to hide my emotions or reactions, I grudgingly did the task. It must have been a week of stocking shelves that did me in the week I was fired from both jobs. I laughed as I shared I was grateful I was fired because it helped me decide to go back to school during my 'year off'. One of the stores shared the same parking lot as the IHop and we laughed about my experience as we parked and remarked how we both did not like being told what to do.

Denise and I visited at IHop for two and half hours. I shared my field notes with her from our first visit and she said, "wow, you wrote all of this from our conversation" (March 21, 2016). I sensed in that moment Denise knew I was listening to the stories she was sharing as she read over the pages I handed her. She reflected on some of the things I had written, as she spoke of her life growing up in an urban city and later moving to her Northern community in British Columbia to be closer to her granny and family. She shared more about her family, about losing her mom at a young age, and about how

difficult it was staying in the community after losing her mom. She shared the complexities of growing up in a blended family and not having any siblings from her mom and dad, but only half siblings. She shared more about how she met her partner Michael when she was 23 years old. Michael lived in a neighbouring community. Denise was open in sharing many aspects of her earlier life, her deep sense of loss, her complex family structure, and her strong connections to many friends. Keeping connections to friends and family was important to Denise and she reminisced how she grew up in a community “where everyone looked out for all the kids”. She recognized there were families that were “block parents” and reflected on how today is very different for her children and herself (conversation, March 21, 2016). Denise felt safe growing up in her community and worried that today it was much different for her children.

Denise knew she needed to leave her community to create a different life for herself, one she would co-create with her partner Michael and their young, growing family. She shared they were not living a good lifestyle in their community and decided to leave. As we visited for hours, she continued to share the many complexities and layers of her life as well as her aspirations and dreams for the future. Although Denise did not envision becoming a mother, she and Michael welcomed her son Lee when she was 25. Three years later Kylie was born. For Denise, having a family changed her life for the better.

Meeting Kylie (March 29, 2016)

I made my way to the address of the Taekwondo place where Denise and I had agreed to meet. I learned from previous conversations Kylie enjoyed participating in her classes and it was important to Denise and Michael for Kylie and Lee to participate in two sporting activities a year. Being physically active and belonging to a team were important aspects in their familial curriculum making.

I first met Kylie in a parking lot on March 29, 2016 outside her Taekwondo building. I was feeling a bit anxious and wondered if Kylie would like me. The parking lot was quite busy so I found a parking spot near the main road and farther from the door. The building was large and I sensed there were multiple classes going on simultaneously as I saw many children of various ages, wearing their outfits, and with their families. I sent Denise a text message letting her know I arrived. A few minutes later I noticed Denise's vehicle pull into the parking lot and park. I exited my vehicle and made my way towards the truck. Denise was outside the truck and opened the back door where Kylie was already standing up ready to jump out. She was smiling and excited and wondered aloud, "are you Cindy?" I responded I was and that I was very happy to meet her. I wondered what Denise had told Kylie about me. Kylie was quite tall and had long medium brown hair with large bright brown eyes. She smiled a lot and I could tell she was excited for her class. I knew from speaking with Denise that Kylie was quite independent, however I was surprised by how quick and able she was in leaving the truck. She jumped out of the truck and began making her way towards the building entrance. Her confidence was beautiful to watch as she walked a bit ahead of Denise and me. As we walked behind her I was surprised at her tall stature for a five year old and commented to Denise about this. Denise noted that she was as tall as her brother, which he did not like too much. We chuckled as I returned to thoughts of my brother and I and how we still compare who is taller. It's a tradition each time we see one another as we stand back to back while his children reveal the results. My brother does not like that he and I are very close in height to one another and is convinced he is taller. It is always a debate.

Denise and I followed closely behind Kylie. Just before Kylie entered, she turned and asked me, "are you coming in?" I responded that I was and she seemed excited that I was joining her. As soon as we walked in, Kylie scanned a barcode that was located on her belt at the desk located to the left of the door. In this way, her attendance in the building was tracked. Kylie was very comfortable with doing this every Tuesday and Wednesday for her classes. The building was bustling and filled with children and adults

of many ages. A large room to the right, partitioned with wall to wall glass windows, showcased the older Taekwondo students. I followed Denise and Kylie as they made their way to the change/bathroom area to find a place for her backpack. We left our shoes on a rack. I waited while Denise helped her change into her outfit. When I asked where to go next, Kylie mentioned me to “follow her upstairs” as she led us towards a flight of stairs located along the back wall of the building. These stairs guided us into a long narrow hallway with a closed door at the end. There was a class taking place and many parents and children were sitting and standing along the wall, eagerly waiting to enter. We found a space against the wall and sat on the floor. Many parents were preparing their children for class by making sure belts were tied correctly. Some children sat quietly next to their parents; others moved back and forth excitedly waiting for the door to open. The cramped space filled up with many parents and children waiting on the stairs as the hallway filled up. I noticed parents did not talk with one another and were focused on their children.

The door opened and the previous class exited the room, along with many parents. There was a lot of excitement in the hallway. As the children and families exited, we began making our way inside where the children made their way into their assigned rows and the adults shifted their bodies once again along the wall. I followed Denise until we found a place to stand against the wall, eventually resting in a seated position. I learned during later visits (April 6, 2016; April 26, 2016; May 31, 2016) parents and guardians were invited in to watch during the last class of the month, whereas during other classes they waited in the hallway. Sitting in the narrow hallway was not an inviting space for parents to wait while their child participated. I learned later that positioning parents on the outside was one reason Denise waited in the truck while Kylie participated in class. It was after my second visit to the Taekwondo class (April 6, 2016) Denise shared with me via text message that Kylie wanted me to take her to her last month class, the class where adults were invited into watch and participate in a game afterwards. I was excited to accept her invitation and booked our next visit to coincide with Kylie’s Taekwondo schedule.

Kylie participated along with her peers through the different activities the instructor encouraged while Denise and I watched from the side. Kylie watched both Denise and me and often glanced in our direction proudly every time she was praised for completing a certain task. It was a way to say *look at me*. Kylie was excited to have an audience focused solely on her. At the end of her instruction we were invited to play a game alongside the children. We were all given soft nerf balls and were told to throw at one another. Adults lined up opposite the children and those who were hit needed to complete five jumping jacks. I was very familiar with this game and had played it many times with my students. I began throwing the ball at Kylie and then at other people's children. I noticed parents were only hitting their own children and the children were aiming for their parents. It was clear I was not invited into the children's worlds of play and I was not clear with the rules of this play. I felt incredibly awkward as I wondered who was I in this space as an invited guest. I quickly realized that I should not be throwing nerf balls at the other children. I laughed out loud at myself as I continued to throw the ball while Kylie ran around in front of me. She quickly told me I should only aim the ball toward her. I turned my focus to only Kylie. It seemed strange to me to be playing a game with children but not to be involved with all of them in the game. After the game ended Kylie ran across the room, hugged her mom and then hugged me.

“It's up to her”

We decided to continue our conversation and I followed Denise and Kylie to the Dairy Queen for ice cream. When we arrived, Kylie, still in her Taekwondo outfit, made her way to the cake displays as Denise and I made our way to the counter to order. Kylie pointed out the 'Frozen' decorated cake and announced it was her favorite one. Kylie bounced towards us, announcing she would like a strawberry sundae. With sundaes in hand, we settled into a large booth. I continued to carry my notebook and pencil. It seemed large and awkward. I automatically opened it up to a blank page and offered Kylie a pen as we visited.

As I spoke about the research further and of the importance of spending time with children, I said that sometimes children's voices are not heard when adults gather to talk. I indicated that I wanted to spend some time speaking with Kylie alone. As Kylie quietly wrote her name on the page, I shared this was a perfect example of what I was explaining. Denise agreed and was open to me spending time with Kylie. However she responded that it was up to Kylie whether she wanted to spend time with me and stated, "it's up to her. She is the one who usually has a hard time when I am not around" (Transcript, March 29, 2019).

As I think about this moment of eating our ice cream, I am reminded of how easily I opened my book and offered a pen to Kylie while we spoke. I remembered doing this in my classroom sometimes when parents sat at a table with their child while we spoke, often about the child's progress report. As adults, we often talked over, around, and above the child while the child was engaged in an activity such as coloring a variety of images. While this was not a practice I was proud of, it seemed to be acceptable in schools with both the parent(s) and child, especially when adults were talking *about* the child. I also was reminded of when I was a child and how I enjoyed creating and coloring when adults were having conversations. This was also a familial practice when we went to restaurants and were encouraged to color a poster or picture with crayons they provided, a practice still encouraged in many restaurants.

Denise returned the signed consent forms⁴⁴ to me and we arranged a time when Kylie and I would meet that worked for Denise's schedule around her family and school. Kylie seemed excited at the thought of our next visit and, when I shared where I had written it down on my paper calendar, she looked at it for a while and responded, "that's eight more sleeps!" (conversation, March 29, 2016). I smiled at her comment and thought about how she was measuring time in days and counting the days until we saw each other again. I wondered if counting days on a calendar was part of her familial curriculum

⁴⁴ Although Denise agreed to participate in the study during previous meetings, she shared she forgot the signed consent forms at home and gave them to me on March 29, 2016.

making to help her understand when she would see Denise when she was working away from home. As we left Dairy Queen, I followed them to their truck. Kylie turned to give me a hug before she opened the door and pulled herself into her car seat. Denise and I shared a hug before we parted and I said I would text her soon and would love to meet up again.

Co-composing worlds through drawing together



Figure 5.1. The drawing Kylie and I co-composed during our first meeting, March 29, 2016

Although Kylie and I engaged in other activities such as playing with play doh, creating images using markers, paints, and pastels was how Kylie and I entered into relationship with one another. During our first visit while we ate our sundaes at Dairy Queen, Kylie initially sat between Denise and I. When I opened my book and offered the pen and blank page to her, she accepted them immediately and shifted her body by crawling under the table to sit on the other side of me and began drawing herself. It was not preplanned and, as I nervously wondered how our conversation would unfold, I

pulled out the book after the three of us settled at the table and opened it to a blank page. I took small notes on one side as Denise was telling me how school was and how she recently learned that she and her cousin received the Aboriginal Careers Award from the college. As she shared her excitement that she would use the money to take her family on a trip to Toronto in the summer, I offered the pen to Kylie to use the opposite page of the open book. It felt strange writing notes as I tried to listen to Denise so instead I turned my focus to Kylie while we continued our conversation and began to draw a cat as she drew herself. It was natural for us to draw on the same page together as we co-composed our first drawing together, which created a space for us to come together in relationship. This was usually how Kylie chose⁴⁵ to spend our time together when we were sitting alone.

⁴⁵ I created an art bin that was filled with various items such as blank paper, markers, paints, paintbrushes, play doh, pastels, and blank canvases as a way to create field texts alongside Kylie and a way to enter into relationship. I shared the bin with Kylie after our first visit. The art bin grew according to what the Kylie requested, such as ‘smelly markers’ and Kylie was allowed to take what she wanted from the bin to use in her home such as the play doh.



Figure 5.2. Kylie's drawing of me, April 26, 2016



Figure 5.3. My drawing of Kylie, April 26, 2016



Figure 5.4. Drawing Kylie at McDonald's, May 31, 2016.



Figure 5.5. Kylie's drawing, May 31, 2016

Learning to Pay Attention and Listen to Kylie

I knew Denise had notified the daycare to let them know that I would pick up Kylie. I handed the daycare worker my driver's license. Although I was unsure of their process for strangers picking up children, I assumed they would want to see some photo ID. I had it ready. They were expecting me, as they smiled and handed me back my ID after a short glimpse at it. I was a bit surprised by this. I signed in and unlatched the locked gate that separated the children from the entrance/exit doorway that led in to the parking lot. Each time I picked up Kylie from the daycare (April 26, 2016; May 31, 2016) and visited her (November 24, 2016) in this space the daycare workers ensured they had Denise's permission. With many daycare staff present, sometimes I was confused about who received the permission if the information was not written in the daycare record book.

As a staff member asked another person to "get Kylie", her brother, Lee, whom I had not met, also seemed to be expecting me. I noticed as soon as I made my way into the large central play area a boy stopped playing with his friends on the floor and stood up. He didn't say his name but I knew who he was when he said, "It ends at like 6:30 or something like that." I blurted out, "what's that?". He responded, "karate. I mean Taekwondo" (Conversation, April 6, 2016). Kylie yelled across the room calling her brother as she made her way over towards us. Kylie grabbed her coat and Lee handed off her backpack. She told Lee to take her school backpack home and carried another one instead. I asked if her outfit was in the one she carried. Lee responded that her outfit was in the backpack and returned to play with his friends on the floor. I thanked Lee as he watched us make our way through the gate and as we made our way towards the front door. Since this was not part of his rhythm of leaving the daycare with Kylie, I sensed he was concerned about who I was and was ensuring I knew when her class was over. I wondered if he reminded me so he would know when to expect Kylie at home. We made our way across the parking lot and arrived at my car. I opened the back door and Kylie

jumped into the booster seat. While I snapped her seat belt in place the following conversation began and continued while we were in the car.

Do you remember we are going to McDonald's?

Yes, I remembered.

Do you know where there's a good McDonald's?

Yea.

*You can go through there [pointing],
go straight,
and then turn.*

There's a McDonald's over there?

Yea.

Ok, let me check on my phone.

[Driving by playground/park]

I haven't even been there.

Been where?

The park.

After Taekwondo, can we go to the park?

I'm not sure.

I could maybe call your mom and see.

Ok.

Because it such a beautiful day...

...the sun is out.

And it is so hot.

The sun is always been hot. (Conversation, April 6, 2016)

Prior to picking up Kylie, I imagined how our first meeting would go and planned our time together. I imagined we would spend time at McDonald's and visit the play place area after we ate as a way to further connect prior to Taekwondo. When I asked Kylie where there was a "good McDonald's" my image of *good* included a play place

inside of it. Kylie knew where there was a *good* McDonald's close by but instead of attending to her knowledge of the community she traveled throughout daily and the McDonald's she visited with her family, I traveled to a further McDonald's 15 minutes away, one that had a play place. I imagined Kylie and I enjoying ourselves playing in the space with one another. In coming together in the beginning I did not listen to what she had to say because I had my ideas of what she would like to do. During our drive, Kylie clearly explained she would have preferred to play at the park but I did not listen to her words and rather shifted the conversation because I was focused on the drive to the play place and making it in time for Taekwondo. The traffic was busy because it was rush hour, something I did not anticipate as I imagined enjoying our time together in the play place. Although she asked to go to the park because it was a warm spring day with "the sun is out", I did not accept her invite to the playground. Rather than being open, I held on to my ideas of what she might want to do rather than the worlds she wished to travel to.

After we finished eating, I suggested we play in the play place. The area was loud and filled with lots of children. Encouraged by my words, Kylie entered the play place with me but I soon realized it was not a place of ease for her, or for me. It was a place where I, like many other adults in the room, hovered around the edges as the children entered their worlds of play. Kylie did not seem to enjoy this world alone, even though she was amongst other children they were still strangers to her, and, in many ways, I was still a stranger to her. It was a world I completely misunderstood and imagined quite differently. We left shortly after and made our way to Taekwondo. It was after our first visit alone together I began paying more attention to what Kylie was telling me and the worlds she wanted to take me to.

During our second research conversation (April 26, 2016) Kylie and I fell into a rhythm of visiting McDonald's before heading to her Taekwondo class. Shortly after picking her up from daycare I began driving back to the main road, hoping to find the restaurant when the following conversation took place in my car. It was then in this

moment that I realized Kylie was familiar with the community where her daycare was and how to find the McDonald's, Taekwondo, library, as well as how to find her home. All of these places were located in neighboring communities. It was also during our first drive together Kylie pointed out landmarks that were of significance to her. This included places where her brother and family went to take hockey pictures of him and his team, which was located several kilometres away. Kylie was observant and knowledgeable of directions and how to help me navigate a community that I was not familiar with.

*I don't know where there's a McDonald's.
Do you know where there's a McDonald's?*

Yea!

Yea? Where?

Over here [pointing].

Just go to the end there.

You will see it.

[A few moments later after following her directions]

Keep going straight because there will be a McDonald's over here.

Do you recognize this place?

Yea!

You're absolutely right!

It's just over there.

Do you go to McDonald's a lot?

Yea, but sometimes not.

There it is. I see it. Do you see it?

Do you see the 'M'?

That's the McDonald's sign.

So you can turn over here.

If you want to.

Can you park somewhere I'm gonna show you something.

[Parking]

Is this okay?

Yea.

Let's get out!

Hold on hun!

[Opening back car door]

You know there's a spider back here.

What? Really? Where?

On the ceiling.

I don't like it.

Oh really.

He's just hanging around while the rains came.

Now it's sunny, I'll let him loose!

[Removing spider from car and placing it near base of tree]

I'll let him live because he deserves to live.

Yea!! (Conversation, April 26, 2016)

Kylie's World of Daycare

Over time I began to see the importance of Kylie's world of daycare. Kylie saw daycare as a place where relationships and friendships were formed with other children and adults. It was a place she knew well and where she moved with ease. During one visit when I stopped in the daycare to pick her up, she talked about her relationships with others, specifically about Jaden, a daycare friend. He attended morning kindergarten and she attended afternoon kindergarten. When I wondered about her friend Jaden and when she is able to visit with him she replied, "I see him just at daycare and when the teachers pick him up from school" (April 26, 2016). The transitions before, between, and after school were important times for Kylie. During these times she was able to see and visit with her friend Jaden, as the children traveled between their daycare and school worlds. Many of Kylie's friendships developed and were sustained within her world of daycare. When I inquired into who her friends were at school she responded, "I don't know"

(April, 26, 2016). Earlier Denise remarked Kylie was “shy” in the school landscape. It seemed as though the daycare landscape was the place where Kylie felt most at ease and the school landscape was one where I sensed she felt more dis/ease.

In one conversation Kylie named all seven of her “daycare teachers” (April 6, 2016). Her voice was almost singing as she named each one. As I visited the daycare, it was rare that I interacted with an adult, except when I ‘checked in’ and left with Kylie. When I spent time with Kylie in the daycare (November 24, 2016) the staff were helpful in allowing Kylie and I to find a space to visit and paint at a table. As they helped set us up with a container of water and a plastic sheet to capture any loose paint, many children stopped by to visit with Kylie and me. They were curious to see what we were doing and wondered if perhaps they, too, could join in. Kylie and I both interacted with the many children that came to the table as they shared their names with us. I wondered aloud with each child if they were in the same class as Kylie but none were. Most of the children that were in our area were in grade two. During this time I worried that Kylie and I would not find time alone at the table since we were prominently placed near the middle of the room and gently asked the children if they would give Kylie and me some time alone. It was then that Sitra, a daycare worker would gently ease the children and direct them to a different activity while Kylie and I prepared to paint. While we were looking at the items in the bin the following conversation took place as Kylie reminded me of who was important to her as she called out to one of the staff members she felt connected to.

Look at all these paint brushes I have we can choose from.

There’s even some more in the bottom.

See.

I found one.

I want this one.

Sitra! Sitra!

Look at this one!

It’s so huge! It’s so huge! (November 24, 2016)

Showing Sitra a new discovery she made was exciting for Kylie. Although Sitra was not the only adult in the room, she was the one Kylie yelled out to in her excitement. Sitra was quick to respond to Kylie as she turned around and acknowledged Kylie as we sat at the table. I wondered how long Kylie had known Sitra and if Sitra was her primary caregiver in the daycare.

Each time Kylie and I met with one another, drawing each other, was one of the ways we connected.

I'm gonna draw you!

Ok, you draw me and I will draw you.

I need purple glasses.

What colors your eyes?

Brown

Black in the middle and then brown.

Remember we went to the park and we drew each other? (November 24, 2016)



Figure 5.6. *Kylie and I painting, November 24, 2016*

I noticed how at ease she was as she guided me freely and quickly between the different areas and rooms she was able to travel within. I did not see any adults in the room telling Kylie what she should be doing or what area she was to play in. Kylie saw herself as someone in relationships with those who worked in the daycare and felt at ease

in her relationships and in the place. I noticed there were many different rooms in the daycare sectioned. In this way they could accommodate different age groups of children with Kylie and Lee separated. However, the gates between the sectioned areas seemed to be invisible to Kylie as she freely opened and closed them as she led me to an area that was quieter and away from others so we could spend some time together alone. I wondered if Kylie has special privileges because she 'grew up' in this space and the adults allowed her to move freely. At the time I did not notice others moving between gated sections. As we moved through the first and second gate I grew a bit worried that we were going into an area that we were not allowed to move through, and scanned the room to see if an adult was willing to tell us where we should be. In this moment, I was the only one feeling tension as she invited me to follow her into a separate room in the daycare that had a large doll house along with many dolls and accessories.



Figure 5.7. Kylie and I playing at the daycare doll house, November 24, 2016

The World of Daycare for Denise: The (In)convenience of Daycare

As Denise spoke about the convenience of having a daycare so close to the school she also shared many tensions she and her family experienced with it as well. She liked the hours of the daycare which suited her family needs during this time where they “open at 6:30 and close at 6 p.m., that’s 11 ½ hours” (conversation, April 11, 2016). Although the daycare hours supported her needs her voice changed to concern where she continued, “Right now Michael leaves at 6:30 in the morning so he has to take them to daycare. Daycare just opens when he drops them off. It’s *just* opening” (April 11, 2016). Denise also spoke about the challenges Kylie and Lee experienced with being at daycare so early in the morning and shared how she would prefer to find a babysitter for the time they need care before and after school (April 16, 2016). As she spoke, she verbally shared

many different scenarios of alternative care options, however the convenience of day care seemed the most logical for making sure her children were safe and cared for.

Financial costs of child care also shaped their decisions as Denise shared her worries about the future. She spoke about losing her daycare subsidy once she returns to work full time along with having to repay her large student loan beginning in December, six months after completing her program. I learned her partner Michael often kept the children home instead of sending them to daycare when he was not working, however this became problematic for Denise possibly losing her subsidy if the children were not attending everyday or a certain amount of hours. Although Michael wanted to keep the children with him when they finished school on some days, there was no option but to send them to daycare in fear of losing their subsidy. Denise said, “without assistance, daycare would cost \$1420.00 for both of my kids to attend part-time”, however, with her current subsidy she was required to pay a lower cost of \$415.00 for both children to attend before and after school which was a “huge difference” (conversation, April 11, 2016). The cost of daycare was also lower because Lee and Kylie were now attending school and “day care [costs] all depends on the room. Like, what room they’re in is a big difference in cost” (April 11, 2016).

Both children attended a K-6 school outside their community boundary with Lee in grade three and Kylie attending afternoon kindergarten. Denise and her partner chose the school based on its close proximity to a daycare/after school program Lee and Kylie attended. Kylie attended the daycare since she was 5 weeks old and was supported by the “daycare grandma” that cared for her (March 21, 2016). Having a “daycare grandma” for Kylie eased many of Denise’s tensions of placing Kylie in daycare at such a young age. She shared, “I didn’t like leaving her but I had to work. I knew she was in good hands and well taken care of. It was a hard decision, but I had to work” (March 21, 2016). I could tell from Denise’s words the decision to leave her daughter at such a young age was difficult, but having to work and provide a stable environment for her growing family meant she needed to leave her small daughter in the care of others. Denise knew

working away from home would earn her a higher income than remaining in the city to work a minimum wage job. Denise wanted her family to know that they could depend on her to provide for them. While Denise worked away from home, Michael became the primary caregiver for the children and worked seasonally during the warmer months operating heavy machinery. Denise seemed to enjoy that Michael took on the caregiver role more and enjoyed spending her time working. Part of Denise's narrative of being "strong" meant that she provided for her family.

The continuity and familiarity of the daycare community were important for the family. Denise shared Kylie enjoyed daycare and it was a place she felt at ease in. In contrast to daycare, Denise noted that Kylie was shy in school. I wondered if Denise saw Kylie as being shy in school while she was present or if this term was given to her daughter from those who worked with Kylie on the school landscape and communicated to Denise in some way. I wondered if Denise saw Kylie shift from someone who was outgoing and curious outside of school and in the daycare setting to someone who responded with 'shyness' when she entered school. I wondered if Kylie was seen as being 'shy' in school because it was a new place, filled with new people and increased structured activities, as opposed to daycare, a place she was very familiar and comfortable in, a world she felt at ease in.

Denise shared when she and her partner were initially searching for a school for their children, their first choice was a French immersion school close to their home. They wanted their children to attend the only French immersion school in the catchment area because her partner is a fluent speaker. Although the school was close and in a neighboring community due to transportation issues between the daycare and school, "it didn't happen" (conversation, April 16, 2016). Denise shared they were disappointed the children were unable to attend a school that would have taught them a second language but they had to make the difficult decision based on child care availability. As she shared this she spoke about possibilities of finding neighbors and local teenagers who might be able to watch both children before and after school, but the continuity and relationships

Denise and her children had with the daycare staff eased some of her tensions as she negotiated their care.

Supporting her partner's first language was important for Denise. She shared that she once enrolled in an evening French class at the community college to support her and her partners desire for their children to learn a second language, however the location of the course was moved to a farther location where distance, time and parking costs made it difficult for her to complete the course.

The (In)convenience of School

On March 29, 2016 Denise shared Kylie's progress report while we sat watching her participate in Taekwondo. I scanned the report card, but did not read what the teacher wrote. When I asked Denise what she thought about the report card she responded, "she seems to be doing okay" (conversation, March 29, 2016). She shared her frustration over how there is very little communication with the teacher sending her six notices that she has not logged into Schoolzone⁴⁶. Denise shared using Schoolzone was not a part of her routine at home.

"I just want them to learn and do well in school"

During our first meeting Denise spoke of her dreams for both Lee and Kylie to both do well in school. As Denise shared her struggles with completing her homework for the courses she is enrolled in, she was reminded of how struggling with homework was something her family all shared in. She shared her frustration of being unable to support both Lee and Kylie in their learning with the work they were bringing home.

⁴⁶ SchoolZone is an online program the school and the district use to gather information on children's attendance, progress, fees, and to communicate homework assignments to parents/families. It also provides families access to information regarding their child(ren), school news and events, as well as provides yellow bus tracking. SchoolZone tracks each time children, families, and staff login to access information and what information is viewed/collected. SchoolZone sends notifications to families' email addresses daily, beginning at 4:00 p.m. Information accessed from Edmonton Public School Board (2019) website <https://www.epsb.ca/schools/schoolzone/> on January 12, 2019.

Denise shared a lot of tensions she experienced as she spoke about what she noticed around the children's school experiences. She shared many stories and I used her words to create a found poem to illuminate the emotion she was sharing while she was retelling stories of what she was experiencing in her familial curriculum making at home and how school was shaping their lives.

*homework already
she does not understand
a homework duotang
letters come home on a ring
learning sounds through actions
like letter 'c'
motion choo-choo like a train
I don't know how to help her
I remember drawing letters in sand on a plate
I know this way of learning
having a picture of a train for the letter 'c'?
does not make sense to me*

*Lee does not like schoolwork
or homework
spelling gives him the most grief
I often become frustrated
trying to help him
to motivate him
to complete his work
It doesn't get done
we both leave frustrated
He does not like his school*

cookie cutter kids
cookie cutter schools
lacking imagination
no desire to play outside
I have to kick my kids out of the house
From playing indoors
We don't want 'Bubble kids' (January 13, 2016)

So tell me something about school?

When it's lunchtime, Ms. M goes to the office and eats her lunch.

Where do you eat your lunch?

In the classroom.

We are in room X.

What are some fun things you do in school?

I do gym.

We play lots of stuff.

Yea, like what?

Ummmmm....

Silence

Tally?

What kinds of games do you play in gym?

Any games.

Like what?

Freeze tag.

Like when the music stops you freeze.

That's freeze tag.

And tag.

But we can't jump on each other.

And uh....

I think that's all I remember.

I need some lipstick! (November 24, 2016)

Returning to Ohana

we talk in circles

you are the only one who can talk with me in circles

we always end up back

where we began (Denise conversation, April 11, 2016)

Denise shared these words with me during our third meeting and second research conversation. We met at a restaurant close to the community college for lunch. After finishing our lunch we continued talking for an hour and half next to her parked vehicle in a busy urban parking lot. It was during this time Denise spoke about how having her children changed her life dramatically and for the better. Time moved quickly as we continued sharing earlier parts of our lives and our hopes and dreams for the future. It was easy to speak with Denise and I wondered if she felt the same way as we began our conversations with stories about ourselves. In this way, Denise and I shared a mutual vulnerability in sharing and listening to each other's stories with one another. Denise showed me a tattoo she had on her arm in handwriting, which read *ohana*. When I asked Denise what that meant she shared the word *ohana* means family and that family was the most important thing to her. She spoke about the movie *Lilo and Stitch* and watching it with her children. She shared that in the movie her favorite line was "Ohana means family. Family means nobody gets left behind" (Conversation, April 11, 2016) I left Denise and returned home thinking about our conversation and the words she stated as we said our goodbyes to one another. I wondered what Denise meant when she commented on how we *talked in circles* with one another and how I was the only person she did this with.

Chapter Six

Resonances Across Experiences of Familial Worlds of Curriculum Making

This chapter explores three resonant threads across the familial curriculum-making ‘worlds’ (Lugones, 1987) of participating children and their families: familial curriculum making grounded in community; invitations into children’s ‘worlds’ of ease and comfort; and school curriculum making as shaping familial curriculum making. In the third thread there are glimmers into how each child’s school curriculum-making world shapes her familial curriculum making worlds. I discerned these resonant threads by metaphorically laying the storied narrative accounts side by side, taking a step away from the closeness of the experiences to ascertain what became visible and audible in the resonances.

Thread 1: Familial Curriculum Making as Grounded in Community

As I physically and metaphorically laid the three narrative accounts beside one another and looked across them, what became visible as woven throughout each of the participating children and families’ familial curriculum-making worlds was a sense of being grounded within community. What also became evident was how community was taken up quite differently within each family’s experience. Partly these differences were situated in each family’s intergenerational stories of belonging within different communities. As I detail in what follows, families told stories of early experiences that shaped their lives and reverberated into their familial curriculum making with their children. In their family stories and in their unfolding experiences, the children’s lives were shaped in unique and different ways even as they were grounded in familial stories of community.

Mary helped me to see multiple ways she continues to develop an expanding community for her children, a central feature of her familial curriculum making. It was

important for Mary to create an inviting environment in her home where others felt comfortable and welcomed, something I felt immediately when I entered her home. Mary saw her home, first and foremost, as a place of comfort and as a gathering place for friends and family. As she first built a community at home, Mary spoke of “*building those foundations*” for “*the girls*” (Transcript, January 20, 2016). Despite the small physical size of the house, it was important to Mary that the family “make it work” so her daughters experienced the stability of living in one home and developing important relationships, first with one another and within their immediate family, and then with others within their neighbourhood community (Transcript, January 20, 2016). Even within the physical space constraints, Mary ensured that her familial curriculum making included a central focus on creativity and the aesthetic with time, space, and resources to encourage her children to notice and appreciate the beauty in the world.

Geographically and metaphorically, Mary’s familial curriculum making began in her home and was a slow and thoughtful progression of deliberate community making for and with her children, beginning with her first daughter, Naomi. Relationships were central to the reverberations that moved outwards into expanding places in the community. Building a strong sense of community focused on intentional relationships was at the heart of how she and her partner co-constructed their familial curriculum making with Naomi and her siblings. This was interwoven with creating, living in, and maintaining a supportive community of peers and family. The experience of having children shaped the movement out from their home to the community. Mary shared, “*before we had kids, we didn’t talk to anybody in the neighbourhood. It was, like, we didn’t need to*” (Transcript, March 2, 2016). However, when they began to have children, Mary began to build relationships with other families in the neighborhood. Beginning with neighbours, Mary formed strong relationships with others who had children similar in age to her children. In order to continue to build a community for her family, she often visited the community playground to help her daughters and herself to develop relationships with other families and children.

Another aspect of this strong thread in the familial curriculum making was the importance Mary placed on helping Naomi learn to be a strong, responsible member of the communities in which she lived, beginning with her sisters and moving outward to other children in the community. Naomi's responsibility as a big sister was embodied in their familial curriculum making. Naomi took great pride in her responsibilities as she named herself as someone who "*help[ed] with the babies*" (Transcript, July 6, 2016). For Naomi, making sure her sisters felt included was important. She was attentive to their needs and curiosities. One moment where I particularly noted this was when Naomi and I painted together and Naomi noticed "*Grace is getting tired of standing [at the table],*" (Transcript, January 20, 2016), I was awakened to her gentle ways of being watchful and carefully navigating the needs of those around her. She thoughtfully noticed her sister Grace was silently shifting her small body in ways to make herself comfortable while she watched us paint. Naomi also pointed out the importance of living in responsible ways as she said, "*I will drink my 'juice' [pointing toward her paint water] now. Actually, I'll pour out my juice just in case somebody drinks it because if somebody drinks it, they'll be drinking paint*" (Transcript, January 20, 2016).

As Mary expanded the communities in which she and the children lived outside of the home, her familial curriculum making showed the importance of building relationships within each community, beginning with Naomi's preschool teacher, Yvonne, who she described as someone who "*totally fell in love with Naomi*" (Transcript, January 20, 2016). Having Naomi's first 'teacher' develop a strong relationship with Naomi supported Mary's familial curriculum making and her forward looking stories as she imagined her youngest daughters being part of the preschool community curriculum making with teacher Yvonne. Mary's words helped me think about the importance of moving into community spaces. These are spaces of belonging and I can see the responsibilities layered within the expanding community, when she reminded me, "*they got to, kind of, be a part of all this with us, they are growing with us too*" (Transcript, January 20, 2016). Mary also shows the importance of familiarity and continuity within

community when she said, “*some of the kids she went to preschool with are now in kindergarten with her. So, like, these are relationships that she’s building*” (Transcript, January 20, 2016).

Another aspect of this strong thread in the familial curriculum making was the importance of having Naomi and her sisters become knowledgeable of the people who live in her community. I first saw this as Naomi guided me through her community, naming different friends and neighbors as she travelled to the community playground she often visited and where she participated in the summer playground program. When Naomi skillfully took me to the community store she showed me her expanding knowledge of the community in which she lived and showed me that she thought she was leader within her community. As we walked she shared the importance of being able to “*follow the leader*” and shared, “*if you don’t know which one is my Grandma’s house, I can show you ... we can knock on the door, and if she is home, we can say hello to her*” (Transcript, April 20, 2016). This illuminated the important sense of her agency and her feeling of being at home in her expanding community, an aspect of the familial curriculum making.

Echoes of this continuity of remaining attentive to relationships in community as familial curriculum making reverberated as Naomi spoke of her relationships, particularly with creating and maintaining friendships within her community at school. Naomi reminded me of her relationships with others in the community when she said, “*we’ve been together for a long time, since we were in preschool*” (March 2, 2016). When Mary described the shift to the school community as Naomi began kindergarten, a strong relational aspect to community was central. Mary said, “*it’s really important that the girls stay at Sunshine school and carry these relationships through school. These are friends that she’s going to have right until she graduates*” (Transcript, September 22, 2016). Mary plans to remain in the community so she and her daughters can maintain important life long relationships with others.

Mary participated in community events so Naomi and her sisters would feel the connectedness and, at the same time, develop a sense of responsibility to the community. Mary invited me along to an annual community gathering with the girls where the focus was on supporting people who lived in the margins of the community. Mary shared, “*It’s in the old school, just a block over there, they do programs to reintegrate people that are, kind of, in, you know...street-living situations...transient people. We’ve been going for two-three years now*” (Transcript, July, 6, 2016). It was important to Mary in her familial curriculum making that her children be part of all aspects of the community.

When I turn towards Linda and Vince, I sensed a shared familial curriculum making grounded within the larger social and political communities that supported and continued to shape their understandings around Métis culture and identity. When I first met Vince and Linda, I learned that identity and politics were woven tightly together in their lives. Vince said, “*I always knew, of course, I was Métis...but it’s not something that you would dwell on...[now I’m] talking about it every day*” (Transcript, September 29, 2015). Both Vince and Linda were very knowledgeable in both historical and present day court rulings regarding Métis identity. This shaped Linda’s familial curriculum making as she noted, “*Finally all three of my children are recognized [as Métis]*”, based on a recent Supreme court ruling (Transcript, May 1, 2016).

Participating in community events that highlighted aspects of Métis traditions such as music and dancing were intentional features of their familial curriculum making with Miranda. They wanted to ensure she was knowledgeable in who she was and was becoming as a young Métis girl and provided opportunities where she could learn to dance the traditional jig as well as play the fiddle. Music was important in their familial curriculum making as Miranda participated in piano and voice lessons.

Both Vince and Linda agreed their familial curriculum making shifted over time and now is a collaborative “*family project*” (Transcript, September 29, 2015). Miranda

was also involved in intergenerational conversations that revolved around Métis identity, culture, and politics. Having Miranda present during these conversations which often focussed on complex cultural, political and institutional issues was central to their familial curriculum making that were part of shaping her identity. This shared familial curriculum making is shaped by the contributions both Vince and Linda experience within their daily lives within the larger Métis community. They intentionally create opportunities for Miranda that support experiences that will help her to become a leader within the Métis community.

As a shared negotiation, Vince and Linda chose a school that directly supported their familial curriculum making ensuring Miranda would develop the skills and abilities necessary for her to grow into a confident bilingual leader in the Métis community. Linda reflected on her older children's schooling experiences in the International Baccalaureate program and shared the importance of continuity in placing Miranda, "*in this kind of stream all the way from the beginning*" alongside their familial curriculum making, as supporting "*the kind of person you want to put out into the world*" (Transcript, October 30, 2016). The multiple extracurricular activities they chose for Miranda to participate in were also ones that supported their familial curriculum making.

As I turn my glance towards Denise and Kylie's narrative account, what becomes visible is a familial curriculum making grounded in community places and which begins geographically and temporally in one of the places Kylie knew first, her daycare. This was a place where Kylie felt safe and connected to others through the relationships she had with those on the landscape in a place she 'grew up' in. For Kylie, being a known and a visible member of this community gave Denise a sense of ease as she spoke fondly about Kylie's daycare beginning with her "*daycare grandma*" (Transcript, April 16, 2016). This is a central aspect in their familial curriculum making where relationships and being a member of the community are important.

Like Mary, Denise's familial curriculum making shaped Kylie's increasing knowledge of her community and the many places she visited and participated in within the community. A central plotline in their familial curriculum making was ensuring Kylie lived a story of growing independence and confidence. This was evident in her knowledge of different landmarks in her community, as well as in neighboring communities. She navigated the physical geography of her community with ease as she directed me to Taekwondo and to restaurants while pointing out her neighborhood library.

What became visible early on was Kylie's sense of agency and voice in decisions that shaped her life. This was shown in the ways she navigated different community places we visited and her sense of familiarity of the landscape. It was important to Denise in her familial curriculum making that Kylie travel between, and into, community places with ease. What also became evident in Denise's familial curriculum making was the importance of allowing Kylie to author her own life within boundaries. I became awakened to this when Denise indicated it was up to Kylie to decide whether she wanted to participate in the research. As the three of us sat at the table and I asked to spend some time alone with Kylie, Denise said, and Kylie heard, that it was up to Kylie to decide. Kylie eagerly agreed. The boundaries were set by Denise as she had already spent a number of hours with me and I had first connected with her through a friend. Denise seemed to create, within her familial curriculum making, a set of relationships and then allows Kylie to work within those relational boundaries on how she wants to self author her life.

Thread 2: Children's Invitations into Their Worlds of "Ease"

I began in the real worlds the children lived in and belonged to; the worlds I hoped to be invited into; the worlds they created and imagined.

These moments of invitation are fleeting and can easily be missed.

My hopes for the research began to be lived out when Naomi invited me into her worlds of ease and comfort. Her invitations began almost immediately after first meeting her with Mary (October 23, 2015), when Naomi returned home from kindergarten and changed from her school clothes into her Halloween costume to show me what she looked like in that moment and how she became a fashionable vampire. Naomi seemed to be at ease with me early on, and I believe it was because she was at ease in her home. I missed that first moment of invitation as I had difficulty traveling to her worlds of play with ease. As Mary named her a “fashionista” and someone who loved clothes, I focused on, and complimented, her costume. Speaking with Mary seemed easier in this moment than taking up Naomi’s invitation and travelling to her ‘vampire’ world. Over time, I noticed I often had difficulty taking up Naomi’s invitations to travel to her worlds so reluctant was I to move out of my world of comfort, my world in which I was teacher. My difficulty with travelling out of my world of ease interfered with my ability to take up her invitations to travel into her worlds of play and imagination fully. Lugones (1987) reminds me that it is easy to be playful in the worlds in which I am at ease, such as worlds in which I am the teacher, and not so easy to be playful in worlds where I feel a lack of ease. Gradually, with Naomi’s consistent and multiple invitations, I learned to notice her invitations and to sometimes be able to travel to her worlds.

During our first meeting, Naomi showed me she did not want to bring her school curriculum making world into her familial curriculum making world. As she excitedly arrived home from kindergarten, she immediately removed her backpack and tossed it into the corner chair of her living room. She was showing me that what she had experienced in school was not to be noticed in her home and that she did not want to invite me to look at what was in her backpack. Naomi was at ease in her home the moment she entered and it was not difficult to see how she embodied the familial curriculum making of her home as a place of comfort and safety.

As shown in the narrative account, Naomi always took care to attend to making sure I was comfortable, as she invited me to different physical places where she felt at ease, such as her shared bedroom, the playroom at home, and a neighborhood community playground. It was in these worlds that Naomi lived with ease, her worlds located in both real and imaginary places. It was in these places that she travelled to her worlds of ease, worlds she invited me to travel to in order to show me what was important to her.

In our first conversations, I was unable to travel to Naomi's imaginative world such as when she invited me to draw a unicorn. Initially I thought this would be a world in which I would feel at ease. When I tried to take up her invitation and travel to her world, I experienced uncertainty and difficulty. Lugones (1987) notes there are four ways of being at ease in a 'particular world': a fluent speaker in that 'world'; an agreement with the particular norms of the 'world'; being humanly bonded; and a shared history with one another. Although I too loved unicorns when I was younger and once drew them with ease, my confidence and playfulness with drawing changed over time. It seemed that travelling to her world would have been easy since, at one time, I was a fluent speaker. I still was in agreement with the particular norms of that world. However, being at ease in her world was difficult for me. Naomi loved to draw and she was confident in her abilities and drew a unicorn with ease. She playfully traveled to my world and provided me with directions on how to draw a unicorn, even sharing her drawing with me to copy. Although I shared a similar love of unicorns with Naomi, I did not feel at ease in drawing a unicorn and shared my vulnerability and worry with her. However, in my dis/ease in not drawing the 'right' unicorn, I was unable to hear Naomi's words of encouragement and support as she tried to make me feel at ease in her world of imagination. Lugones talks about playfulness in two ways, that is, 'agonistic playfulness' and 'loving playfulness'. I believe I was acting with an agonistic sense of 'play'. Lugones writes, "[a]n agonistic sense of playfulness is one in which *competence* is supreme ... leads those who attempt to travel to the another "world" with this attitude to failure" (Lugones, 1987,

p. 15-16). Lugones' words express what I was feeling as I struggled to accept Naomi's invitation to her world.

With time I began to awaken to her invitations and was reminded that while children are required to travel to different worlds out of necessity (and survival) everyday, as adults, we are not required to travel to theirs. I was not accustomed to travelling to children's worlds. However, if in the research I wanted to come alongside Naomi I needed to travel to her worlds. Gradually, I learned to pay attention to her invitations and to travel to her worlds with a loving sense of playfulness.

Naomi often lived in a world of improvisation as I experienced with her when we spent time in the playground. Dragons, invoked by Naomi, suddenly entered our play. In the moment, as she called for me to take care crossing the hot sand, I was able to enter her world. She had quickly shifted our conversation to an imaginary world she was travelling to and invited me alongside. In that moment, I was able to travel to Naomi's world with what Lugones calls 'loving playfulness', that is, with "an openness to being a fool, which is a combination of not worrying about competence, not being self-important, not taking norms as sacred and finding ambiguity and double edges a source of wisdom and delight" (Lugones, 1987, pg. 17). As I ran with Naomi across the burning sand to flee the dragons, I was not concerned about how I appeared to others who were watching. Naomi was persistent in teaching me how to travel to her worlds through imaginary play.

Even though I began to recognize the worlds of school were not worlds of ease for her, it was difficult for me to set aside my own world of comfort, that is, my school curriculum-making world where I felt at ease. I often fell into inviting her to take me to her school curriculum making world, a world where I felt I would be at ease. She resisted my invitations and, eventually, I learned to stop asking her to travel with me to her school curriculum making worlds and to listen to her invitations. Naomi worked to ensure that when I travelled to her worlds, I felt at ease. As she invited me to travel to her worlds, she

showed me how to live within her worlds so I would feel at ease. This concern that others were at ease was an expression of her familial curriculum making.

As I began to work with Miranda, many of our early conversations were with her parents as we all sat together at a table. Miranda coloured or worked with small puzzles and games while her parents and I talked. Miranda often intervened in the conversations by asking for help or by calling to me to show me something. I often also turned to her. But if these questions or requests for help were invitations from Miranda to enter her world of ease, I was not able to enter. I kept being drawn back into the world of teacher as I talked with her parents. It was in these moments where I was positioned as 'expert teacher'. However, as I awakened to being storied as teacher, a storying that made it difficult for me to enter Miranda's worlds, I began to feel dis/ease in the ways that Vince and Linda wanted me to travel with them to my school curriculum making world, a world I often felt at 'ease' in. In these moments I experienced a kind of "double image of myself" (Lugones, 1987, p. 13). Miranda's parents appeared to see me stereotypically (Lugones, 1987) as a teacher because I am a teacher. However, in the conversations with Linda, Vince and Miranda, I was trying to animate myself as a researcher. My intention was not to intentionally animate myself as stereotypical teacher. However, as the four of us gathered at the table, I had difficulty animating myself as a researcher interested in traveling to children's worlds.

At first I took cues from her parents into how I might be able to travel to Miranda's worlds. When they pointed out a backyard playhouse, I invited Miranda to show me the backyard playhouse. However, what I had seen as one of her possible worlds, that is, a playhouse where she played, I quickly learned that she did not play there. What I had imagined as a place of ease, a child sized backyard playhouse, was not a place of ease for her. There were several times when I believed Miranda was trying to invite me into her worlds but I was unable to take her invitations. Eventually we co-composed a world in her driveway using chalk crayons I had brought along and my idea

for playing hopscotch. Together we co-composed a world in which we both played with what seemed to me a sense of playfulness.

Miranda often lived in a performative world where she participated in many activities where she was required to show how she was growing in her learning. I was invited to watch her perform Taekwondo and piano. But as I watched Miranda in what seemed to be performances, I wondered if these were places or moments of ease for her. Although she seemed to enjoy hitting and kicking the target in her Taekwondo outfit as she demonstrated her skills at home and appeared to enjoy playing the piano at her parents' requests, she did not choose to invite me to these worlds. These appeared to be worlds she was encouraged to show me but not ones that she invited me to travel to with her.

Because I was never in Kylie's home, at first I thought I had not been invited into her worlds of familial curriculum making. However, as I read and reread field notes and conversation transcripts I began to understand that Kylie's worlds of familial curriculum making were not only in her home place but also in the places her parents helped her select as worlds of familial curriculum making, worlds outside her home place. Two of these worlds were in her daycare and in her Taekwondo dojo.

While I knew from Kylie's mother that Kylie had attended the same daycare since she was very young, I had not understood this particular daycare as a central place in her familial curriculum making. It was a world where she felt at ease. While I went frequently to pick her up at daycare, it was not until she actually toured me through the daycare that I began to see this was a world of ease in which she had travelled and continued to travel daily. As Kylie and I sat at a table painting and drawing images, many children visited us and were curious about our activity. These were children with whom Kylie spent a lot of time both at their school and together in the daycare. Many of the children had been with her in the daycare for long periods of times. As she took me

around the daycare, she was confident in how she navigated us through the different rooms of the daycare until we settled into one of the rooms that housed the doll house. When we were confronted by a loud disagreement between a parent towards a child, Kylie knew it was important to leave the room and guided me out into the main room of the daycare. This invitation to her world was one that I did not see as an invitation initially. It was much later that I came to understand it as a significant world in her familial curriculum making.

Another world which Kylie invited me to travel to with her was her Taekwondo dojo. At first I did not understand this as a world in which she felt at ease. My lack of wakefulness to this world initially was somewhat surprising to me because I often waited while she attended her class. She had also requested that I take her to the end of the month practice when adults are invited into the dojo. It was as we sat and waited that I became aware of her ease in that world. She had draped herself across my legs as I sat on the floor while other parents waited with their children for class to begin. I slowly awakened to the dojo and the daycare as familial curriculum making worlds in which she was comfortable, knew herself as a fluent speaker in those ‘worlds’, was in agreement with the norms of those ‘worlds’, and had a shared history with the people who lived in those worlds. It took me some time to recognize these as worlds in her familial curriculum making worlds, worlds she invited me to travel to.

Her invitations were not taken up as fully as with Miranda and Naomi because I was waiting to be taken to her home. I failed to understand that I was in her significant familial curriculum making worlds and she had been offering invitations to her worlds from the first moment when her mother told me it was up to Kylie if she wanted to meet with me.

Thread 3: School as Shaping Children's Familial Curriculum Worlds

As I looked across the three narrative accounts I discerned that school curriculum making shaped the familial curriculum making experiences of all three of the children and their families. While the children and families were not having the same experiences, there was something similar across the experiences and I saw these as resonances across their experiences. Each family worked to negotiate the school curriculum making worlds they travelled to. While I did not have an opportunity to spend time with the children in their schools, I was able to see, through stories told by parents and children and by observing their actions in relation to their experiences in school, glimmers into their school curriculum making worlds.

Sometimes, as with Miranda and her family, school curriculum making began to shape familial curriculum making even before Miranda began kindergarten. Miranda's parents engaged in significant research around which school offered the most appropriate curriculum making for Miranda. They developed a list of characteristics that a school needed to offer: it needed to be a Catholic school, with an after school care program available in school, and with an enriched curriculum, including a second language program and/or an international baccalaureate program. As they visited possible schools, they held these criteria in mind and finally found an appropriate school some distance from their home. The long drive to take her to the school and to pick her up at the end of the day shaped the familial curriculum making in significant ways. While the school was not chosen only because there was in-school daycare available, the availability of after school care was one significant factor in the school selection. The long 25 minute drive to and from the school shaped their familial curriculum making. In addition to time spent each day on a long drive, the location so far from the family home and community meant that it was difficult for Miranda to spend after school and weekend time with classmates as they did not live in close physical proximity to her house.

The familial curriculum making was also shaped by the school curriculum making as Miranda's parents enrolled her in different activities such as summer camps and kindercollege to develop skills and abilities they thought would be important for her success in the school curriculum making. When she was in kindergarten, and particularly after the first conversations with the teacher, there were considerations of Kumon programs that further shaped the familial curriculum making.

One very significant way the school curriculum making shaped the familial curriculum making was when a teacher described Miranda as shy. Miranda's parents were very concerned by this labelling description, perhaps because it contained echoes of stereotypical images of girls of Indigenous heritage. They quickly acted to resist that label. Their resistance involved enrolling Miranda in piano playing and singing where performances were required and in Taekwondo where empowerment and developing personal strength are key components.

Linda shifted her work schedule so she was able to work two days from home. She also joined the school council, learned more about the IB program, and participated in many conversations with other parents as ways to support Miranda's school curriculum making. School curriculum making became a central focus. Miranda's experiences in school curriculum making shifted how they spent their time at home. Although Miranda's teacher reported that Miranda was "*doing okay*" in school, the feedback was vague and unsettling for Vince and Linda. Making sure she was "*at par with the curriculum*" Vince and Linda began teaching Miranda at home. They wanted to "*get a sense of what she's really good at*", and by doing so were able to see the areas in the school curriculum where she struggled so they could support her (Transcripts, February, 7, 2016). This shifted their familial curriculum making to include school curriculum making through various workbooks developed specifically with Canadian curriculum and content so it would be directly linked to the curricular outcomes in kindergarten.

Another significant way familial curriculum making was shaped by school curriculum making was through the second language Miranda was learning. During our conversations, many wonders were voiced around whether Miranda's English skills would suffer since she was in the French immersion program. Although English was her primary language spoken in the home, there were concerns that her English skills might be limited because she was learning French at school. The French language was not part of her familial curriculum making. They were also considering possible ways to support Miranda's French language skills. For example, Linda researched possible French courses specifically designed for adults who had children attending an immersion school. Enrolling in such a course would enable Linda to speak French and would therefore support Miranda as she learned French. Conversations regarding Miranda's English and French language learning were frequently part of our conversations as were the negotiations Vince and Linda engaged in around their decision to enrol Miranda in an immersion school experience.

School curriculum making also shaped Kylie's familial curriculum making but in different ways than for Miranda. Kylie had been in the same daycare since she was five weeks old. When it was time to select a school for her to attend, Denise made staying at the same daycare the central decision making factor. Initially Denise and Kylie's father had wanted to enrol Kylie in the community school that offered French immersion as Kylie's father is fluent in the French language. However, having her attend that school would have required a new day care setting for before and after school care. Because of the changes that would be required to make a French immersion school possible as a school for Kylie, they stayed with the original daycare and the school closest to it. It appeared that the school curriculum making, that is, the actual school, was chosen because of its proximity to the familiar daycare setting. The availability of child care was a deciding force in the choice of the school curriculum making.

There were other ways that school curriculum making began to seep into familial curriculum making. Denise struggled with her son's homework and also struggled with understanding the ways the school curriculum making was designed to teach Kylie her alphabet letters. This was particularly troubling as the school had asked Denise to help Kylie with her letters as homework and Denise did not know how to support her learning at home. This tension for Denise shaped the ways that the familial curriculum making was undertaken at home.

The school curriculum making also shaped the familial curriculum making of Mary and Naomi. Mary had chosen the school long ago through the choice of the neighborhood in which they chose to live. Mary had, in the years since Naomi was born, made sure there were community connections to help Naomi with the transition into school through her participation in preschool within the larger community. Making connections with other families in the community was vital for Mary and Naomi to feel a sense of belonging on the school landscape and within the greater community.

There were other ways in which the school curriculum making shaped the familial curriculum making. During the time I was alongside Naomi and Mary, I watched the shared bedroom where Naomi spent time with me change. Initially the focus was on creativity and Naomi often composed different worlds such as her 'office' and 'house'. However, over time, the place was transformed into a desk which became a kind of placeholder for her papers, pencils, and school artifacts. The desk appeared to be a place to keep things. I noticed Naomi no longer spent time there and no longer invited me to play with her in that place as she had when we were first together. She no longer invited me to that desk which appeared to be school like, rather than a place for playing. When I tried to invite myself to the place, she resisted my presence. Over time the desk moved into the playroom and became, what seemed to me, a "messy" spot where her things were collected. While Mary may have wished Naomi to "*do her school work*" at the desk,

Naomi did not appear to use her desk that way. However, school curriculum making shaped, at least in part, the kinds of papers, books and objects that were around her desk.

As Naomi started Grade 1 she also played school at home, a kind of living out of the stories of school she was experiencing. She cast herself in the role of teacher and cast me as student. This seemed to fit with the way that the teacher was asking Naomi to act as teacher to some of her classmates.

From my earliest visits, I noticed that when Naomi arrived home, she did not want to bring her school curriculum making world to her familial curriculum making world. She continued to not want to talk about school. At one point during Naomi's grade 1 year, Mary said Naomi's teacher described her as "*star student*" and "*solid citizen*". As Mary shared this with me, Naomi became visibly distressed and began to bounce around. She clearly felt 'dis/ease' at having to continue to live up to the story of who she was in her school curriculum making world, a story that her mother was telling to me.

I am reminded of Lugones' (1987) description of "an ambiguous being, a two-imagined self" (p. 13). Lugones explains

When I travel from one "world" to another, I have this image, this memory of myself as playful in this other 'world'. I can then be in a particular world and have a double image of myself as, for example, playful and as not playful. (p. 13)

Perhaps an experience of being a "two-imagined self" was part of what made Naomi uncomfortable as she did not want this image of herself as good student to be the one that she would have to live out in her familial curriculum making. She wanted to continue to be more playful in her familial world. I wonder if Naomi was showing us her dis/ease as she had what Mary described as '*meltdowns*' when she returned home from school, leaving the plotline of 'good girl' at the door as she moved from one world into the next. Mary shared that she parented differently since Naomi began school. Sometimes when Naomi came home and she saw the difficulties she was experiencing in the transition

between her two worlds, Mary encouraged Naomi to change into her pajamas and to be with her family, particularly her sisters.

Summary: Resonant Narrative Threads

While there may be other narrative threads that resonated across the experiences in the children and their families' familial curriculum making worlds, these three seemed particularly salient. The three threads spoke strongly to the early experiences of children and families of Indigenous ancestry as they composed their lives within their familial curriculum-making worlds and the tensions experienced by the children and families as they world travel between familial curriculum-making worlds and school curriculum-making worlds. As thread one showed, each family grounded their familial curriculum making in experiences of community, that is, their created ways to help their children live their lives within particular communities of importance to them. Thread two showed how the children carefully invited me into their familial worlds of curriculum making although it was frequently difficult for me to accept their invitations to world travel. Travelling with them allowed me to understand how they were composing their lives within these worlds, worlds that, as shown in thread three, began to shift as they entered school curriculum making worlds. In the final chapter, I explore and discuss what the personal, practical, and theoretical justifications for the work are, showing how the work has shaped me and what it offers to practical work and theoretical understandings in curriculum making.

Chapter Seven

Introduction

As I began to write this final chapter, I wondered how to articulate all I have learned as I engaged in this narrative inquiry alongside three young girls and their families during our year and a half together. I wondered how this research might shape new understandings of curriculum making and teacher education, as well as add to theoretical and practical understandings about engaging in narrative inquiry alongside young children and their families. I searched for ways to develop a ‘picture’ of how the chapter should look. As I reflect upon my struggles of wanting to see the end result before I began writing, I was reminded of my experience alongside Naomi when she asked me to draw a unicorn. I began by searching for an image of a unicorn. I was too uncertain to draw what I imagined a unicorn might look like. I experienced similar feelings of uncertainty about writing this final chapter. In my experience with Naomi, I wanted to see the already made image of a unicorn before I began to draw. As I struggled to begin this chapter, I wanted to see the shape of the chapter before I wrote it. I struggled with a belief that I needed to see the full picture of a last chapter before I began writing.

I was drawn back to Naomi and the knowledge she so freely shared with me about how to draw a unicorn. Naomi shared how important it was to trust myself to create from my places of knowing rather than replicating a completed image in all its neatness and certainty. Naomi lived, and thrived, in the messiness and flexibility of creating from her imagination. She spontaneously invited me to travel alongside her in both her real and imagined worlds. I was in awe of her ability to express herself and live in her worlds of imagination and creativity without fear of judgement or of failing to meet particular standards that were often imposed by others, both people and institutions. This was different from how I lived in the world as an adult. I know that I too lived in creative and imaginary worlds as a child; Naomi recognized that, sadly, I had lost my ability to imagine and create freely, and without hesitation, as I became an adult. Yet, she believed

that I could still imagine and create and invited me to do so alongside her. I knew that engaging in this narrative inquiry required an openness to ‘world’-travelling (Lugones, 1987) and to imagine other possible worlds. Throughout the inquiry, this tension and desire for certainty was an ongoing struggle for me. I had lived my life striving to fulfill and live up to standards that were predetermined for me and standards that I had taken on as being necessary to meet. I had learned how to meet them, particularly within my school curriculum making worlds. It is now, after engaging in this research, that I wonder at the cost of living out or living up to these preset narratives as David Carr (1986) suggests. Although I was not awake to what Naomi was teaching me at the time, her words and my experiences alongside her returned to me as I began this final chapter.

In this chapter, I share what I learned through, and with, this narrative inquiry. I describe what I learned as I write about the personal, practical and theoretical justifications of the inquiry.

Personal Justifications

The personal justification “often fuels the passion and dedication” of the narrative inquirer and is frequently relived and retold through autobiographical stories of experience (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 174). It is within my autobiographical stories that I located the beginnings of my work and I return to them here. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write, “narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical...[and] it is crucial to be able to articulate a relationship between one’s personal interests and a sense of significance and larger social concerns” (p. 121-122). My inquiry was shaped through my earlier lived tensions between my familial and school curriculum-making worlds, my experiences as an Indigenous Cree-Métis early childhood educator alongside Indigenous children in urban public schools, my experiences as an Indigenous education consultant in a large urban school board, and my experiences as a board member with the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and the Legacy of Hope Foundation.

In chapter 1 I wrote of my personal justifications for this study. I made visible why I wanted to expand upon my earlier autobiographical narrative inquiry as I made visible the tensions and importance of remaining attentive to the familial curriculum-making worlds within which children live (Swanson, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). By engaging in a narrative inquiry alongside children and their families my hope was to understand their experiences as they entered a school curriculum-making world. I wanted to be alongside each child and her family to hear their stories of their familial curriculum-making worlds at this time. Being alongside during this critical time allowed me to inquire further into the ways my early experiences shaped who I am and who I am becoming, particularly my earlier experiences and the lived tensions I experienced alongside my granny as I became ‘educated’ in schools. I continue to think about some of the experiences I carry and the stories that have been called forth, particularly around the *costs* of privileging my school curriculum-making worlds over my familial curriculum-making worlds. I continue to wonder about the stories that have remained silent in my life and the ways they began to become visible as I came alongside the three children and their families. I continue to think with the complex notions of becoming ‘educated’.

Shifting Identities within familial and school landscapes

When I began the inquiry in 2015, I was not in a classroom teaching. However, when I entered into relationships with the families, I named myself as a teacher/researcher as part of my identity, my stories to live by. I had long told myself stories of being a teacher who worked with young children. Now I was also beginning to story myself as a researcher, a narrative inquirer.

As I came alongside the children and their families, I wondered how naming myself as being a teacher shaped our relationships with one another. I sensed sharing my stories to live by as a teacher allowed the families to develop an unspoken trust with me as they were in the midst of leaving Kylie, Naomi, and Miranda in the hands and classrooms of other teachers and schools for the first time. On one hand, naming myself

as a teacher alongside the families and children allowed me certain privileges as I was someone with many years of experience working alongside young children. On the other hand, naming myself as a teacher positioned me as someone with knowledge that many of the families were seeking as they shared with me their wonders and concerns about their and their child's experiences. Although there were times I found myself wanting to leave my identity as teacher behind, I was often drawn back into living out the plotlines of how I had learned to be alongside children and families in the classroom. It was the children who saw me differently. They did not see me as a 'teacher' but rather positioned me in multiple ways as we developed our relationship over time. Sometimes I was friend, playmate, or auntie as we engaged in conversations with one another. The children shaped who I was in relation with their stories as I played in playrooms, walked and engaged playfully in parks, sat at tables, or waited for Taekwondo to start. The children created possible worlds that allowed me to be other than teacher.

Shifting forward to writing this last chapter, I see that I have become more at ease in living these multiple stories of who I am alongside children and families. Now as a teacher, I am open to understanding myself as a researcher interested in the familial curriculum-making experiences children and families embody as they enter my classroom. Now I can come alongside them curious about who they are and are becoming, rather than only as the teacher who creates the classroom curriculum. Like Paley, I can now more easily see myself as learning alongside the children and the families about what they are bringing to the classroom. While I have understood this before, as when I had the children bring their grandparents with them to the classroom (Swanson, 2013b), I am now more explicitly able to express this knowledge in my practice.

In September, 2018, I returned to full time classroom teaching. Holding my experiences alongside Naomi, Mary, Miranda, Linda, Vince, Denise, and Kylie close to my heart, I organized a series of potluck feasts in the classroom. I wanted to invite the

children, their siblings, and their families into our classroom as a way to develop relationships and community. The classroom in this way became a space where we could visit and where I, and hopefully, the parents could imagine a different unfolding as their lives interacted with, and at times, collided with schools. By coming together in this way I invited families to position me outside of the narrow story of teacher. I recognized that children and families were not familiar with meeting within the school landscape in this way, as it is more common that gatherings at school are usually focussed on school activities directed towards the children's success in the school curriculum-making world. I shifted this in the gatherings I organized.

As we prepared for the 90 minute time set aside for the October potluck feast, the children's and my excitement increased as the day drew closer. The children and I engaged in many conversations, imagining how the evening might unfold. The children were curious and wondered what they would do while we ate. Slowly, over time, the children began to see themselves as an integral part of the evening. They began to see themselves as co-composers of the curriculum-making world of the feast gathering. As we continued to share in conversation and wonder alongside one another, the children were adamant they did not want to talk about, or share their school work, or develop a performance to show what they were learning in school. What echoed throughout our conversations was the children's desire to spend time with others engaged in activities of play and conversations. As we imagined the different possibilities of various activities, we decided it would be an evening where we all would sit, eat, and visit with one another. We were all in agreement.

That afternoon, I prepared tea, coffee, and water and set up tables for food outside my classroom door while the moose stew simmered on the stove. My mom arrived a bit early with fried bannock, butter, and strawberry jam. She continued to organize the tables for the food as I placed long sheets of paper on the classroom tables along with baskets of crayons. Although the children were not instructed to take up the crayons, they were there

in the event the children and/or their family members wanted to create while they visited with others.

As the children and their family members arrived with their food contributions, I welcomed them. I had blank name tags available for family members and children to write their names on, if they chose. Many quickly began visiting with one another and I sensed an ease in the classroom. The room was filled with approximately forty-five children and family members. Additional tables and chairs were brought into the room. As the room filled and children and families settled into spots, I welcomed everyone. I thanked them for coming and spoke of the importance of coming together as a community and shared how the children and I were co-composing our stories of community in the classroom. I also shared that we would be having four potluck feasts throughout the school year, one for each season. I reminded everyone about how the evening was for visiting and enjoying the delicious food each family, and I, had brought. I sensed some families were relieved and welcomed gathering together with no particular agenda. Perhaps, the relief was that the dominant narrative of school was absent. I also sensed, however, that, for some, there was a dis/ease in coming together in this way because it was so unfamiliar within a school landscape. As the evening progressed, families began to realize we were co-composing a safe space. Families who had seemed quiet in the beginning began to engage in conversation with others.

Conversations began around the children first, as families visited with one another while the children excitedly met up with their friends. Children moved between their friends and their families. Parents were drawn together by their children and the friendships they were developing in the classroom. Many children and families were already in relationships with one another in the community. Other families were meeting for the first time. Many children, including their siblings, gathered together and ate. Parents and children moved around the classroom and sat in different chairs throughout the evening as they visited and shared who they are with others. At one point a child

noticed a 'kids' table' and a 'grown up table' had emerged during our time together. It made me realize how attentive the children were. I realized again how important it was to co-compose our curriculum making worlds.

As families began leaving, many shared their gratitude for coming together in a different way within the school landscape. Others wondered when the winter potluck feast would take place and shared the dishes they were planning to bring for others to enjoy. Many families assisted in cleaning up and helped re-arrange tables and chairs for the next morning. Some families chose to take photographs of their children alongside their classroom friends as a way to remember the evening. Many family members volunteered their time and support in preparing the classroom environment for the next gathering. We all left that night with a sense of accomplishment.

Coming into shifted and new relationships with one another was important and I wanted to create a space where people would feel welcome. I wanted them to feel welcome to bring what mattered to them in their familial curriculum-making worlds to a space where we could be together. It was a space where I imagined, over time and through the four gatherings, deeper relationships with one another would form. I also wanted to create a space to invite the children and families to live and tell a different story of being in a classroom within the school landscape. I knew from my work as a teacher and researcher that children and families' familial curriculum making is often silent and/or silenced within school landscapes (Lessard, 2014). Through being alongside Naomi, Miranda, and Kylie, I knew children often silenced stories they were living within school landscapes when they travelled to their familial curriculum making worlds. There was a disconnect between two distinct worlds of curriculum making the children travelled within daily. This triggered many questions for me, including questions of how we could co-create spaces for diverse children and their families to come together as a community. In conversation with the children, we were beginning to co-compose a curriculum world shaped by what the children and families wanted to share as they came

into relationship with one another and with me. In meeting together within the school landscape we co-constructed a middle space, a meeting of lives between the familial and school curriculum-making worlds.

As I prepared for our potluck feast, I knew this was the first time for an event like this. It was something unusual within the school where I worked. Typically, when children and families are invited into the school, the focus and intent are rooted in school curriculum making activities, with the purpose to show, or report on, or support, children's learning in school. Our gathering resisted the narrative of how children and families are positioned within the school landscape as observers, participants in, and supporters of the school curriculum making. Aside from some families appearing uncertain as they entered the space, there were no visible tensions throughout our evening. I, however, experienced some tension leading up the event, as well as afterward.

I wondered how I was storied alongside other teachers and administrators as I invited the children and families to gather in this way. Rather than tell the administration about the importance of creating a space between the familial and school curriculum-making worlds, I invited them to participate in our evening to experience how creating this middle space between the familial curriculum and school curriculum-making worlds opened up possibilities for each one of us to co-construct a new world of curriculum making. My principal joined us for the evening and visited with many of the children and families.

While I used to worry about not "covering the curriculum", I now more easily, albeit with some feelings of uncertainty, embrace another classroom space that has been part of my school curriculum making. The space, named circle sharing, is a space where each child is given time to share their experiences and stories alongside others. Each morning, as we meet each other at our circle carpet and settle in, the children situate themselves according to where they place me in the circle. A child usually sets down a

circle pillow for me to sit on. Each day the pillow is situated in a different spot and the children choose where they want to sit according to where it is placed. Knowing we move in a clockwise direction around the circle, the children who wish to speak first and near the beginning of the circle situate themselves to the left of me, while others who wish to speak later or last place themselves in the middle and to the right of where I sit. The children intentionally place themselves according to when they want to share. Each child shares once and listens to everyone else share, one at a time.

Before I undertook this study, circle sharing was often tension filled for me. As I shared in Chapter 1, questions from administrators were often directed as to the length and purpose of our daily circles. Unannounced visits by administrators during our classroom circle time occurred, as they sat and watched what was taking place as the children shared. Although they were invited to participate, our offers to stay and participate were not taken up and they would often leave after listening to a few children share. Wonders about whether I was covering the mandated school subject matters were asked later. Direct questions were asked and suggestions were made on how I could shorten our circle time. Questions around assessments and progress report grades were queried as the children wrote about their lives based on what they shared in circle and about their thoughts about their lives after sharing their experiences and listening to others' experiences. I knew that the children were making curriculum alongside one another and me, beginning with what the children knew first. They were able to make sense of their experiences as they shared.

Previous administrators were unable to see the importance of creating a space on the school curriculum-making landscape that honored and recognized children's stories of experience. A narrative that was taking shape within the school landscape was that our daily circle was taking up valuable subject matter curriculum-making time. What was not known, a secret story that was occurring in our classroom was that the children's storied experiences they shared during our circles was what shaped our school curriculum-

making experiences into meaningful experiences. It was the place in which children situated themselves and others in relation to them.

After undertaking this narrative inquiry and returning to teaching, the children and I have continued with our daily circles. It was the first activity we engaged in on our first day together. By engaging in the circles, we continuously recognize the importance in co-composing our curriculum-making experiences. In doing so, we are co-composing a counterstory; a counterstory filled with possibilities. Our space is where relationships are created and sustained and where children share their knowledge of the different worlds in which they live. They share who they are, and are becoming, within those worlds. Our circle has become a space where stories of their familial curriculum making worlds are recognized, and, for many, is a place within the school landscape where they are able to safely share stories of who they are and are becoming alongside others in their families, communities and school. I have become more confident in speaking to the importance of attending to the lives of children and families. I can now speak to the importance of giving them time and space to share the multiple worlds in which they belong. As the children and I come together and share, we continually reshape who we are, and who we are becoming in relation with one another, as well as who we are becoming in relation to our familial curriculum making worlds, and in relation to the school curriculum making worlds we are co-composing within the classroom and school landscapes. This sense of becoming is important to me and to the children, even as it sometimes calls forth difficult stories and makes visible the tensions we each experience. Greene (1993) reminds me of the importance and uncertainty in coming together in this way, as a way of becoming what is not yet, when she writes:

Even in the small, the local spaces in which teaching is done, educators may begin creating the kinds of situations where, at the very least, students will begin telling the stories of what they are seeking, what they know and might not yet know, exchanging stories with others grounded in other landscapes, at once bringing

something into being that is in-between. As they do so, what Hannah Arendt called ‘webs of relationships’ may be woven, webs overlying the worldly things people normally talk about when they are together. It is when they begin disclosing who they are to one another that worldly things can be overgrown with such a web, ‘with an entirely different in-between which consists of deeds and words and owes its origin exclusively to people’s acting and speaking differently to one another’. It is at moments like these that persons begin to recognize each other and, in the experience of recognition, feel the need to take responsibility for one another. This means responding to one another as a sister or brother being in the process of choosing, of becoming what that person (in the midst of others) is not yet...that situations have to be deliberately created in order for students to break free in this way. Coming together in their pluralities and their differences, they may finally articulate how they are choosing themselves and what the projects are by means of which they can identify themselves. We all need to recognize each other in our striving, our becoming, our inventing the possible. (p. 218-219)

Practical Justifications

The practical justification attends to the possibilities of shifting or changing my, and others’, practices (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray Orr, 2007). As I returned to my narrative beginnings in chapter 1, I made visible how I was unable to sustain myself as a teacher in the classroom that was shaped by multiple complex social, cultural, political, and institutional narratives. These narratives significantly shaped and defined many of my teaching practices in the classroom, many practices that were not sustaining me as a teacher. I realize now there were many moments where I did resist dominant narratives that had been designed to define who I would become as a teacher, directly and indirectly. As I made visible some of the tensions I experienced while trying to navigate the complex narratives in the classroom alongside children I recognized many actions as a form of resistance. I resisted many practices that positioned me in ways that did not feel

right to me. While I knew how to teach in the ways I was expected to, I left the classroom because I did not want to continue silencing and labeling children and families in ways that were encouraged and supported on the school landscape. Many of the labels were given to children as a way to point to their deficits.

In returning to graduate school and engaging in my masters and doctoral studies, I began to name the tensions I was experiencing and to attend to how I could live differently alongside Indigenous children and families as a teacher and researcher. I know from my experiences alongside my granny and engaging in my earlier work that silencing our familial curriculum making had come at a *cost* to my granny and to me. Inquiring into my earlier stories of experience alongside my granny allowed me to shift my teaching practices by creating a space inside the classroom space where the children's and my familial curriculum-making worlds were made visible and honored, by the children and me.

After being alongside Kylie, Naomi, and Miranda and their families, I returned to teaching with new insights into how to listen to, and come alongside, children and families in ways that allow me to continue to wonder and think differently. In doing so, I continue to wonder how teachers may shift their practices in curriculum making alongside children and families if they recognize, acknowledge, and attend to understanding children's familial curriculum-making worlds. I continue to wonder what *cost* is taken up when we do not take the time and create the space to attend to the worlds of children and families, and what is lost, missed, or ignored when we do not take up their invitations.

Attending to familial curriculum making with Indigenous children and families.

An inquiry alongside Indigenous youth and their families highlighted ways in which the shaping influences of early school leaving often began in youths' earliest years of schooling (Lessard 2014; Lessard, Caine, & Clandinin, 2014; Swanson 2013a). Long-term influences of early schooling experiences in the life making of Indigenous children,

youth, and their families, are profoundly concerning⁴⁷. Similar to Friedel (2010), Lessard, Caine and Clandinin (2014), and Young (2005a; 2005b) I am aware pervasive issues shape the educational and schooling experiences of Indigenous children and their families. Racism, stereotypes, and single stories (Adichie, 2009) add to the complexity of Indigenous children and families' experiences as they move into schooling situations.

Maxine Greene (1995) writes of seeing small as helping us to discern the patterns, trends, and movements of phenomenon over time and of seeing big as helping us to see the person in their particularity, in their wholeness. Often statistics about Indigenous children are told on the school landscape: often these statistics capture a deficit perspective – including forms of disengagement, absenteeism or school drop out rates for Indigenous children. The statistics provide ways of seeing small, that is, to see trends and patterns. The statistics are often used to tell a story of, and about, Indigenous people. They almost always present a reductionist view of Indigenous children and families. What they do not speak to is the experiences of children and their families. As I came alongside three children and their families, the research provided ways of seeing big, seeing the curriculum making of the three families as they were living their lives in multiple curriculum making worlds.

There were similarities across all the demographic features of the participants that agreed to be a part of the research study. Although I was not searching for similarities, all three children were female and lived in two parent homes. Working against the single

⁴⁷ The Indigenous (Aboriginal) population represents 4.9% of the overall Canadian population. Since 2006, the “Aboriginal population has grown by 42.5%—more than four times the growth rate of the non-Aboriginal population over the same period. According to population projections, the number of Aboriginal people will continue to grow quickly. In the next two decades, the Aboriginal population is likely to exceed 2.5 million persons” (Statistics Canada, 2016). The increase of Indigenous (Aboriginal) peoples living in urban centres has also increased substantially. Aboriginal people living in urban cities account for over half 51.8% of the total Aboriginal population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2016). While Indigenous (Aboriginal) people represent 6.5% of Alberta’s population, Indigenous (Aboriginal) children aged 0-14 makeup 29.1% of the total Indigenous (Aboriginal) population in Alberta (Alberta Government, 2017). In the urban centre where my inquiry takes place, one school board noted 8,044 self-identified First Nations, Métis and Inuit students with 524 self-identified Kindergarten children in the 2015-2016 school year, when this inquiry takes place (Edmonton Public Schools, 2016). Although the statistics allow me a glimpse into the population statistics of Indigenous peoples, they do not reflect experiences.

stories (Adichie, 2009), that are often (un)spoken of and about Indigenous children and families on school landscapes, the contexts of the participants' lives were not marked by the stories of poverty, violence, substance abuse, foster care, and/or being raised in single parent homes. However, as an Indigenous teacher on school landscapes I am often aware of the many ways in which stereotypes, single stories (Adichie, 2009) and racism are present and often follow Indigenous children and their families on the school landscape. Allan and Smylie (2015) state there are four ways in which racism can be experienced by Indigenous peoples in Canada, particularly within social institutions such as health and education, noting: systemic racism, interpersonal racism, epistemic racism, and internalized racism. Much like Allan and Smylie (2015), I wonder, in what ways, "racism fundamentally contributes to the alarming disparities in health [and education] between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples" (p. 1), such as in literacy and high school completion rates. I wonder about how the four ways racism is experienced is part of school landscapes. I wonder, for example, if this may be why Vince and Linda did not want Miranda pulled out for activities specific for Indigenous children on the school landscape; why Linda made sure she was part of the school council; I wonder if this is why Denise named her children as being 'mostly white', perhaps a way to protect her children from racism in the community and at school; and I wonder if this is why Mary is strongly present in coming to know the community her children are becoming an integral part of, making sure they are a part of the relationships amongst other families that will carry them through their educational journey as they attend community schools.

Often single stories (Adichie, 2009) are shared in the context of being deficit and children and families are labeled before stepping into the school landscape. Stories of poverty, domestic abuse, substance abuse, neglect or lack of care, along with attendance and academic concerns, too often follow the children and their family members. These stories echo through the whispered words and (un)spoken silences. The experiences of the participants speak back against these deficit stories and offer stories of families and children co-composing their familial stories of resilience, community, creativity, imagination, hope and possibilities.

Theoretical Justifications

The social and/or theoretical justifications “can be thought of in two ways: theoretical justifications, as well as social action, and policy justifications” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 37). My doctoral work is one of the first multiperspectival narrative inquiries alongside very young Indigenous children and their families. I came alongside them outside of institutions, beginning with children’s and parents’ experiences in their familial and community worlds. My dissertation continues a conversation begun by Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2011) and contributes to theoretical understandings of curriculum making, particularly in early childhood education by focusing on, and inquiring into, children’s and families’ experiences and their familial curriculum making during the temporal period when they first enter formal school environments.

Theoretical Justification 1: Composing relationships with parents as shaping relationships with children

In 2016 I participated in writing a review chapter of narrative inquiry in *Early Childhood* (Clandinin et al., 2016). In the chapter we noted the lack of narrative inquiries with young children and the impossibility of finding studies where narrative inquiries had been undertaken with children and families outside of schools or other institutions. There are now a few studies that do this. Huber et al., (2018) undertook a narrative inquiry alongside eight urban Indigenous families (parents and/or grandparents) who prepared, and readied, their children (and grandchildren) for kindergarten. Although their study was alongside parents and/or grandparents who were parenting children entering into kindergarten, the families were guided by the children’s experiences. Siriboe and Harfitt (2017) and Siriboe (2019) engaged in a recent narrative inquiry and attended to the familial and school curriculum-making experiences of three families and their three children in Hong Kong as they shared their lived experiences of English language learning alongside their children, ages four and five. Through conversations and visits with the families and their children, Siriboe heard stories of the children’s and parents’ experiences as the families negotiated school settings and as the children experienced

early education. In this narrative inquiry, both children and families shared stories with Siriboe over a year and a half. While the methodology and methods of the study, as well as the focus on the familial curriculum making were similar to my study, the context was very different. Clandinin and colleagues (2016) noted, “[y]oung children’s experiences are often studied in narrative inquiries in relation to their familial experiences, that is, children’s experiences are understood in relation to their families (p. 250). This was evident in all three of the studies.

In engaging in this narrative inquiry alongside children and their families, I first needed to find participants and, as noted in Chapter 2, I found participants through personal networks of friends, acquaintances, and professionals. While it was difficult to find participants, this was only the first layer of complexity. As I came alongside each family, I realized that my identity shifted depending on the contexts in which I was alongside participants. As with each family and the relationships we developed, I was storied somewhat differently within the landscapes in which we gathered. I needed to be open to the ways that the inquiry unfolded alongside each family. There was no one way of proceeding. I knew instinctively that I first needed to develop a relationship with the mother and/or father. I could not come to know the child until I had a relationship with the family.

Since I was connected to Mary and Naomi through a family member who was a colleague at the university, our relationship quickly developed into one that resembled a friendship. I entered into the home with the “borrowed status of friend”, a friend of a family friend/relative. Although I shared that I was a teacher, I was rarely storied as one within their familial landscape. Their home was welcoming and metaphorically grew, as more people became a part of the larger community they were developing for their children, including myself. It was in this space I was named as *family friend* by Mary, and later as *friend*, *auntie*, and someone who ‘*gets to hang out with kids*’ by Naomi.

I knew Vince in a professional way and I came into the relationship as a professional, an educator, a Métis woman. As I met Linda, I came embodying a story of a Métis professional educator. As we gathered at the table in their family home, sometimes I was positioned as the expert teacher or expert researcher, which created an uneasiness for me. However, I knew that I needed to, in a way, honour the stories by which they knew me. This different relationship shaped the relationships with Vince, Linda, and Miranda in such different ways and I needed to be open to where the stories took me. I was, indeed, in the midst. I know I experienced difficulty in being in conversations with two adults and one child, as I was trying to develop three sets of relationships. Too often I felt my attention more focussed on the adults. I wondered how being storied as a teacher/researcher may have shaped my relationship with Miranda as conversations around school shaped many conversations where she was an active listener, and, sometimes, a participant. Although being named a teacher where conversations around school were often places where I was *at ease*, these conversations shifted me to places of dis/ease as I was trying to negotiate my relationships with multiple people on the landscape. Slowly, and over time, my relationship with Miranda began to shift into one that allowed us to be playful and where she began to invite me into the worlds she was comfortable in travelling to with me. When we began to co-construct our world of hopscotch, Miranda began to see me as someone other than a teacher. In these moments, Miranda began to story me as someone who played with her and spent time with her as we co-created and engaged in various forms of play.

Denise and I met through a family member I was a friend with when I was younger. Denise took care to make sure that she and I had developed a relationship before I met Kylie. Although Denise knew I was a teacher and researcher at the university she did not seem to position me in these ways while we engaged in conversations. Denise's openness to share aspects of her life seemed to shift how she came to see me as someone who was trusting and able to understand some of her experiences. Titles or roles did not seem to shift how Denise positioned me, however I sensed Denise spent a lot of time with

me in the beginning to gain a sense of who I was and whether I would be given access to visit with her daughter. Although Denise and I spoke about me being a teacher during the first time I met Kylie, being a teacher did not seem to follow me as I continued to meet with Kylie in Taekwondo, daycare, and the community places we ate dinner. I imagine for Kylie my presence was one of being a friend and someone who spent time with her. For Kylie, this was familiar since she grew up with many other adults on the daycare landscape.

At the conclusion of this study, I see that the ways I entered the relationships with the families greatly shaped the inquiry. I saw that it is not possible to begin with developing relationships with children, even when, as with Naomi and Mary, I entered with a kind of borrowed friend status. I now understand that as narrative inquirers enter into research relationships it matters how we are storied as we begin with participants. The stories in the midst that shape the first meetings continue to shape the relationship until the final texts are negotiated. I also now see that when researchers wish to engage in narrative inquiries with children, it matters that there is a relationship with families established first.

Theoretical Justification 2: Negotiating research conversations with children and families

Shortly after meeting all the participants, negotiations took place mostly via text messages and emails on days and times for meetings. In the beginning of the research study, I imagined research conversations would take place every three weeks as I rotated through the three families, with a week break in between. However this imagined schedule quickly fell away as I realized the lives of the participants and my life did not fall neatly within a fixed schedule. Research conversations were continually negotiated.

Negotiating times with each family was also different in the amount of time we spent together. For all three participants there was no fixed length of time or frequency

for our meetings. This was constantly shifting as our lives unfolded and were shaped by the children's invitations to travel to their worlds. What became familiar alongside each child was their control over the amount of time we engaged in research conversations. In the beginning I tried to control the activities and the time the children and I spent on them. However, I learned through listening to the children that I needed to slow down, let go of the pre-set expectations of the relationships, and attend to the children's invitations. This meant our time together in research conversations was much longer than I had anticipated as I engaged in conversations with both children and their families, together and separately.

The research conversations with Vince, Linda and Miranda usually lasted between 1.5 – 2.5 hours as we sat around the dining room table. When Miranda began participating more in the conversations through the different activities she wanted and/or was encouraged to show, the conversations became longer. During these times we moved to different areas of the home. When I began having conversations with Miranda one on one, our conversations often lasted an additional 1.5 – 3 hours depending on whether we traveled between Taekwondo, the community playground or ventured outside onto her driveway to play hopscotch.

For Denise and Kylie our research conversations shifted as I began with Denise alone, then Denise and Kylie together, then with Kylie alone once Kylie decided she would meet with me. Denise and I engaged in 2 research conversations and spent 6 hours together before I met Kylie with her. As Denise and I negotiated how the research conversations with Kylie would unfold, Kylie was included in the negotiation on whether she wanted to meet with me alone. Kylie's voice was often present in the negotiation of when and where she wanted to meet. She requested I participate in her Taekwondo classes on the days when adults were allowed in the room to watch and later participated alongside the children. The places and times where Kylie and I would participate in research conversations were always shared through Denise via text message prior to meeting with Kylie. Kylie and I went throughout the community to different places such

as the daycare, Taekwondo, a park, and restaurants. On these days, our conversations lasted between 2.5 – 4 hours.

For Mary and Naomi, research conversations were often negotiated between who I would spend time with and when. Over time, Mary and I learned to have research conversations before Naomi returned home from school. At that time, Naomi and I engaged in research conversations, often alone but sometimes alongside her siblings. Our research conversations often lasted between 5 – 7 hours. Engaging in sustained conversations with each of them separately was necessary. Naomi invited me to travel alongside her to multiple places within her home and community. Since research conversations lasted for an extended time, I was sometimes invited to join the family for dinner and/or celebrations in the community.

I now see that negotiation is a continual process that shapes narrative inquiries from start to finish. While there can be a carefully thought through plan for proceeding, it is necessary to follow the lead of the families and children as times, places, and stories that can be open for inquiry are always in negotiation. It is important to remain wakeful in these moments. In the beginning I had negotiated with each family to meet for around 1 - 1.5 hours. All research conversations took on their own life with constant negotiation as I spent time with the children and their families. In the conversations, only the meeting times were negotiated. Over time, the amount of time we spent with one another became blurred and our times together were extended or shortened based on the experiences we were having together. I did not feel, or at least the families did not make me feel, like I overstayed my welcome. I took my cues from the children and families of when I should leave.

Theoretical Justification 3: Familial curriculum making, places of thinking narratively

As I came into relationships alongside the children and their families, what became visible, over time, was the importance in remaining wakeful to the children's

invitations to travel to their familial curriculum making worlds. In the beginning, I struggled to recognize the children's invitations to show me their different worlds.

In order to be open to the children's invitations, I first needed to shake my comfort with trying to come alongside the children with pre-planned activities. As a teacher, it was familiar to me to have a plan as I prepared to meet with children. I was familiar in being alongside children within the school landscape and in my own familial curriculum making worlds alongside family members and friends. What was unfamiliar was coming along children as a researcher. I imagined activities they would enjoy participating in such as when I gave Miranda a camera to take photos of places that were important to her; or when I gave Naomi oil pastels and a piece of paper for the first time while her mom and I engaged in our first research conversation before knowing Naomi preferred drawing in and creating books; or when I took Kylie to the McDonald's play place without realizing Kylie was not a child who played alone or with strangers. These planned activities were created with good intentions, and the children followed along with my ideas. In these moments I was still the teacher rather than a researcher coming alongside the children.

Although the children did not verbally express their disappointment in the activities I planned for them, they subtly conveyed their lack of ease in these moments. The children were quick to teach me how to come alongside them as they began inviting me into their worlds of familial curriculum making, worlds where they felt at ease. When I was able to let go of my ease and expectations the children recognized me as someone they wanted to invite into their worlds. Remaining awake and open to their invitations was important in coming alongside them, such as when Naomi invited me to enter into her worlds of imaginative play when she opened her world of dragons. As Paley reminds me (1986), the "key is curiosity...as we seek to learn more about a child, we demonstrate the acts of observing, listening, questioning, and wondering. When we are curious about a child's words [and worlds] and our responses to those words [worlds], the child feels

respected. The child *is* respected” (p. 127). It was in the moments where I engaged with curiosity, alongside the children’s “playful attitude,” that I was able to have a playful attitude as well, one that involved an “openness to surprise, openness to being the fool, openness to self-construction or reconstruction of the ‘worlds’ we inhabit playfully” (Lugones, 1987, p. 17). This attitude is necessary in order to learn about children’s familial curriculum making.

Resisting bringing school curriculum making into familial curriculum making worlds

As a teacher who lived alongside children in the classroom and engaged in daily sharing circles alongside children, I was familiar with hearing multiple stories the children shared about their lives. Familial stories became part of our morning rhythm and through our curiosity about one another relationships were developed and sustained in this way throughout the year, and beyond as the children moved up in grades. Missing circle was rare, but sometimes necessary, and it was the children who resisted not having circle time as they came to see this as an important beginning to our day. Forming relationships with young children quickly as a teacher was something I did often, and I believed I do so with some ease. However, as a researcher my uncertainty in how I entered into relationships with the girls and their families fluctuated. There were moments where I felt at ease and moments I did not. Attending to the familial curriculum making alongside the children and their families was filled with uncertainty. However, as our relationships unfolded, the children invited me freely in their different worlds of curriculum making.

Although the children did not distinctly recognize there were two worlds of curriculum making they were living in, there were ways in which the children showed me, and the families, that there was a separation of the two worlds they were experiencing daily as they traveled back and forth between home and school. Being curious about the children’s school curriculum making worlds, I found myself often

asking them direct questions about school. My questions were often met with silence, short answers, redirection of conversation, or stories about who they were in relation with on the school landscape. Naomi often met my questions with demonstrating how she behaved on the school landscape by living out how she was named in that world, however she would often show me someone different than how she had been positioned. Naomi resisted my efforts to talk about school and in these moments often tried to invite me into one of her worlds, such as into her 'office' or fleeing dragons.

The school curriculum-making world was not a world the children invited me along to experience with them. Through the inquiry with the children I learned that they were eager to invite me to their familial curriculum making worlds but resisted inviting me to their school curriculum making worlds. Furthermore, I watched as they silently and sometimes in their actions resisted the school curriculum making from enter their familial curriculum making. I wonder when this starts to change.

Returning to the beginning: Closing the Circle

As I come to the end of this dissertation I am drawn, as always, back to my stories of my granny as I am reminded of the *cost* to our familial curriculum making as I privileged my school curriculum making. Coming alongside the children and their families in their homes reminded me of how traveling to children's familial curriculum making worlds is a requirement, a necessity in coming to understand the life making of a child, alongside their families. This cannot be done in isolation.

I look back now at an earlier school curriculum making artifact I held on to for so many years. I wonder now, looking back on this piece why I kept it. I wondered why this was an important piece of paper I held onto for 34 years during my many moves. What was its significance then, and what does it continue to teach me now?

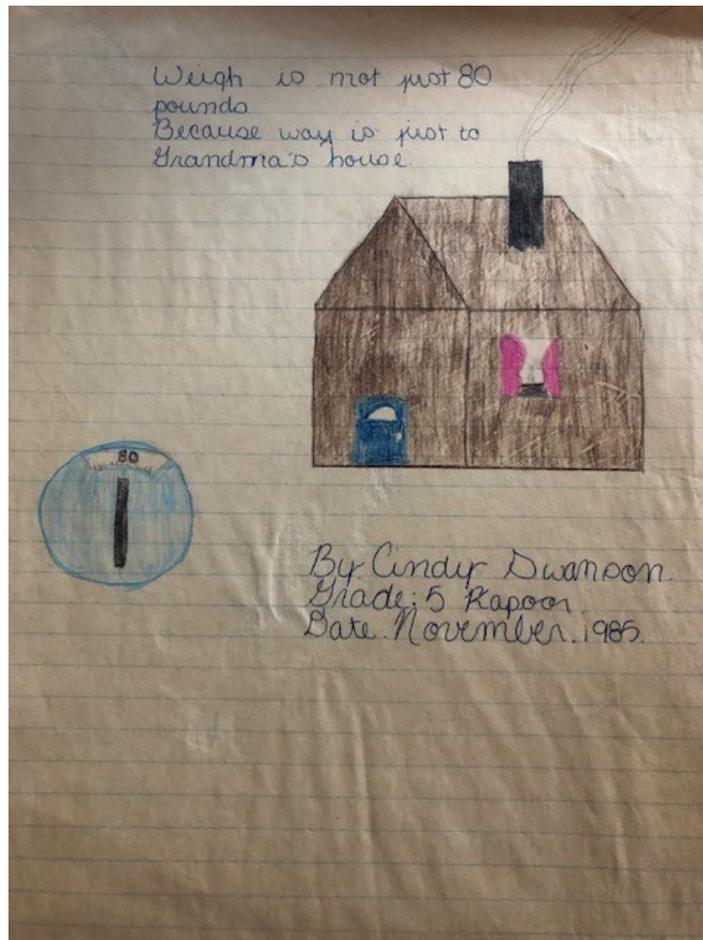


Figure 7.1. School artifact, November 1985

When I think back to the time I completed this assignment, I do not think back to the moments I had in my school curriculum making world and don't remember much about that particular time. Specifically, I don't remember much about what was happening on the school landscape, what I was learning or the relationships I was forming. And yet, I held on to this artifact from so long ago. What stays with me the most during this time was that I was temporarily living at my granny's house. It was a year filled with many changes and I was in the midst of attending my second school, out of three, in grade five. I attended this particular school because it was close to my granny's home.

My granny's home, or rather her bedroom, became the place I always turned to in moments of uncertainty. My granny was the person who I looked towards for guidance and support. The moments that stay with me during this time were moments when I was alone with her. My granny made time for me whenever I would visit her and we would often seek refuge in her bedroom, especially when I lived with her. The smell of moose hide and Vicks vapor rub filled her room and these scents remind me of her and our times together. I remember my granny and I co-composing, and traveling to each other's worlds of familial curriculum making as we shared our lives with one another. Mostly, I remember the hopes and dreams she imagined for my life.

Her wish for me to become somebody came at a cost to our familial curriculum making world and came at a cost to our relationship. I wonder now, what would have happened if my familial curriculum making worlds were not sacrificed so that I would be 'successful' in my school curriculum making world. I wonder what would have happened if the worlds my granny and I were co-composing were recognized beyond her bedroom walls. I wonder what would have happened if my granny was recognized for the knowledge she carried beyond the four walls of her home as having some value and worth. I wonder if my granny purposely told me to 'not be like her' as a way to love me into a different story, one where I would not endure the hardships and struggles she lived through. I wonder, now, if I have become the *somebody* she had in mind.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Appendix B

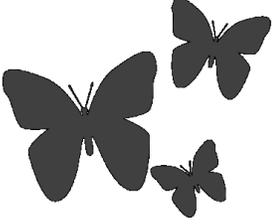
Appendix C

Appendix D

Appendix E

Appendix F

Appendix A Recruitment Poster



An invitation to 3 Indigenous families who have children entering into school for the first time (Head Start, Kindergarten or Grade 1) to share stories of experiences.



Research purpose is to understand how children and families in an urban context experience curriculum making in their homes and school.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:
Cindy Swanson
Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (CRTED)
University of Alberta
780-492-2290 or
Email: cpswanso@ualberta.ca

This study has been approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board.

Cindy Swanson
cpswanso@ualberta.ca
780-492-2290

Appendix B Recruitment Letter for Community

Recruitment Letter for Community Members/Organizations

My name is Cindy Swanson and I am a doctoral student at the University of Alberta. As a Métis/Cree woman and early childhood educator, I am interested in learning more about the experiences of Indigenous children and families as they prepare to and the enter into formal schooling environments (Head Start, K, or Grade 1). I would like to research alongside Indigenous families and children to gain insights into the personal, cultural, school, familial, and social narratives shaping their experiences. This involves meeting with Indigenous families and children, approximately 12-14 times over the next two years to hear and reflect upon their experiences.

Narrative Inquiry, the methodology I will be using to help me engage in this study, involves telling stories of experiences and may involve the sharing of artifacts, memory box items, photography and creative work, and/or the creation of life timelines. One-on-one conversations will be held in locations of participants' choosing.

The privacy and confidentiality of participants is extremely important to me and will protected at all times throughout the research. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality. Participation in this study is voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw at any time during the research study without penalty.

My research process and methods has been approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board (REB). If you have concerns about this study, you may contact the Research Ethics Office, at 492-2615. This office has no direct involvement with this project.

I would appreciate it if you could post this letter and poster in a visible spot in your organization. Thank you for your consideration of this request. For questions or clarifications, I may be reached at the contact information listed below. You may also contact my co-supervisors Dr. Jean Clandinin and/or Dr. Janice Huber at jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca and/or jhuber@ualberta.ca

Sincerely,

Cindy Swanson
PhD candidate
Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development
University of Alberta
Phone: 780-492-2290 email: cpswanso@ualberta.ca

Appendix C Informed Consent Form for Family Participants

Informed Consent Form for Family Participants

My name is _____. I agree to participate in the research study entitled, "A Narrative Inquiry alongside Urban Indigenous Children and Families into their Familial and Early School Curriculum Making Experiences." I understand that this research will be carried out by Cindy Swanson, a PhD student from the University of Alberta. I have been informed that Cindy will write field notes of her participation with me and that, on 12-14 occasions, we will engage in one-to-one tape-recorded and transcribed research conversations, where we will share observations, reflections, and understandings of my experiences as my child first prepares to, and moves into formal schools for the first time. Cindy will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants (see attached form).

I am aware that writing based on this inquiry will be submitted for dissertation requirements, publication in journals, and presentations that will be made at local, national, and international conferences. I have been informed that my anonymity as well as the anonymity of my child will be respected. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and to clarify concerns about this inquiry. I know that my participation is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any time without consequences. I understand that I have the option to withdraw all data related to my participation any time before December 31, 2016, or upon negotiation and completion of narrative accounts, whichever occurs first. I feel comfortable talking with Cindy about this possibility if it should arise. In the event I do not feel comfortable, I understand I may contact her co-supervisors Dr. Jean Clandinin and/or Dr. Janice Huber at jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca and/or jhuber@ualberta.ca

Name (Please Print)

Signature

Date

Appendix D Informed Consent Form for Child Participants

My name is _____. I give permission for my child _____ to participate in the research study entitled, “A Narrative Inquiry alongside Urban Indigenous Children and Families into their Familial and Early School Curriculum Making Experiences.” I understand that this research will be carried out by Cindy Swanson, a PhD student from the University of Alberta.

As a parent of a child participant in this study, I have been informed that Cindy will write field notes of her participation. I have been informed that on 12-14 occasions, Cindy and my child will engage in one-on-one tape-recorded and transcribed research conversations, where together, they will share observations, reflections, and understandings of my child’s experiences in schools. I understand that some of my child’s photographic and/or creative work may become part of the inquiry. Cindy will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants (see attached form).

I am aware that writing based on this inquiry will be submitted for dissertation requirements, publication in journals, and presentations that will be made at local, national, and international conferences. I have been informed that my anonymity, as well as the anonymity of my child and our family, will be respected. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality.

My child and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and to clarify concerns about this inquiry. I know that my permission for my child’s participation is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw him/her from the research at any time without consequences. In the event that my child withdraws from participating in the study, any data relating to my child that has been collected to that point will only be used with my consent. I understand that I have the option to withdraw all data related to my child’s participation any time before December 31, 2016, or upon completion of narrative accounts, whichever occurs first. I feel comfortable in talking with Cindy about this possibility if it should arise. In the event I do not feel comfortable, I understand I may contact her co-supervisors Dr. Jean Clandinin and/or Dr. Janice Huber at jean.clandinin@ualberta.ca and/or jhuber@ualberta.ca

Name (Please Print)

Signature

Date

Appendix E Ethics Approval Letter

Notification of Approval

Date: February 18, 2015
Study ID: Pro00055041
Principal Investigator: Cindy Swanson
Study Supervisor: Dorothy Clandinin
Study Title: A Narrative Inquiry alongside Urban Indigenous Children and Families and their Familial and Early School Curriculum Making Experiences
Approval Expiry Date: February-17-16

Approved Consent Form:	Approval Date	Approved Document
	18/02/2015	Informed Consent Form for Family Participants_Swanson.doc
	18/02/2015	Informed Consent Form for Child Participants_Swanson.doc

Thank you for submitting the above study to the Research Ethics Board 1. Your application has been reviewed and approved on behalf of the committee.

A renewal report must be submitted next year prior to the expiry of this approval if your study still requires ethics approval. If you do not renew on or before the renewal expiry date, you will have to re-submit an ethics application.

Approval by the Research Ethics Board does not encompass authorization to access the staff, students, facilities or resources of local institutions for the purposes of the research.

Sincerely,

William Dunn, PhD
Chair, Research Ethics Board 1

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).

Appendix F Ethics Approval Amendment

Acknowledgement Form

Date: March 09, 2015
Amendment/Renewal ID: Pro00055041_AME2
Study ID: Pro00055041
Study Title: A Narrative Inquiry alongside Urban Indigenous Children and Families and their Familial and Early School Curriculum Making Experiences
Principal Investigator: Cindy Swanson

Thank you for your submission of updated recruitment posters to the Research Ethics Board 1. We acknowledge receipt of the following documents which will now form part of the approved documentation for this study:

- Recruitment Poster dated 09/03/2015
- Recruitment Letter for Community dated 09/03/2015

Sincerely,

Ms Ann Moore
REB Coordinator, Research Ethics Board 1

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).