A Narrative Inquiry into Aboriginal Youth and Families' Experiences of Belonging as Interwoven with Identity Making

by

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Abstract

My doctoral research is shaped by my life puzzles, where as a child and youth, I searched to make sense of belonging and who I was, and wanted to be, in multiple landscapes. Research suggests that when youth do not feel a sense of belonging, they may experience disengagement from school, mental health and wellness issues, early school leaving, and other serious or potentially life threatening consequences (Azzam, 2007; Baumeister, 2011, Brendtro, Mitchell, & Jackson, 2014; Hill, 2006; Kirmayer et al., 2007; Kumar, 2016; Lambert et al., 2013; Richmond & Smith, 2012; Yi et al., 2015). There is limited research on children and youths' experiences of belonging and identity making. The experiences of belonging and identity making are least understood for youth of Aboriginal heritage (Brendtro, Brokenleg, &Van Bockern, 1990, 2005; Brokenleg, 1998; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Fearn, 2006). Set against these gaps, this narrative inquiry explored puzzles around the experiences of Aboriginal youth and their families, both in and out of school. Framed by understandings of identity making in terms of both who youth are, and are becoming, I wondered how youth make sense of belonging while negotiating their identity making.

My doctoral research is situated in the context of a study funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Alberta Centre for Child, Family, and Community Research (Caine et al., 2010). The overall study is a narrative inquiry into the educational experiences of urban Aboriginal youth and their families at home, in communities, and in schools. Drawing on a conceptualization of narrative inquiry as both phenomenon and methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I was positioned as a researcher within a research team in which we lived alongside approximately thirty youth in an after-school arts-based

inquiry club for the 2010–2012 school years. As I came to know youth in the after-school arts club, I invited three early adolescent Aboriginal girls to be participants in this doctoral study. Eventually they brought me to their families (two mothers, a grandmother, and kinship caregiver) who also agreed to participate. Attending to dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), this research with youth and their families was an intergenerational narrative inquiry around participants' experiences of belonging and identity making.

Field texts (data) included identity collages, photography work, artifacts created both in and outside of the club, field notes, and transcripts of 65 conversations co-composed over three years. Three narrative accounts, one for each youth, were co-composed alongside youth and families. In a further analysis I discerned three resonant threads across the narrative accounts: belonging and connectedness to family; belonging and connectedness to place(s) and the place of home; and intergenerational reverberations. The last thread includes institutional and familial narratives, and living up to and learning to try on stories of belonging. I offered personal, practical, theoretical, and social justifications including an understanding of experiences of belonging infused with a "spirit of belonging." This intergenerational, multi-perspectival narrative inquiry offers potential for those who are open to come alongside to co-create more "educative" (Dewey, 1938) and inclusive communities in relation with Aboriginal youth and families.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to children, youth, and families,

in search of belonging,

where

what they know first,

their families,

home places,

who they are,

who they wish to be,

and their “from the heart” stories

reverberating through the generations

matter.

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Chapter 1: We Live in Stories

> In a fractured age, when cynicism is god, here is a possible heresy: 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, or we are also living the stories we planted-knowingly or unknowingly—in ourselves. We live 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)

Okri (1997), a Nigerian storyteller, calls me to consider the stories that I knowingly and unknowingly "live by" and "live in" (p. 46). I wonder about the stories that live in me. As I ponder what "stories planted early" or "along the way" means, and how I might live and tell these stories, I find myself thinking of Greene's (1995) idea of imaginatively returning to early landscapes. In recalling her own "shapes of childhood," Greene describes how the search is not a "memory game"; rather, it is a search "intended to restore a visibility to the shapes of a primordial, perceived landscape . . . [which] has the potential to make visible what has sunk out of sight, of restoring a lost vision" (p. 77).

In searching for my shapes of childhood, I think about the stories that stay with me, stories about what I once thought belonging meant, and what I still sometimes think it means. Planted long ago were stories where I searched for sameness as I tried to fit in and belong, even if it meant continually changing who I was. Living in these stories were worries about whether or not I truly belonged. All the while I wondered how to belong.

Returning to Greene's words, I understand the importance of sharing narrative beginnings, which brings me to this inquiry into the storied experiences of belonging and

identity making. I recognize, as I tell these stories, they are from my "perceived landscapes," told from my present day vantage point, and "layered over with many rational meanings over time" (Greene, 1995, p. 73). As Greene reminds me, "although [I] cannot return to the landscape of those pre-reflective days" (p. 73), I can be "wakeful" and present to my storied landscape by reflecting on them.

Guided by Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) metaphorical three-dimensional inquiry space[1], I share narrative beginnings to ground my research puzzles around belonging and identity making. In multiple landscapes, I struggled to make sense of belonging, and who I was and wanted to be. Embedded within these stories are the personal, social, theoretical, and practical justifications for this doctoral research. I begin with my storied landscape of how I saw others and myself, and why I desired sameness.

Narrative Beginnings

Sliding Back: The Little Shack on the Block

Growing up, I often felt like I was different, yet I longed to be the same as other children. When I was 4, the hope for a more prosperous life led my parents to move my siblings and me to Canada to join our relatives in Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta. My aunt and uncle invited my family to live in their developed basement. They owned a Chinese restaurant, and my mother worked as a cook, my father as a server, and my brother and sister as bus staff. I was employed as the restaurant's weekend dishwasher at the age of 6. I felt there was little

[1] I drew on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000, p. 50) metaphorical three-dimensional inquiry space, in which they describe attending to *sociality*, *temporality*, and *place* through looking inward and outward (sociality), backward and forward through a temporal lens while also attending to place or a sequence of places. By *inward*, they mean toward the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetics reactions, and moral dispositions. By *outward*, they mean toward the external conditions, such as the environment. *Backward and forward* refers to a sense of temporality (past, present, and future).

choice but to work at the restaurant. Having a babysitter was too expensive, not to mention unheard of. Although it was never explicitly said, it was unacceptable to have strangers take care of us, or at least this was the familial narrative that I learned to live by.

When I turned 11, we moved to a small town because my parents wanted to run their own restaurant; this began a series of moves. Whenever our restaurant lease was up, our family moved again to where opportunity took us. The next place was to a village, and then another village. When we first moved to the small town of Wainwright, I was happy to live in a government-subsidized townhouse, despite the far walk to the restaurant. Even though our townhouse was not in the best of condition, it looked the same as others on the block. No one house stood out. My family did not stand out. In this way, I think it gave me a sense of belonging and an identity—that we were not less than, but more like, everyone else.

In the summer following our move, just before the new school year started, my parents saved up enough money to buy a house across from the Catholic school where my siblings and I would attend school. Although we were not Catholic, my siblings and I were given permission to attend. Moving so close to our school, I think, was a huge relief for our parents, because we could easily and safely walk to and from school ourselves while they were at work. When I first saw this "new" house, new was the last word that came to mind. At the sight of the tiny, decrepit house for the first time, my heart sank. I could not believe this shabby mess was going to be *our* house. I was scared to go inside because it looked like an abandoned shack, or perhaps a shack that should be abandoned. Could people actually live inside it? I could not stop thinking about what my new friends would think of this shabby house, which I felt revealed my family's true identity—that is, we were not like other families. I was ashamed to live in this house that seemed to represent everything I did not want to be.

Over the next few years, there were many times I wanted to complain to my parents but I tried my best not to. I did not want my parents to feel bad about something I knew they could not change. I knew they could not afford an upgrade. Adding to this, I felt guilty for being ungrateful with all the struggles and sacrifices they had to make in order for us to move to Canada. While my parents seemed proud of this house, I did not understand why. I was puzzled how they could be proud of something that identified us as being out of place and as not belonging.

I wanted to leave this house as soon as possible, but there was permanency as my parents leased to own this house from a couple who agreed to accept monthly payments. It was the first house we owned in Canada. The images of the shack house are engrained in my memory. The shabby looking exterior matched the interior of the house. Inside was run down carpet that blanketed the old, slanted floors in the kitchen. I remember it was impossible to play a game of marbles. Our kitchen consisted of an old fridge, stove, and tiny kitchen table. I hated that kitchen. It was weird to have carpet in a kitchen and I was scared I would spill something. I never fully accepted our shack house because I did not like how it made me feel somehow inferior to others.

We were already noticeably different from the other children as we were the only visible minorities in our kindergarten to grade K–12 school. Living in the shack right across from our school, everyone could see that we were poor. Our shack house seemed to amplify just how different we were. I felt like I could not hide from this identity, a symbol that I did not belong. This feeling of not fitting in was amplified by other differences. Looking back, as I think about the stories I lived and told, and continued to live and tell, viewing myself as poor

and less than quickly became part of the stories I lived by. My identity shaped, and was also shaped by, my sense of belonging.

Most of my friends lived in big houses. They often invited me over to play. While my friends did not live in mansions, from the vantage point of a 12-year-old, it felt like they did. My friends had two story houses with yards. One of my friends even had a trampoline in her backyard. None of them had carpet in their kitchens or mice in their closets. I wondered what it would be like to live in a house that one of my friends might admire. I felt like I was living out a cover story[2] where I was the same as my friends. I was always surprised that my friends never said any unkind words to me about the shack house. My friends frequently came over to my house, some invited, some just dropping in. Yet, even with friends who seemed to accept me and our shack house, I felt I still lived in a cover story where I tried to hide that I was actually an outsider.

These were the stories that I planted in myself of who I was, as my identity appeared to be interwoven with my sense of belonging. These puzzles around how to belong, who I was, and who I wanted to be, only solidified my search for sameness, and my attempts to elevate myself to being more than "less than." The walls of the tiny, paint chipped shack house felt confining, *defining*, to me. I longed for our old townhouse, which looked the same as the other houses on the block. I thought belonging meant sameness and, in order to belong, I had to be more like others. I wanted to be like my friends. I wanted a kitchen that did not have carpet. I did not want to wish that my house was the nicer one next door, or for that matter, any other

[2] Clandinin and Connelly (1996) wrote of cover stories, noting, "Teachers live and tell cover stories when they find themselves in out-of-classroom places trying to "fit within an acceptable range of the story of school [...]. Cover stories enable teachers whose teacher stories are marginalized by whatever the current story of school is to continue to practice and sustain their teacher stories" (p. 25). I refer to their notion of living and telling cover stories as a way to reflect on the stories I covered and silenced in my search to belong.

house on the street. I wanted to be proud of who I was and have a sense that I really belonged so I silenced the stories where I felt like I did not.

I yearned to belong in other ways too. In order to belong, I wanted to be equal to my friends. I wanted to participate in the same activities they did. From grades seven to nine, even though my mother forbade me, I went to Bible camp with friends whose parents offered to drive me. I loved Bible camp and one day it occurred to me that adopting the Catholic religion, which was all around me, was another way I could belong. I remember when I told my mother of my revelation about becoming Catholic like all my friends at school. This proposal upset my mother. She told me that we were Buddhists, not Catholics, end of story. I was frustrated with my mother because I did not think she understood me or who I was. She was hindering my ability to belong. I did not understand why she sent me to a Catholic school if I could not be the same as others.

I told myself a story that if I became a Catholic, I would belong. How could I fit in, especially during school mass, if I was the only child in my class left sitting on the church pew? Feeling like an outsider, I watched my friends stand up and leave in order to receive the Eucharist from our school's priest. My sister, who knew that I, we, were not Catholics and had never gone through any communal ritual, was horrified one day as she and her friends witnessed me receive the sacred Eucharist bread when the other children in my class did. Her friends' story of how I sinned, coupled with my guilt, led to my decision to confess my "sin" of posing as a Catholic to my teacher. I feared the consequence of this action. One day after school, I confessed to my teacher, telling her the story of how I took the sacred, holy bread even though I was not Catholic. To my relief, my teacher smiled and said it was okay that I ate the bread and assured me that I would not, when I nervously asked her, "Will I go to hell?"

Once I confessed that I was not Catholic, I was sad that I had to go back to being the "other" and different as my sense of belonging slipped away once again. Looking back, I see how strongly I was trying to belong, and how this desire to belong, to fit in, was shifting my identity.

As I moved through grade school, I continued to cover and silence these stories of feeling like I was different and did not belong. I was afraid I would be discovered if I were to uncover my feelings and thoughts of not belonging. In my search to belong, I learned to tell secret stories and cover stories[3]. I wonder if my parents also did, in their own ways. I wonder now if my parents struggled to make sense of how to belong in a country that was foreign to them, linguistically, culturally, and economically. I wonder now with whom they could have shared these "wordless stories" (Neumann, 1997, p. 107). I wonder who would have listened and sought to understand their experiences around belonging and becoming as their lives were composed alongside me and my siblings.

"I Hate Rice!"

My dad was tasked with making our school lunches. Every day, it was the same ham and mustard on bread. After a while I hated the taste of mustard but I did not tell my dad. Having boring ham and mustard was far better than bringing the smelly and strange looking Chinese food we ate at home. At school, I wanted to eat the same foods as the other children. Eventually, I began to also reject eating rice at home. I openly declared my disdain for it. Sometimes I even yelled, "I HATE RICE!"

[3] Secret stories are "stories told only to others in safe places both on and off the school landscapes." Cover stories are "stories told to maintain a sense of continuity with the dominant stories of school" (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 7).

Eating Chinese food drew unwanted attention to me at school. I remember bringing Chinese food in my school lunch once and it felt like all my classmates were staring at me. I think some even scrunched up their noses at the smell. At least if I had ham and mustard sandwiches, I could blend in. I knew my dad was trying his best, but even with his best effort, I envied the other children's lunches. One day I begged my dad to buy Oreo cookies that I heard the other children talk about at school. He bought the cookies and I remember feeling happy because it was something I had that was the same as the other children; from then on, my lunches always included Oreo cookies. I happily shared them with classmates. I think my dad may have fed my entire class Oreos by the end of the school year. As I tell this story, I now see how unknowingly some of the stories I planted in myself, or that were planted in me by others, continued to reverberate, defining and shaping my experience of belonging and identity making as I tried changing how other people might see me, in order to fit in.

A Remedial Past

I remember being pulled out of math class for what was described to me as a special class. Besides the embarrassment of standing out when the teacher pulled me out of math class, through my 8-year-old eyes, walking through the hallway to the room that was clearly marked *Remedial Instruction* was a march through the hall of shame. I did not understand why I was pulled out. As a child, I was timid and quiet at school. I remember the teacher saying that I was an English as a Second Language (ESL) student and the teachers could help me. I remember being confused because I spoke more English than Chinese at home, so much so that my family considered English to be my first language.

Even more confusing was that I thought I was smart. I read chapter books at home and I was a regular at the local library situated behind our restaurant. I was starting to run out of

different book series to read. I read so much that my mom used to complain because reading distracted me from serving customers. Up to this point, my mother and I lived by stories of me as a smart, good student. I remained confused at the contradiction between the stories I lived and told at home with my mother and in the community with the librarians, and the school story where I was an ESL student. However, I did not question the teachers. Eventually the remedial student story of who I was replaced the former story I had of myself, the one where I was a smart, good student. I wonder now if this new label might have temporarily covered over the story my mother once told of me, the one where I was a smart daughter.

In that small remedial room, my embarrassment and frustration only grew as I was frequently rewarded for playing the easy board games, periodically receiving ribbons for my efforts. I played much more challenging trivia games with my friends outside of school. I remember growing more silent that year. My friends, out of support or perhaps out of pity, occasionally patted me on the back on my way out to remedial class. I wonder if they, too, were confused because they used to think I was like them. I did not feel at ease in this world I lived in at school.

These pull outs for remedial instruction continued for most of grade 3 until near the end of the school year when I wrote my first set of standardized tests. Remedial instruction stopped abruptly after that. The teacher never told me why it stopped. In the following years, this story stayed with me. I found myself always wanting to prove that I was a smart, good student. I progressed through the rest of my schooling, fighting this story where I had to prove that I was NOT a remedial person. Even my mother's story of me changed as she started telling my family and her friends, I was in the 'dumb person' class. It was mortifying as I found myself living out an identity that my teacher planted of me, in me, and, in others. Well into adulthood,

I remained silent about my remedial past but, as Okri (1997) reminds me, "Even in silence [I am] living out stories" (p. 114) and living in stories. Stories live in me. Stories I planted in myself inevitably shaped who I was, or who I thought I was, for years to come.

It wasn't until I was a teenager in a rural high school that the new principal invited me to look at my cumulative file in his office. I had never seen these records before and I was always curious about the exams I took in grade 3, the year that I learned of my 'dumbness' and was cured of it. My grade 3 test scores showed that I was reading at a grade 6 level and writing two years above grade level. This news took me back to a time before remedial instruction where I once lived by stories of being a smart, good student. I wondered if my test results had anything to do with the abrupt ending of remedial instruction. I wondered if my grade 3 teacher believed the remedial instruction helped me and my achievement was credited to that program. I silenced this story that I learned to live by and that lived in me. Even as an adult, for many years, I did not share this remedial story with others (Chung, 2008).

Cookie-Cutter Home

When I think back to earlier landscapes, it felt like my life was anything but posh or privileged. Of course, I am learning now that the word privileged is a relative term, but I defined and understood it first in terms of perceived wealth and possessions. Somehow the homes I lived in through the years seemed to be symbolic for me, of me, representing my stories of who I was and my sense of belonging. I did not always own a home in what some would consider a boutique neighbourhood. A narrative in which people story me as coming from a stylish life is a story in which I feel uncomfortable. My current home might be described as a cookie-cutter model because it looks similar or identical to other townhouses in the neighbourhood. I juxtapose this sameness to my childhood homes, which were diverse. In

recalling my shapes of childhood (Greene, 1995), I felt culturally, visibly, and socioeconomically different. Looking back, I wonder how I was constructed in others' eyes and how I might have viewed others.

I am a beginning academic and a teacher who has received formal accolades. I am a homeowner in a perceived "boutique" area of the city. These were all stories that seemed to fit into a coherent narrative. I recall being told by others that they could easily see me fit in anywhere. For instance, I have a friend from a wealthy upbringing who once compared our lives with someone whom she referred to as being from a middle-lower class, adding she was "not like us." I remember wondering what she meant by this. My friend's words stayed with me because I felt uneasy and irritated at her comment. I thought these words had an air of arrogance that seemed to reinforce a dichotomy between us and them, as though we were better. Looking back, I wonder if my uneasiness was really with myself, because inside, I felt like a fraud. I felt like I was "them" but with an identity masked by a cookie cutter two-story home in a nice part of the city. Even as an adult, was I living out and living in a story that others planted and transmitted for me, about me, of me? I was living in stories I planted in myself. I dwelt in the tension that somehow my good friend fixed me as "us" and as someone who was different or better than the "other." How was it that my friend did not see the "other" in me? If she knew more of my past life, would I then be seen to her as the "other"? Does being "other" mean that one is an outsider and does not belong?

Okri's (1997) words also call me to imagine and re-imagine how I constructed myself in early landscapes. I wonder now about the stories that I lived by, lived in, and that live in me. Okri refers to "stories [I] planted—knowingly or unknowingly—in [myself]" (p. 46). I wonder how people like the person labelled middle-lower-class, or the "other," were constructed. I

wonder about how I was constructed in others' eyes, living out the "stories planted in [me] early or along the way" (Okri, p. 46). I wonder about the stories that have shaped who I was, who I am, and who I want to be. I wonder if these same stories shaped my sense of belonging. I wonder how I might look beyond categories that I once thought defined me, and others who lived alongside me.

Neumann (1997) wrote that stories are only partially composed of text, and are also "composed of silence for which no text can exist" (p. 92). Her words remind me to pay more attention to what is absent than to what is present, more to what remains unsaid than to what is said, and more to what is unknown than to what is known. Neumann's words helped me to think about experiences of belonging and identity making, experiences that I storied and those I silenced. I thought about the "spaces between words" in the living and the telling of my stories (p. 111). Neumann (1997) wrote of how "silence may intertwine with articulated story, supporting its very existence as story, but . . . silence may itself bear story" (p. 111). Her words make me think about how I embody stories as stories live in me and I live in stories (Okri, 1997). I understand that it is important to inquire more deeply into how some told and silenced stories may have been "moving forces" (Dewey, 1938, p. 38) in shaping my shifting sense of belonging and identity making as I searched and re-searched to understand who I am and who I want to be.

Sliding into the Present: Who I Am as a Teacher

> *Ji-Sook threw up before writing a test at school—she wants to be a successful citizen. Another Korean child told her she "talked funny" and should not act "so Korean" but more like everyone else. Ji-Sook cried many tears. She*

changed the way she dressed and spoke. I wanted her to change her name to Elizabeth so she would fit in but Ji-Sook wants to keep her name.

(Transcript, Mrs. Han, April 20, 2007, in Chung, 2008)[4]

These stories lived and told by a mother, Mrs. Han, and her 8-year-old daughter, Ji-Sook (pseudonym), newly immigrated to Canada, lingered as I wondered alongside this family about what belonging might mean, both to them and in the diverse, multicultural classrooms where I taught. In a 14-month-long narrative inquiry[5] in an Alberta grade 3 classroom, I learned more of the children and their families' storied experiences as their identities were shaped by a desire to belong. Before the complexities of lives were made visible to me as a teacher-researcher, I wondered if I had attended to the storied experiences of children and youth and their families, or had I focused more on the delivery of subject matter[6] as I carried out the "curriculum-as-planned" (Aoki, 1993, 2005). Sliding back, I wondered about the stories that were being planted in Ji-Sook about what it means to belong.

My master's inquiry was a study of the storied experiences of children and teachers. As it unfolded, I found myself particularly drawn to one newly immigrated child, Elizabeth, who I learned later was also named Ji-Sook, and her mother. Just as I, too, had struggled to make sense of belonging as an immigrant child, I found myself wondering about their experiences of

[4] This was a recorded conversation from my master's study that stayed with me and that I am drawing forward to help me think about children and their families' experiences around belonging and identity making.

[5] My master's study was a part of a national multisite study entitled *A Narrative Inquiry into Children's and Teachers' Curriculum Making Experience in an Achievement Testing Era*. This three-year narrative inquiry was situated across school sites in Alberta, Nova Scotia, and Saskatchewan. Drs. D. Jean Clandinin, Janice Huber, Anne Murray Orr, and M. Shaun Murphy were granted funding for the research by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

[6] Schwab (1973) described five bodies of experiences which must be represented in curriculum. The four curriculum commonplaces are subject matter, teacher, learner, and milieu. The fifth body, the process of curriculum making, requires attention and equal representation of all four commonplaces to occur. Schwab (1973) noted, "Each representative of a body of experience must discover the experience of the other and the relevance of these radically different experiences to curriculum making for a partial coalescence of these bodies of experiences to occur" (p. 504).

belonging and identity making. Sliding to the present, I wondered about the stories they lived by and lived in. I wondered about stories that might live in them still.

I was envious of Elizabeth's courage to bring homemade Korean sushi rolls on a field trip. It was amazing how she munched on her seaweed snacks happily despite the curious stares from the other children. I recalled my childhood and I felt so different from her, for as a child, I did not bring authentic, smelly Chinese food to school. At first it seemed as though Elizabeth and I were very different. I storied Elizabeth as a confident, worry-free little girl. Even though she was new to the school, I did not think she worried about belonging like I did when I was her age. She was the same age that I had been when I was "cured of my dumbness." It was not until one snowy recess that I began to see how I might live in Elizabeth's stories and how she lived in mine.

I noticed Elizabeth sitting on a bench by herself, clutching a book about space. That day she explained to me that she wanted to get an A. I later learned she had assured her mother that she would get into Harvard one day and eventually take care of their family (Chung, 2008). This image of Elizabeth reminded of me of how I spent most of my schooling, where I, too, worked hard to be known as a smart, good student. I continued to attempt to tell a different story in the hope I could erase the remedial identity of me planted long ago in me. However, it was not only in Elizabeth's quest for high academic achievement in which I saw myself in her world and her in mine. The image of Elizabeth reading a book, just as I did as a little girl, lingered with me. Sometimes I read for knowledge, but often I read for escape, especially during times when I wished my life, and who I was, were otherwise. I wondered if there were multiple and more complex plotlines in Elizabeth's worlds. As I continued to live alongside

Elizabeth and her mother, I realized that our stories were not separate but intertwined, as we lived in stories where we both wanted to belong.

Elizabeth began to share more of her stories with me. She was conflicted between using her English (Elizabeth) or Korean name (Ji-Sook). As trust grew between us and our relationship deepened, she wanted me to call her by her Korean name. I later learned about the disagreement Ji-Sook had with her mother about using her Korean name. Mrs. Han wanted Ji-Sook to use her English name, a name that was like everyone else's name. I wondered what belonging meant to Mrs. Han. I wondered about the other stories she lived by and lived in as I reread a card that Mrs. Han asked a Korean neighbour to write in English for her.

> *Dear Teacher,*
>
> *I appreciate that you always look after my daughter, Elizabeth, with love. Since the first day of school she has enjoyed everything with pleasure. Because she has come to Canada not even a year ago, she would have some problems with English and with Canadian Culture. Please understand that and Elizabeth and I will do our best to help her to get along with it well. I always hope to see you at school someday, but due to my lack of English, my cares weigh heavily on my chest. I feel sorry that although I'd like to see you at school, my lack of English makes me worried. I wonder if Elizabeth doesn't bother you during classes.* (Mrs. Han's letter, October 8, 2007, in Chung, 2008, p. 24)

Mrs. Han's letter stayed with me as I thought about how she was experiencing belonging as she lived alongside her daughter. She spoke of her daughter's problems with English and with Canadian culture, but also of her own "lack of English." I wondered if they felt different, and "less than," as they bumped against dominant narratives. Through engaging

in a year-long narrative inquiry alongside Ji-Sook and Mrs. Han, I came to understand more of the cultural, social, institutional, and intergenerational familial narratives that shaped their experiences of belonging and shifted their stories to live by (Clandinin et al., 2006; Young, 2003). As I metaphorically laid my experiences alongside theirs, I also began to wonder more about the interconnectedness of belonging and identity making.

Belonging and Identity Making: Stories that Continue to Live in Me

Through narratively inquiring into my storied experiences, puzzles around belonging and identity making[7] have continued to stay with me. As a child, teenager, and in moments of adulthood, I still found myself seeking sameness and silencing my stories to live by. I keep Okri's (1997) words close to me, "If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives" (p. 46). As I lived and told the stories that I live by, and lived in, of who I was and what it meant for me to belong—I began to shift and relive these stories. As I engaged more deeply in relational research alongside Ji-Sook and her mother, I came to understand the importance of knowing more about others' "worlds" (Lugones, 1987) and of their experiences of belonging in order to have a "sense of the whole" (Setterfield, 2006, p. 59). By whole I meant who they are and are becoming. I wondered about the experiences around belonging for children and youth, particularly for those who view themselves as the "other." I wondered about the youth who bumped up against institutional, cultural, and social narratives. I wondered about the youth who are over-represented in certain deficit statistical stories, with little known about their experiences. I wondered how youth and their families make sense of who they are, and are becoming, both in and out of school, in their experiences of belonging. I wondered how, and if, belonging and identity are interwoven as I awakened to their interconnections

[7] In chapter 2, I discuss theoretical concepts of identity.

within my storied landscapes, and in my narrative inquiry alongside Ji-Sook and her mother.

Coming to the Research Puzzle

Guided by my autobiographical narrative inquiry into my lived and told stories as a child and youth where I felt less than, and different from, other children, my doctoral research is shaped by my life puzzles. My research puzzle sought to understand children and youths' experiences of belonging and identity making. In this study, I explored puzzles around the experiences of Aboriginal youth and their families, both in and out of school. I wondered if youths' experiences of belonging are interwoven with identity making. I wondered how children and youth make sense of belonging while negotiating their identity making.

As a teacher-researcher[8] I began by wondering if, and how, I attended to the experiences of students I taught over the years. Following the completion of my master's degree I returned to the classroom, and continued to wonder about my past and present interactions with diverse groups of children, how I might have unknowingly storied them through planting stories of belonging and who they are, I scripted *of* them, *for* them. As puzzles around belonging and identity making continued to stay with me, I decided to pursue this research in my doctoral degree.

[8] In my master's study "Composing a Curriculum of Lives" (Chung, 2009), I engaged in a year-long narrative inquiry positioned as a teacher-researcher.

The Larger Funded Study

My study around belonging and identity making was situated within a larger study, titled *A Narrative Inquiry into the Schooling Experiences of Aboriginal*[9] *Youth and Families*. The study, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, was a collaborative conceptualization among representatives of Aboriginal community organizations, traditional knowledge holders (Elders), a district school board policy representative, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers and researchers from education and nursing. The larger study engaged Aboriginal youth and their families and narratively inquired into their experiences in order to develop a deeper knowledge and awareness of the multiple narratives that shaped their experiences in their home, community, and schools. This study followed an earlier narrative inquiry into the experiences of youth who leave school early[10] (Clandinin et al., 2010).

Since I had undertaken a narrative inquiry with Dr. D. Jean Clandinin in my master's work and worked with Dr. Florence Glanfield in another narrative inquiry, it seemed that my doctoral work would be a strong fit within the new study. My research puzzles were situated around the experiences of children, youth, and their families' experiences of belonging and identity making. As a teacher and beginning researcher, I continued to wonder how to create more inclusive and educative spaces in schools alongside youth and families. While I had experience working with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, I knew little about the

[9] Our research team used the word *Aboriginal* to describe individuals who identify themselves as First Nations, Métis, and/or Inuit. However, as McNaughton and Rock (2003) stated, "The terms 'Aboriginal' and 'non-Aboriginal' are used provisionally" with an understanding that "they do not accurately reflect the degree of actual diversity among the individuals and communities they are used to represent. There is no one 'Aboriginal' identity, just as there is no one 'non-Aboriginal' identity" (p. 3).

[10] In Clandinin et al.'s (2010) final report *Composing Lives: A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Youth Who Left School Early*, they refer to "leavers" as "students who leave school (not including transfers) before they graduate from high school with a regular diploma" (p. 11).

experiences of children and youth of Aboriginal heritage. In the literature, I found there was an abundance of statistical reports *on* Aboriginal youth, but limited research *with* Aboriginal children and youth around their experiences of belonging and identity making.

As part of the research team, I was afforded the opportunity to work alongside Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers, Elders, and community members in both the larger study and my doctoral research. In the summer of 2010, we were granted ethics approval from the Faculties of Education, Extension Augustana and Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. After obtaining ethics approval and operational approval from the selected school board, we negotiated entry into a junior high school, the physical place for the first part of the research. We negotiated a time outside regular school hours where we could meet with youth. The transition from working with primary aged children to working with youth in junior high school was of great interest to me.

Situated in Western Canada, the larger study, *A Narrative Inquiry into the School Experiences of Aboriginal Youth and Their Families*, was located in an urban junior high school (grades 7–9). The school demographic consisted mostly of youth from low-to average socioeconomic backgrounds. According to the principal of this school, over 40% of the student population were likely to have Aboriginal ancestry; however, only a small number of these students chose to self-identify on the mandatory registration as Aboriginal (Team meeting, September 2010). Positioned as a researcher, I worked collaboratively with other researchers alongside approximately 30 youth in an after-school arts-based inquiry club for the 2010–2012 school years. All youth in the school were invited to join the art-based inquiry club, which met weekly during after school hours. We invited youth to participate in the club through school

announcements, posters, and greeting them in school hallways. As we came to meet youth, they invited their friends to come to the club.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Frameworks

A Narrative Conceptualization of Experience

My research, a narrative inquiry into Aboriginal youth and their families' experiences of belonging and identity making, is grounded in Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) narrative view of experience. Over 25 years ago, Clandinin and Connelly began to develop narrative inquiry, a way to study experience as both phenomenon under study and methodology. Working from, and with, Dewey's (1938) theory of experience, Clandinin and Connelly developed a narrative view of experience in which experience was understood as a storied phenomenon (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, 2006). I was drawn to the epistemological and ontological commitments of narrative inquiry that attend to the relational, ethical, contextual, and temporal unfolding of lives.

Dewey's (1938) theory of experience is most often cited as the philosophical underpinning of narrative inquiry as his two criteria of experience, interaction and continuity enacted in situations, provides the foundation for attending to experience through the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space with dimensions of temporality, place and sociality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Within this three-dimensional inquiry space, experience is conceptualized as relational, temporal, and continuous. Within narrative inquiry, human experience is the most fundamental reality we have (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). In order to more attend to the experiences of Aboriginal youth and their families around belonging and identity making, attending to their lived and told storied experiences is central.

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) describe the relational ontological, epistemological, and methodological commitments of narrative inquiry in which a Deweyan (1938) theory of experience is central. In this transactional view of experience, relations are built "between a human being and her environment—her life, community, world" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39). In this way, the conception of reality and knowledge is relational, temporal, and continuous between a researcher and participants. As a narrative inquirer, the relational ontological, epistemological, and methodological commitments guide me as I attend to the experiences of Aboriginal youth and their families. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) write that

> the narrative view of experience within 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 another, and writing, and interpreting texts. (pp. 42–43)

Inspired by Dewey's (1938) view of experience, the common places of narrative inquiry, temporality, sociality, and place serve as a conceptual framework (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). One of Dewey's criteria of experience, *continuity*, points towards how "independent of desire or intent, every experience lives in future experiences" (1938, p. 27) and that "every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p. 35)**.** The criterion of continuity (Dewey, 1938) highlights the unfolding temporality of experience with an understanding that past experiences live in, and shape, future experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) draw on

Dewey's view that people are always positioned on a continuum of experiences, and emphasize that "each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future" (p. 2).

Dewey's (1938) other criterion of experience, *interaction*, which he stresses is inseparable from the concept of *situation*, highlights that "an experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment" (p. 43)**.** In understanding youth and families' experiences, as well as my storied experiences around belonging and identity making, I pull forward Dewey's (1938) notion of the dynamic interplay and interaction of the two criteria. He notes:

> The two principles of continuity and interaction are not separate from each other. They intercept and unite. . . . Different situations succeed one another. But because of the principle of continuity something is carried over from the earlier to the later ones. As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts. He does not find himself living in another world but in a different part of an aspect of one and the same world. What he has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situation which follows. (p. 44)

Viewed this way, the interplay of Dewey's criteria helped me think about how the stories I live and tell of belonging and identity making, in different situations, with different people, shaped my experience of belonging and identity making within multiple landscapes. I cannot simply erase, dismiss, or hide stories that may be tension filled, for these are the stories I embody, and that shape and re-shape my stories to live by as a child, and now as a mother, teacher, and researcher.

Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space prompt me to "move back and forth between the personal, and the social, simultaneously thinking about the past, present, and future . . . in ever-expanding social milieus" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 3). In my narrative beginnings, represented in part in Chapter 1, I came to see how I embodied particular experiences around belonging and identity making from childhood into adulthood. Dewey's (1938) words express something of how I felt as I awakened to how these stories had become part of who I was, am, and am becoming. He wrote, "Just as no man live or dies to himself, so no experience lives and dies to itself. Wholly independent of desire or intent, every experience lives on in further experience" (Dewey, 1938, p. 27). I recognize now that I have unknowingly embodied and forwarded stories around belonging and identity making, stories that were planted early or along the way.

As I sought to understand the experiences of belonging and identity making of Aboriginal youth and their families, I recalled Dewey's (1938) words, "Every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves towards and into" (p. 38). In this view, all experiences are important, but, as Dewy also noted, "experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other" (p. 25); speaking more to this, he distinguishes between "mis-educative" and "educative" experiences (p. 25). Dewey wrote that an experience may be mis-educative when it "has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience" (p. 25). For experiences to be "educative," they must point to creating conditions and "opportunities for . . . continuing growth in new directions" (Dewey, 1938, p. 25). As I inquired into the stories I lived and told around belonging and identity making, I began to awaken to how some of my experiences around belonging and identity making were mis-educative rather than educative. I found myself in a state of stasis as I silenced stories

around belonging because I feared I would still be defined by these stories; I drew upon these understandings as they helped me stay awake to the possibilities of telling and retelling stories as I imagined new ways of being and belonging for myself alongside youth and their families.

Dewey's (1938) criteria of experience and Carr's (1986) concept of narrative coherence in people's lives highlighted the importance of attending to youth and their families' stories. Carr (1986) describes the notion of narrative coherence in the following way:

> Our lives admit of sometimes more, sometimes less coherence; they hang together reasonably well, but they occasionally tend to fall apart. Coherence seems to be a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not. Things need to make sense. We feel the lack of sense when it goes missing. The unity of self, not as an underlying identity but as a life that hangs together, is not a pre-given condition but an achievement. Some of us succeed, it seems, better than others. None of us succeeds totally. We keep at it. What we are doing is telling and retelling, to ourselves and to others, the story of what we are about and what we are. (p. 97)

Carr's (1986) words helped me attend to the lived and told stories the youth and their families carry, stories that may give their lives a sense of coherence, particularly around their experiences of belonging and who they are and are becoming.

A Narrative Conceptualization of Identity

Clandinin and Connelly's (1998) narrative conceptualization of identity as *stories to live by,* informed my research. "Stories to live by" is a narrative, experiential conceptualization of identity. This term is situated with Connelly and Clandinin's (1995) understanding of school knowledge landscapes with in-classroom and out-of-classroom places, which are different

knowledge contexts**.** Knowledge landscapes are not static sites but are temporal (past, present, and future) places, which shape and are re-shaped by those who live within them and by outside influences and forces**.** Clandinin et al. (2006) wrote of "stories to live by" as fluid, multiple, and shifting, composed and recomposed as they are shaped by the past and present knowledge landscapes in which a teacher lives and works. Teacher identity is "a unique embodiment of each teacher's stories to live by, stories shaped by knowledge composed on landscapes past and present in which a teacher lives and works" (p. 9). Clandinin et al. (2006) expanded the conceptualization of attending to "stories to live by" to include the identity making experiences of youth, children, and families.

Noting the multiplicity and temporality of identity making, Clandinin et al. (2006) described how "Stories to live by are multiple, fluid, and shifting continuously composed and recomposed in the moment-to-moment living alongside" (p. 9). Understanding identities as multiple selves returned me to Minh-ha's (1989) words. She encouraged me to view ourselves as having "infinite layers" that "form the open (never finite) totality of "I" (p. 94), and to move beyond a limiting, categorical understanding of identity (p. 90). Miller (1998) also influenced how I thought about identity making as she reminded me of "incompleteness-the open question" that might "summon [me] to the tasks of knowledge and action" (p. 153). She reminded me that who I was, and who I am, is not fixed or static, rather I am necessarily incomplete. It was in becoming present to the stories in early landscapes that I lived by, lived in, and that live in me, that my narrative inquiry took shape.

As I inquired into the stories that I planted in myself and that were planted in me, I understood that these are stories composed in relation with others**.** I came to understand the shaping influences of cultural, social, linguistic, and institutional narratives as I co-composed

my stories alongside others (Clandinin et al., 2006). I drew on Rodgers and Scott (2008) who also spoke to the importance of having an awareness of our identities and the contexts and relationships which shape them. They note:

> Contemporary conceptions of identity share four basic assumptions: (1) that identity is dependent upon and formed within multiple *contexts* which bring social, cultural, political, and historical forces to bear upon that formation; (2) that identity is formed in *relationship* with others and involves *emotions*; (3) that identity is *shifting, unstable, and multiple*; and, (4) that identity involves the construction and reconstruction of meaning through stories over time (p. 733)
>
> . . . [Therefore,] contexts and relationships describe the *external* aspects of identity formation; and stories and emotions, the *internal*, meaning-making aspects. (p. 733, italics in original)

As I pondered the implications of the work of these authors, I understood the importance of paying attention to the contexts in which I, and others, were immersed. These contexts shape how we perceive ourselves and how others may perceive us. As Rodgers and Scott (2008) noted, "We do not necessarily perceive contexts (which include ways of thinking and knowing) as much as we absorb them, often taking them for granted as what is 'real'" (p. 734).

As I sought to attend to the youth and their families' experiences, I was reminded that their unfolding identity making was shaped by temporality, and was/is, their reality. Identity making is fluid, shifting, multiple, and shaped and dependent upon the contexts in which they were/are immersed such as in schools, homes, and relationships. In attending to the dominant

narratives that their lives may bump[11] up against, Rodgers and Scott (2008) reminded me, "within each context there exists a set of norms, and it is expected that those norms will be upheld by the participants within the given community" (p. 734).

In my search for literature on what influences may shape youths' experiences of belonging and identity making, I found research, which pointed to a growing awareness of a collective or social identity connected to having a sense of belonging. White (2013), in his research on gangs and identity, noted that "social identity has a series of interconnected objective and subjective features that taken together combine to create multiple and varied identities" (p. 25). White wrote about the complexities of social identity as part of identity formation. He explained that: identity is chosen (I am who I say I am); bestowed (I am who others say I am); simultaneous (I am more than one identity at the same time); strategic (I am who I am depending on the circumstances); and virtual (I am who I am shaped by global communications). (p. 25)

Lee and Robbins (1995) wrote more to the importance of social connectedness or what they refer to as having "a sense of belonging" as related to "one's opinion of self in relation to other people" (p. 239). Baumeister and Leary (1995) echoed similar views as they wrote of the fundamental need for individuals to have a sense of connectedness; individuals may go to great lengths in order to forge these relationship and bonds with others. Social networks are also seen to shape identity formation and learning (Soudien, 2008). Beck (2014) wrote of the importance of connections to "group-oriented personal identity" with having a sense of belonging. He noted, "Through the narratives and life events shared between members of each specific

[11] Clandinin et al. (2006) coined the term *bumping* as a way to think about relational tensions in people's lives.

teenager culture, a group-oriented personal identity becomes formed for each teenager therein with which the interests and norms most important to the group as a collective whole are sustained . . . [this] provides a feeling of belonging (p. 238).

As I lived alongside the youth and their families, I worked to attend to the multiple contexts and relationships formed within their "worlds" (Lugones, 1987), which brought forth different aspects of their identities and experiences of belonging. Rodgers and Scott (2008) noted "relationship is essential to identity because to have an identity one must be recognized as a particular 'kind of person' by others" (p. 735). Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop (2004) noted that because identity is relational and multiple, it is fluid and can change in the moment to moment. They noted,

> [Identity] is not a fixed attribute of a person, but a relational phenomenon. Identity development occurs in an intersubjective field and can best be characterized as an ongoing process, a process of interpreting oneself as a certain kind of person and being recognized as such in a given context. In this context then, identity can also be seen as an answer to the recurrent question: "Who am I at this moment?" (p. 108)

Rodgers and Scott (2008), much like Carr's (1986) notion of narrative coherence, pointed to the relational aspect of continuity and coherence in identity making. They noted,

> There is a notion of continuity and coherence that signals a self, even as there are discontinuities, shifts, and crises that signal an *evolving* self. In effect, the self can be seen as the meaning maker or teller of stories. If our identities are stories, then ourselves might be the storytellers…. one's core identity… is

something that holds more uniformly for ourselves and others, across contexts. (p. 738, italics in original)

Underpinning the theoretical conceptualizations of identity that frame my research is a commitment to place as central to understanding experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) drew on Dewey's notion of situation in their initial framing of place as one of the dimensions of narrative inquiry. While I draw on Clandinin and Connelly's conception I also draw on the work of Basso (1996), Blood (2010), Clandinin and Huber (2002), hooks (2008), Lessard (2014), Marmon Silko (1996), and Young et al. (2015) to attend more directly to the relational aspect of place as interwoven with identity making. Marmon Silko (1996) highlighted the importance of place as she spoke of how the Pueblo people view themselves as not separate, but part of the landscape. She wrote,

> as long as the human consciousness remains *within* the hills, canyons, cliffs, and the plants, clouds, and sky, the term *landscape*, as it has entered the English language, is misleading. 'A portion of territory the eye can comprehend in a single view' does not correctly describe the relationship between the human being and his or her surroundings. This assumes the viewer is somehow *outside* or *separate* from the territory she or he surveys. Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on. (p. 27, italics in original)

As I sought to understand the experiences of belonging of the youth and their families, further shaping my thinking was bell hooks's (2008) emphasis on dwelling in place. "In Belonging: A Culture of Place," she situated herself back in place by revisiting her childhood and shared her wonders of what it means to truly belong. She spoke of the importance of

belonging as a "desire for a connection" and the importance of having a sense of "from-ness" to a place (hooks, 2008, p. 213). Framing her thinking was a conceptualization of place as a "home" and a particular way of being in the world in relation with others.

Within these narrative conceptualizations of identity, it is important to continually attend to dimensions of sociality, temporality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is also important to acknowledge how youth and their families are "always in the making" and identity making is composed in relation with others (Greene, 1993, p. 213). Greene's (1995) emphasis on attending to relationships reminded me of the interwovenness of youth and families' lives as I sought to understand who we were, and who we were becoming. She wrote,

> I cannot truly say "my life story." That would imply that, spiderlike, I have somehow spun a web solely from the stuff of my own being, when, in fact, I cannot exclude the contexts of my gender, sibling, and maternal relationships, political and professional phenomena, and even aging and decline from "my self." I am not so "individual" that I can claim to be free from the shaping influence of contexts. (p. 74)

"World"-Travelling, Playfulness, and Play: Imagining in Identity Making

> You and I are close, we intertwine; you may stand on the other side of the hill once in awhile, but you may also be me, while remaining what you are and what I am not. (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 90)

Minh-ha's words resonated as I thought about how, in my early landscapes, I yearned for sameness in order to belong. She provoked me to think more deeply about what it means to story myself or someone else as the "other" and called me to consider how, and if, I have

travelled to “the other side of the hill” (1989, p. 90). I also turned to Lugones’ (1987) conceptualization of “worlds” and “world”-travelling. She noted,

> Some of the inhabitants may not understand or hold the particular construction of them that constructs them in that “world.” So there may be “worlds” that construct me in ways that I do not even understand. Or it may be that I understand the construction, but do not hold it of myself. I may not accept it as an account of myself, a construction of myself. And yet, I may be animating such a construction. One can “travel” between these “worlds” and one can inhabit more than one of these “worlds” at the very same time. (pp. 10–11)

Lugones’ notion of “worlds” drew my attention to how I inhabit multiple worlds and may hold different constructions of the ways I belong and live in these worlds. In other words, I may have different experiences of belonging and show aspects of who I am, depending on the place, time, and relationships with those in each “world.” These constructions of who I am in multiple words are not, as Lugones pointed out, solely of my own choosing. Within the multiple worlds I inhabit, people may construct me differently than my own constructions of who I am in a particular world. I now see how some of the constructions of who I was in my early “worlds”—and how, and if, I belonged—shaped the stories I planted in myself unknowingly. I learned to live in and live out others’ storied constructions, or at least the stories I thought, they held of me.

I wondered how I might travel to “the other side of the hill” (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 90) or “world”-travel alongside youth and their families in the ways Lugones (1987) described. “World”-travelling is a way to identify with others by travelling to others’ “worlds.” Lugones wrote “it requires that I am able to understand the distinct experience of being different in

different 'worlds' and the capacity to remember other 'worlds' and [myself] in them" (p. 11). The shift in identity is what Lugones referred to as "travel," where I, and others, might be different in different worlds. As she noted, "this shift may not be willful or even conscious, and one may be completely unaware of being different than one is in a different 'world'" (p. 11). It is through "world"-travelling to others' worlds that I might learn to gaze with "loving perception" where "[I] can understand what it is to be [other] and what it is like to be [myself] in their eyes" (Lugones, 1987, p. 17).

Minh-ha's (1989) metaphor and Lugones' concepts of "worlds" and "world"-travelling provoked me to inquire more deeply into how I negotiated my identity and experiences of belonging in the multiple worlds I occupied—as a child and as an adult. Have I constructed myself and others with a stereotypical or arrogant perception[12] (Lugones, 1987)? I began to awaken to how I storied myself and others within categories and dichotomies. I revisited Minh-ha's (1989) words as a reminder of the limitations and dangers of assumptions, stereotypes, and creating categories. She stated, "Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak" (p. 94). Minh-ha (1989) drew my attention to how "I" might live in more relational ways as she imagined a world where we "transcend our borderlines" (p. 28). In her words I saw the possibility to more "lovingly 'world'-travel" cross-culturally (Lugones, 1987). Lugones explained "playfulness" in the following way:

> Playfulness is, in part, an openness to being a fool, which is a combination of not worrying about competence, not being self-important, not taking norms as

[12] Lugones (1987) speaks of "arrogant perception" as "the failure to identity with persons that one views arrogantly or has come to see as products of arrogant perception" (p. 4).

sacred and finding ambiguity and double edges a source of wisdom and delight. (1987, p. 17)

Lugones's notion of playfulness helped me think about my experiences of belonging I lived in and lived out experiences where I did not feel like I could be playful or "at ease."[13] Perhaps, there were certain worlds in which I felt I did not belong because I did not feel like I had "attributes in them" (Lugones, 1987, p. 9) or that they held attributes of me. I drew on this notion of playfulness as it pertained to identity making. As I thought about the importance of playfulness, I wondered about the worlds where I felt at ease and was playful, worlds where I had an attitude "that carrie[d] [me] through the activity, a play attitude" (p. 180) where I did not have to "abandon [myself] to, nor [was I] stuck in, any particular world" (Lugones, 1987, p. 16). I wondered if these were worlds in which I experienced belonging. Temporally sliding back to my experiences as a child and sliding forward into my experiences as an adult, I wondered how I situated myself in relation with others, in different places, and times. I wondered if I had a playful attitude or sense of playfulness (Lugones, 1987) in any of the multiple worlds I inhabited and within the identities I composed?

As I considered the possibilities of how to "lovingly" "world"-travel within and across the worlds of youth and families, I pulled forward the work of Caine and Steeves (2009), Paley (1997, 2004, 2015), and Sarbin (2004), who speak to the importance of "imaginings" and "play" as narrative constructions of identity making. As Caine and Steeves (2009) noted, "we come to understand imagining as a form of perceptual and embodied knowing and an essential way of being and as a way to attend from our experiences such that we attend in particular

[13] Lugones (1987) wrote of "being at ease" in a "world" in one or all of the followings ways: 1) knowing all the norms that are to be followed and having confidence with them; 2) being normatively happy and agreeing with the norms; 3) being humanly bonded with those you love and those who love you; 4) having a shared history with others in a world (p. 12).

ways" (p. 3). They describe imagining as "an active process of creating and re-creating that draws on the familiar through memory and being, as well as the alien or strange" (Caine & Steeves, 2009, p. 5). In this way, I understood the notion of relational play within imagination is essential to identity making. Caine and Steeves (2009) wrote:

> We have come to understand play as an expression of imagining, as an active movement back and forth, that has spontaneity and rhythm. Play is a medium that allows us to bring forth our embodied knowing. . . .we see imaginings as narrative constructions. It is the notion of play within imagination that helps us move inside the stories of others, of being and becoming. Play is a medium, which allows for the exploration of self' while at the same time the imagination can 'never take leave of the other.' (p. 5)

Caine and Steeves (2009) added, "connecting through imaginings with others . . . creates a possibility to discover what is unknown, what is different, what connects us to others and others to us" (p. 6). I am drawn to the idea that it is amidst these real and imaginary spaces where we can engage in play (Caine & Steeves, 2009) and be playful. It is within these imagining spaces that I might be able to tell, retell, and possibly shift my stories to live by.

Sarbin (2004) also emphasized the importance of imagination as did Greene (1995) who called me to "tap into imagination" (p. 19). Tapping into imagination became a way for me to change the stories I live by as I imagined "otherwise." Greene (1995) wrote,

> To tap into imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished, objectively and independently real. It is to see beyond what the imaginer has called normal or 'common-sensible' and to carve out new orders in experience. Doing so, a person may become freed to glimpse what might be, to

> form notions of what should be and what is not yet. And the same person may, at the same time, remain in touch with presumably *is*. (p. 19, italics in original)

These narrative conceptualizations of "world"-travelling, playfulness, and play (Lugones, 1987) within imagination situated in time, place and relationships (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) informed my research as I worked to attend more closely to youth and families' experiences of belonging as interwoven with identity making. Caine and Steeves (2009) reminded me "imagination can set the ground for the questions we are able to ask, much like travelling to each other's worlds and to do so in loving ways, setting the grounds for becoming together in the in-between space in narrative inquiry" (p. 9).

A Statistical Backdrop

Youth contribute to the rich diversity in Canadian schools, but there is currently limited research to inform educators, curriculum writers, and policy makers of the cultural, social, institutional, familial, and intergenerational narratives of youth and their families that may inform and shape their experiences of belonging and identity making. These narratives of youths' experience are not well understood for youth of Aboriginal heritage[14] (Brokenleg, 1998; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Cardinal, 2014; Clandinin et al., 2010; Hallett et al., 2007; Lessard, 2010, 2014; Richmond & Smith, 2012; Yi et al., 2015).

In Canada, off-reserve Aboriginal youth are a growing proportion of school populations. According to the Aboriginal Peoples Survey, "between 1996 and 2006, the off-

[14] It is difficult to capture the richness and diversity of the First Peoples of Canada (Aboriginal/Indigenous peoples) with terms or labels. In this study, I refer to youths' and families' "Aboriginal heritage" with an understanding that that the First Peoples of Canada, including Inuit, Métis, and First Nations people, "are separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs" (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, n.d., para. 2). It is important to acknowledge that, just as there is no single Aboriginal identity, there is no one "Aboriginal heritage."

reserve First Nations population grew by 35%, nearly four times faster than the 9% rate of increase for the total Canadian population" (Bougie, 2009, p. 13). The 2006 census revealed "there were 78,325 First Nations[15] children aged 6 to 14 living off reserves in Canada" (Statistics Canada, 2008, p. 13). The Canadian Council on Learning (2007) also noted the expansiveness of the Aboriginal population with the comment that "as the non-Aboriginal school-age population in Canada is expected to decline by nearly 400,000 children by 2017, the projected 374, 200 Aboriginal school-age children in 2017 will constitute a larger proportion of Canada's children" (p. 4). According to the newest projections released by Statistics Canada (Morency et al., 2015), "the population who reported an Aboriginal identity[16] [will] continue to grow faster than the non-Aboriginal population from 2011 to 2036" (p. 13). Additionally, findings project that

> the Aboriginal identity population in Canada, estimated at 1,502,000 in 2011, could increase to between 1,965,000 and 2,633,000 by 2036 under the projection scenarios developed for this report. The average annual growth rate of the Aboriginal population would be higher than that of the non-Aboriginal population under all of the projection scenarios developed. As a result, the proportion of Aboriginal people within the total Canadian population could

[15] Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (2015) states, "First Nation people refers to Status and non-status 'Indian' peoples in Canada. Many communities also use the term 'First Nation' in the name of their community. Currently, there are 617 First Nations communities, which represent more than 50 nations or cultural groups and 50 Aboriginal languages" (para. 1).

Moreover, according to Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (n.d.), "First Nations people [historically referred to as North American Indians] in Canada are descendants of the original inhabitants of Canada who lived here for many thousands of years before explorers arrived from Europe" (para. 1). Many "First Nations people identify themselves by the nation to which they belong, for example, Mohawk, Cree, Oneida, and so on" (para. 2).

[16] Statistics Canada's report (Morency et al., 2015) "presents projections of the Aboriginal population and households in Canada based on the most up-to date data available, notably data from the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS). Within the context of these projections, the *Aboriginal identity* population comprises people who self-identified as Registered Indians and, among those who did not, who identified as Non-Status Indians, Métis, Inuit or other Aboriginal people in the 2011 NHS." (p. 13)

> increase from 4.4% in 2011 to between 4.6% and 6.1% in 2036. (Morency et al., 2015, p. 13)

The report also notes that although the Aboriginal population is projected to age, it will remain younger than its non-Aboriginal counterpart due to its higher fertility and mortality rates. Specifically, the projections note that

> the Aboriginal population [is expected to be] still be younger than the non-Aboriginal population in 2036, but it [is expected to] age more rapidly. The median age of Aboriginal people, which was 27.7 years in 2011, [will] be between 34.7 years and 36.6 years in 2036. By comparison, the median age of the non-Aboriginal population [is expect to] rise from 40.5 years to 44.5 years during this period. (Morency et al., 2015, p. 13)

Although the population of Aboriginal youth is rapidly growing, the gap between educational attainments compared to non-Aboriginal youth, has widened; yet our understanding of why is limited. The rate of high school completion remains disproportionately lower for Aboriginal youth (Bougie, 2009; Bowlby, 2005). Data indicates that many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples do not finish high school, and their university completion rate lags behind those of the non-Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2013a). In the 2006 Census, "31% of off-reserve First Nations population aged 25 to 64 did not have a high school diploma, compared to 15% of their counterparts in the total Canadian population" (Bougie, 2009, p. 11). Similar to the 2006 survey, the more recent 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey found that 72% of First Nations people living off reserve, 42% of Inuit and 77% of Métis had a high school diploma or equivalent comparison to 89% of the non-Aboriginal population aged 18 to 44 (Statistics Canada, 2013b).

Research suggests disengagement from schools is a "multifaceted and cumulative process" which begins in the early years of schooling (Bougie, 2009, p. 11). When youth and families do not feel they belong, they may experience disengagement, lower self-esteem, and exclusion; these experiences may lead to health issues, transiency, truancy, early school leaving (dropping out), and/or family migration (Azzam, 2007; Bowlby, 2005; Brokenleg, 1998; Lambert et al., 2013; Peng, 2009; Smyth et al., 2004). Research shows that these concerns are particularly pervasive and serious for Aboriginal youth and their families and may lead to long term consequences or disadvantages (Bougie, 2009; Brokenleg, 1998; de Finney & di Tomasso, 2015; Hallett et al., 2007; Mignone & O'Neil, 2005; Richmond & Smith, 2012; Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013; Trocmé, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2004; Vaz et al., 2015).

According to Kumar (2016), suicide rates among Aboriginal people in Canada are several times higher than rates among the non-Aboriginal population and nearly one-quarter of First Nations peoples living off reserve reported having suicidal thoughts. Adding to these negative disparities, Aboriginal youth are also overrepresented in child welfare and the youth justice system. In a study supported by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, de Finney and di Tomasso (2015) found

> Indigenous[17] youth are overrepresented in both the child welfare and the youth justice systems, and they face particular barriers to healthy and sustainable cultural and relational connections. As Indigenous youth continue to be apprehended by child welfare authorities disproportionately to other youth

[17] The term *Indigenous* is used to acknowledge the First Peoples of Canada, who are people of indigenous descent, including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada formerly Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada, n.d.). There is a growing shift towards using the term "Indigenous peoples" to reflect a more inclusive awareness of Aboriginal or First Peoples, in Canada and in other countries, who are indigenous to the land (Government of Canada, 1996).

(Kozlowski, Sinha, Hoey, & Lucas, 2011), they are also more likely than their non-Indigenous peers to experience multiple foster care placements and less likely to go back to their families. (p. 63)

According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015a) in the summary of their final report,

> Canada's child-welfare crisis has not gone unnoticed in the international community. In 2012, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed to Canada its concern about the frequent removal of children in Canada from families as a 'first resort' in cases of neglect, financial hardship, or disability. In its report, the committee singled out the frequency with which Aboriginal children are placed outside their communities. Noting that Canada had failed to act on its own auditor general's findings of inequitable child-welfare funding; the committee concluded that 'urgent measures' were needed to address the discriminatory overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. (pp. 137–138)

This urgency to address the widening gaps is echoed by a recently released study from Statistics Canada of the living arrangements of Aboriginal children aged 14 and under in which Turner (2016) noted, "While Aboriginal children represent 7% of all children in Canada in 2011, they accounted for almost half (48%) of all foster children in the country" (p. 12). There is an increased movement towards seeking to understand the epidemic of Aboriginal homelessness. The Canadian Observatory of Homelessness[18] (2012) developed the following Canadian definition of homelessness:

[18] The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) was formerly named the Canadian Homelessness Research Network (CHRN).

> Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing. (p. 1)

This definition also includes a variety of living circumstances such as accommodations, which are "temporarily lacking in security of tenure" (COH, 2012, p. 1). Patrick (2014) expanded on this definition to draw attention to homelessness in new ways. He noted that being homeless does not simply mean living on the street or in a shelter. To more inclusively capture the diverse living circumstances of Aboriginal people, he calls for taking into account "both physical space/amenities and emotional/cultural connections" (p. 13) as well as the concept of "spiritual homelessness" referring to "one's separation from traditional land, family, and kinship networks" (p. 13). Furthermore, "spiritual homelessness is a crisis of personal identity wherein a person's understanding of knowledge of how they relate to country, family and Aboriginal identity systems is confused or lacking," and thus may seriously impact one's mental health (Patrick, 2014, p. 13).

These understandings of homelessness as they pertain to Aboriginal youth is particularly important as the number of children placed in the child welfare system and out-of-home care placements continue to rise (Bell & Romano, 2015; Bertsch & Bidgood, 2010). Scholars such as de Finney and di Tomasso (2015) call for creative pathways of engagement

that delineate places of belonging for, and with, Indigenous youth in care.[19] They note that "more Aboriginal children are placed in out of home care today than in residential schools at the height of the residential school movement" (p. 579). A report released by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (Kirmayer et al., 2007) spoke to the intergenerational reverberations of residential schooling. Its authors wrote,

> The removal of Aboriginal children from their communities for educational and social welfare purposes lasted well over a century and resulted in great suffering and loss. The loss of children because parents were perceived to be unable to provide safety and care for them was shameful for Aboriginal families and communities (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Whole generations of Aboriginal parents were stripped of the right and responsibility to raise their children—who were not only precious to their individual parents, but also crucial for the future of the culture and community. (p. 76)

These overwhelming statistical stories provide a background of some of the dominant narratives Aboriginal youth are often storied by, and storied within, as well as the lingering legacies of colonization (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a). What I now understand is that if we measure or seek to understand the experiences of Aboriginal youth and families only through these trends and patterns, it may perpetuate stories *of* them, and *on* them. Just as Adichie (2009) cautioned against the "danger of a single story," Patrick (2014) reminds me that there is not a "singular Aboriginal history" (p. 5).

[19] I refer to de Finney and di Tomasso's (2015) notion of youth being "in care" to include an expansive range of living arrangements such as "foster care, kinship care, residential care and group homes, and youth agreements such as semi and fully independent living" (p. 64).

It is critical to move from what Maxine Greene (1995) described as seeing "small" towards seeing "big." She wrote,

> To see things or people small, one chooses to see from a detached point of view, to watch behaviours from the perspective of a system, to be concerned with trends and tendencies rather than the intentionality and concreteness of everyday life. To see things or people big, one must resist viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view them in their integrity and particularity instead**.** One must see from the point of the participants in the midst of what is happening if one is to be privy to the plans people make, the initiatives they take, the uncertainties they face. (p. 10)

To see "big" in the way Greene (1995) suggested, it is important to come alongside Aboriginal youth and their families to engage in research *with* them rather than *on* them. The limited knowledge and awareness of Aboriginal youths' and their families' experiences make this research even more urgent. In this study, I continually worked to see big by attending to the youths and their families' narratives of experience around belonging and identity making.

The "Spirit of Belonging"

Archibald (2008), in her work with Elders and storytellers who shared their cultural ways of knowing and stories of experience, highlighted the importance of circles. She wrote,

> The image of a circle is used by many First Nations people to symbolize wholeness, completeness, and ultimately wellness. The never-ending circle also forms concentric circles to show both the synergistic influence of and our responsibility toward the generations of ancestors, the generations of today, and the generations yet to come. (p. 11)

Her description of a circle is important to how I worked to understand the importance of familial and intergenerational narratives and influences on our lives (Young, 2003, 2005), as well as the importance of considering wholeness and completeness of one's circle as contributing to a healthy mind, body, heart, and spirit.

Aboriginal scholars Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (1990, 2002, 2005, 2014) and Brokenleg (1998) used the metaphor of a Circle of Courage to describe four basic dimensions of curriculum that are critical for positive youth development: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. According to Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern, one of the philosophical underpinnings in the circle of courage is "the spirit of belonging," in which "the universal longing for human bonds is cultivated by relationships of trust so that the child can say, 'I am loved'" (Reclaiming Youth Network, 2007, n.p.). Speaking further to this conceptualization of belonging as a way of being, In *Native Wisdom on Belonging*, Brokenleg (1998) described the core value of belonging by quoting his aunt Deloria who said, "Be related, somehow, to everyone you know" (p. 131). He highlighted that in Native American culture, "You belonged as a relative if you acted like you belonged. Treating others as kin forged powerful human bonds that drew everyone into a network of relationships based on mutual respect" (p. 131). As I think about these notions of belonging, as being, a "spirit of belonging," I wondered what this spirit meant to youth and their families. The "spirit of belonging" is important to pay attention to, as Brokenleg (1998) notes, without a spirit of belonging where youth have a connectedness to something or someone, there may be harmful consequences. Some of which may include; potentially "counterfeit" ways of belonging or "broken circles" as "children [who are] alienated from positive adults and peers" may find themselves "emotionally and morally adrift" (p. 131).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Narrative Inquiry

> *People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experiences of the world are interpreted and made personally meaningful.* (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477)

I used narrative inquiry to understand the experiences of youth and their families, with particular attention to their experiences of belonging as interwoven with identity making. As Connelly and Clandinin (2006) noted, "the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience" (p. 477). Within this view, experience is a "storied phenomenon" and "narrative research is a methodology for inquiring into storied experiences" (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009, p. 598), that is, narrative inquiry is "both phenomena under study and methodology" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 4). Connelly and Clandinin (1998) further highlighted the importance of sharing life stories:

> Thinking of life as a story is a powerful way to imagine who we are, where we have been, and where we are going. In this view people live lives and tell stories of those lives, and people are characters in their own lives and others' life stories. . . . We live stories. When we talk to others about ourselves we tell stories. (pp. 149–150)

Other narrative inquirers (Cardinal, 2014; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Downey & Clandinin, 2010; Houle, 2012; Huber,

Clandinin, & Huber, 2006; Lessard, 2014; Young, 2005) continued to develop narrative inquiry with particular attention to ontological and epistemological commitments. Clandinin and Caine (2013) highlighted the ontological commitments of narrative inquiry:

> As narrative inquirers we do not remove ourselves from our research puzzles and observe a phenomena or analyse people, but rather, we become a part of the ongoing negotiation of making meaning of experience. (p. 23)

In order to engage in narrative inquiry and be in relation, I was not an outside observer looking in, but was part of the inquiry in that I laid my own experiences alongside the inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). I strove to create narrative inquiry spaces with participants, which were "spaces of belonging for both researchers and participants; spaces that are always marked by ethics and attitude of openness, mutual vulnerability, reciprocity, and care" (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 169).

At the outset of the study, I wrote narrative beginnings of my experiences around belonging and its interwovenness with my identity making. I engaged in inquiring "into a range of field texts (such as photographs, journals, or memory box artifacts)" that I composed and collected. This allowed me to better understand who I was and am becoming, "in relation with potential participants and particular phenomenon" (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 9). An important aspect of narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Caine (2013) is that "narrative inquirers need to continually inquire into their experiences before, during, and after each inquiry" (p. 11).

Narrative inquirers understand "that people live out stories and tell stories of their living" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 34). However, narrative inquiry involves more than the mere telling of stories; it requires a retelling, that is, the "unpacking" processes of inquiry into the stories we live and tell. Clandinin (2013) emphasized moving beyond seeing stories as fixed

entities. As stories are retold, there is the possibility for reliving where, individuals begin to imagine themselves in new ways as they work towards living new possibilities. As Clandinin (2013) suggested, in the reliving, "we may begin to restory ourselves and perhaps shift the institutional, social, and cultural narratives in which we are embedded" (p. 34). "As we "relive" stories, we live differently in the world (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 10).

Participants

I invited three Aboriginal youth[20] to become participants in the doctoral study. I first met Bryann, Sandra, and Sage[21] in the after-school arts club that was created by the research team as part of the larger study. It was not my intention to only have female participants. However, as I show in what follows, three girls made it visible to me that they wanted me to come alongside them in the inquiry. Through our interactions and relationships built first in the club, participants came to me, as much as I came to them. The after-school arts club officially started on October 6, 2010, but this doctoral research with the youth formally began in February 2011 when I invited the first participant, Bryann, to participate. Eventually, I also invited Sage and Sandra to the study after they made their desire to participate visible to me. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described a research process of using the terms of moving from being in the field, to co-composing and collecting field texts, to moving from field texts to composing interim and final research texts. I used these terms to describe the research process in what follows.

[20] I refer to de Finney and di Tomasso's (2015) definition of youth "as young people between 12 and the age of majority, which is set at 18 or 19 in Canada" (p. 64).

[21] The youths' pseudonyms were selected by them and used to protect their anonymity.

Being in the Field

Clandinin (2013) called me to imagine how I might relationally come alongside youth participants. As narrative inquirers, we intentionally come into relation with participants; we put our lives alongside another's life while:

> negotiate[ing] with participants an ongoing relational space, a relational space we call the *field*. . . . In this way, there are possible starting points for narrative inquiry: listening to individuals tell their stories and living alongside participants as they live and tell their stories. (Clandinin, 2013, p. 45)

In this narrative inquiry, the starting point or field where I first came to know the participants was through living alongside them in the relational spaces created by the club with myself and other researchers. The field was also constituted by living alongside three participants in other places and in ongoing conversations with them. As I lived in the field, I attended to the temporal unfolding of my life as researcher and to the lives of participants, in places through time. Participants and I moved metaphorically back and forth between the fields where we listened to each other tell stories during our one-on-one conversations. At first, the conversation starting points were guided by our interactions and activities in the arts club. Later, in one-on-one conversations, we moved to a deeper relational space where we began to listen to each other's lived and told stories and inquired into them. Echoed in my experiences of being in the field alongside youth participants are Clandinin's (2013) words, "The places and relationships we become part of when we begin with living alongside participants call forth the stories we, and they, tell" (p. 45).

Other starting points for our one-on-one conversations included speaking to artwork created in the club, artifacts brought from home, sharing of photographs, creating oral histories,

and transcriptions of conversations. In our conversations, I did not have a predetermined set of questions for the youth. These conversations, as Clandinin (2013) described, "create a space for the stories of both participants and researchers to be composed and heard" (p. 45).

Situating this narrative inquiry primarily by living alongside youth, I went where youth participants chose to take me, including their homes where I was invited to meet their families, and to other places that were special to them, or to places they wanted to go. As Clandinin (2013) wrote, "In living alongside participants, we enter places that are important to participants" (p. 45). In both the living alongside and telling of stories, the youth brought me to people important to them, such as particular family members, or in one instance, a close friend. Youth brought me to their families who also became participants in the inquiry.

The relational field with the youths' families (two mothers, a grandmother, and an aunt) began with a different starting point as we did not begin in the relational space of the club where we lived alongside one another. Rather, through knowing I lived alongside their niece, daughters, and granddaughter, the adults who met with me and became participants in the study began by telling their stories. We engaged in listening and telling stories through one-on-one conversations, in family conversations at agreed meeting places, and later in participants' homes.

From Field to Field Texts

As a member of the larger research team, I worked with many youth in the arts club and engaged in composing field texts, including field notes, on club events. Using a narrative inquiry methodology where being in relation with participants is central, the arts-based activities in the after-school club were co-composed, and agreed upon, in relation with participants. My immersion in the after-school club throughout the 2010-2012 school years

allowed for the co-composition, composition and collection of detailed field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Living alongside the youth for an extended period enabled us to engage in multiple, sustained conversations. As part of the larger research team, all field texts were shared among team members, allowing for a richer and more diverse interpretation of experiences.

While the overall narrative inquiry process was similar, methods used with each participant and field texts co-composed with each youth and their family were somewhat different. In each narrative account (see Chapters 4, 5, 6), I described the methods used and the field texts composed and co-composed. Bryann, Sage and Sandra engaged with me in one-on-one conversations during and outside of the arts club hours. These conversations were negotiated with the youth and their families. Field texts included identity collages with 2 youth participants, photography pieces, art compositions, written work, and transcripts of conversations with the youth and families. Between 2010 and 2013, 65 one-on-one conversations were held and transcribed with the three youth participants and two to four conversations with each family. With the assistance of mentoring Elders and my peers of Aboriginal heritage, I was guided in learning appropriate protocol and culturally respectful ways of engaging in research in relation with children and families of Aboriginal heritage.

Lessard (2010) spoke of the importance of listening sideways to the teachings of Elders and being in relation with participants. He wrote,

> Many of the families taught me to go "sideways" when asking questions. What this means is that I should not ask the questions directly; I need to take time, be patient and have discussions, recognizing that the answers to the questions will eventually emerge. Conversations cannot be rushed. It is impossible to consider

> the sharing of stories if I do not understand the environment and its ability to create or limit conversation. (p. 19)

Moving from field to field texts and to interim research texts, Archibald's (2008) work pointed me to teachings from Elders and other First Nations storytellers. She wrote,

> Patience and trust are essential for preparing to listen to stories. Listening involves more than just using the auditory sense. We must visualize the characters and their actions. We must let our emotions surface. As Elders say, it is important to listen with 'three ears: two on the sides of our head and the one that is in our heart.' (p. 8)

Archibald (2008) and the Stó:lō Elder reminded me of the importance of bringing our heart and mind together in order to be a good "story listener"; she noted, "story listening" is necessary "if one was to make meaning from a story because often one was not explicitly told what the story's meanings were" (p. 76).

As I moved back and forth from the field to inquiring into field texts and eventually to co-composing interim research texts[22] with the youth and their families, Archibald (2008) helped me think about processes of co-composing. She wrote,

> Writing, in a way, is listening to the others' language and reading with the others' eyes. The more ears I am able to hear with, the farther I see the plurality of meaning and the less I lend myself to the illusion of a single message. (p. 30)

Learning to listen "sideways" and with "three ears," I understood more of what it meant to be in relation with the youth and their families.

[22] The co-composing process is described more fully in each of the narrative accounts; it was a process that occurred over several months.

Moving From Field Texts to Narrative Accounts as Interim Research Texts

Attending to dimensions of temporality, sociality and place, I, and, at times, participants, shaped field texts into interim research texts. To move from field texts to interim research texts, a narrative inquirer begins by looking at all field texts as an "archival task" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131), that is, they ensure they have "read and reread all the field text and in some way sorted them" (p. 131). I began with reading and rereading the multiple and diverse field texts from the experiences with the youth in the club as well as in multiple conversations with the youth and their families. As I moved back and forth between field texts to composing narrative accounts, new wonders emerged as I read the field texts. These wonders appeared as gaps and silences and were sometimes included in the final research text.

Downey and Clandinin's (2010) metaphor of a shattered mirror also guided me as I moved from field text to composing narrative accounts. For them, the shattered bits can, metaphorically, be seen as:

> Stories lived and told by a person in particular times and places. . . . In narrative inquiry, we do not intend to reassemble the bits but rather to enter the strewn bits of a person's life in the midst and in relational ways, attending to what is possible in understanding the temporal, social and place dimensions within an ongoing life. Attending to the multiplicity of what becomes visible in the unfolding life, the narrative inquirer attends to the particularities of each "bit" or shard in order to compose multiple possible story retellings or ways to move forward in imaginative and narratively coherent ways. (p. 391)

Downey and Clandinin's metaphor made visible that too focused a search for narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) might "create smooth texts that suggest that lives are smooth and narratively coherent in the living and telling" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 48). Continuing to work with a metaphor of a shattered mirror reminded me that there were multiple possible story retellings.

As I co-composed narrative accounts with youth participants and their families, I awakened to the temporality and interconnectedness and interwovenness of the three dimensions in the inquiry space. Clandinin (2013) describes temporality threaded into place and into events and emotions:

> The dimensions are not separated from one another. For example, we cannot understand a person's experience of place without understanding temporality. As we compose and co-compose interim research texts, we awaken to the interwovenness of life experiences. 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)

Through ongoing sharing with youth and family participants, narrative accounts were composed and co-composed, and mutually agreed upon before moving to final research texts. The process of co-composing narrative accounts with each youth participant, the two mothers and grandmother was ongoing over several months. The narrative accounts were revised with their responses and with new tellings.

In attending to the three-dimensional inquiry space in composing narrative accounts, I also discerned resonant threads, or patterns, that reverberated across the lived and told stories. "By intentionally focusing on what we called threads, we were interested in following particular plotlines that threaded or wove over time and place through an individual's narrative

account" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 132). By laying the accounts metaphorically alongside one another, I searched and re-searched for what were resonances that reverberated across the accounts. I began to understand how, for some youth and their family, repeated telling of particular stories gave them a sense of narrative unity[23]. I turned to MacIntyre's (1981) and Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) notion of narrative unity as it helped me attend more closely to resonant threads. I identified 3 resonant threads that I explored in Chapter 7.

Further shaping the field texts into interim research texts and final research texts were "responses to questions of meaning and social significance" with not only participants, but response communities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131). Just as negotiations and ongoing composition were critical alongside participants whose responses allowed us to move deeper into the multiple meanings and our understandings of their experiences around belonging was the engagement and involvement of various response communities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In these communities I shared field texts and interim texts.

My response communities included the larger research team and Elders with whom we met with regularly to share our wonders (Caine et al., 2013) as well as our individual research studies (Cardinal, 2014; Lessard, 2014). Another response community was comprised of scholars from the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development. These safe inquiry spaces where I was able to share my interim research texts provided me with helpful responses and more layered understandings.

[23] Clandinin and Connelly (1988) described narrative unity "as a continuum within a person's experiences which renders life experiences meaningful through the unity they achieve for the person" (p. 280).

From Interim to Final Research Texts

Final research texts are the texts we make "visible to public audiences, unknown audiences who may be far removed from the lived and told experience of participants" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 50). As narrative inquirers compose final research texts, "we return to the personal, practical, and social justifications of the work . . . final research texts might include traditional academic publications, dissertations, theses, and presentations for academic and non-academic audiences" (p. 50). In narrative inquiry, "Final research texts do not have final answers, because narrative inquirers do not come with questions" (p. 50). Narrative inquirers enter research with the intention of coming to new understandings of people's experiences. The final research texts that narrative inquirers compose are ones that "engage audiences to rethink and re-imagine the ways in which they practice and the ways in which they relate to others" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 51). In the composition of final research texts, my intention was to engage readers in "resonant remembering" (Clandinin & Cave, 2008) by looking across the youth and their families storied experiences.

Ethics

> This telling of ourselves, this meeting of ourselves in the past through inquiry, makes clear that as inquirers we, too, are part of the parade. We have helped make the world in which we find ourselves. We are not merely objective inquirers, people on the high road, who study a world lesser in quality than our moral temperament would have it, people who study a world we did not help create. On the contrary, we are complicit in the world we study, we need to remake ourselves as well as offer up research understanding that could lead to a better life. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 61)

Engaging in a narrative inquiry carried ethical responsibilities to, and with, the youth and their families. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote, “ethical matters need to be narrated over the entire narrative process” (p. 170). In honouring the relational aspect of the inquiry, while interim research texts (narrative accounts) were co-composed with participants, final research texts were also shared with participants whenever possible. In order to protect participants and their families, pseudonyms were used during the writing and sharing of final research texts. The school where the arts club was situated was not named. Participants were informed as to what they consented to and understood they were free to withdraw from the larger study or doctoral study at any time. I obtained letters of consent from the youth and also from their families.

Chapter 4: Bryann's Narrative Account

We went to help take off Bryann's mask but it was stuck to her hairline. After some careful wiggling, we finally managed to get the mask off. Bryann was smiling as she carefully examined the mold of her face. Then she immediately went into the hallway to show her friends. Come to think of it, she was so excited, I don't think she even bothered to wash the residual paste off her face. (Field notes, March 9, 2011)

Figure 4-1. Bryann in the club

Above is an excerpt from field notes taken in the club. By the time this field note was taken, I had known Bryann for four months. In this photograph, I applied strips to Bryann's face as part of a mask making identity project that the youth helped design. Good-humoured, in this picture, Bryann made a funny face at the camera. After we took the mask off her face, she ran into the hallway to show it off to friends and some of her favourite teachers. I began with

these field notes and this playful image of Bryann to show one of the many ways I came to know her.

Before we engaged in this mask making project, we discussed the youths' ideas for this inquiry. After a decision was made to make masks, we sat in a sharing circle and talked about what we could do with the masks. The youth and adult researchers came up with the following possibilities: drawing, writing words, including photographs on their masks to share who they are; showing and mapping places important to them; exploring and sharing their feelings and emotions in the painting of their masks. For example, one youth talked about how the colour red reminded her of the emotions of being mad or angry and blue meant sad.

For Bryann and I, this mask making project in the club was another artifact that brought us to stories about identity and belonging. During grade 7 and 8 at Willow Ridge School, Bryann engaged in multiple projects in the club that allowed me to get to know her better and hear more of her experiences. Below is a photograph taken a month after the mask making project (April 13, 2011). By then, Bryann had been a participant in this doctoral study for over two months. Bryann decided to paint her mask in different colours to convey her emotions at the time. She divided her mask into three sections and selected the colours black, white, and purple. The colour black covered more than half of her face. Figure 4-2 shows Bryann posing for the camera wearing her mask.

Figure 4-2. Bryann wearing her mask

Metaphorically speaking, just as Bryann wore a mask in these images, I learned that to know her in more authentic ways, I had to learn to "travel" to the multiple "worlds" (Lugones, 1987) in which she lived. It took me more than two years of living alongside Bryann to begin to understand the multiplicity of her experiences (Greene, 1995) and the complexities within her worlds. Bryann allowed me into her worlds, where she shared her experiences of belonging. Travelling back to storied moments, I share how Bryann first became a participant.

Becoming a Participant: Asking Bryann

I first met Bryann at the U of A[24] arts club when she was in grade 7 at Willow Ridge School.[25] She had been coming regularly since November 2010, but it wasn't until February 2, 2011 that I asked if she would like to be a participant in this inquiry around belonging. I describe the process more fully in the field notes taken in the club.

[24] U of A is an abbreviation for University of Alberta.

[25] Willow Ridge School is a pseudonym for the Canadian urban junior high school (Grades 7–9) in which our arts-based club, named "U of A arts club" by the youth, was situated. Throughout this dissertation, the youth and I refer to U of A arts club as "arts club" or "club" interchangeably.

Today I was going to ask Bryann if she would be a participant in my study. I sat down beside Bryann. We were the only ones at our table. I took out my rattle that had taken me a long time to paint. I showed her the rabbit that Elder Francis Whiskeyjack drew as well as the other 'bunny rabbit' he had playfully sketched for me. We laughed. Bryann was stitching the handle of her rattle. She told me how she made a drum before at a healing gathering on a reserve. I knew she really wanted to make a drum as she told me about this twice before.

After some more chatting, I mustered up some courage to ask her. I told her I was interested in learning more about her experience as well as her family's experiences both in and out of school. Then I asked Bryann if she was interested in being a participant in my study around belonging. "I want to have conversations with you and your family. I would like to speak with your aunt and uncle too if you are comfortable with this."

I knew Bryann was in kinship care at the time, so I hoped to speak with her aunt and uncle. I asked her if it was okay if fellow researcher Sean Lessard contacted them. "Sure. I will be a participant. And yes, he can call them [her aunt and uncle]."

I was thrilled that Bryann said yes. I asked her if she could give her aunt and uncle a heads up and let them know that Sean would be calling. Bryann smiled widely and quickly told me that she would. Bryann and I began to plan when our first conversation should be, after school or at lunchtime. Bryann replied, "Whenever, I'm available. How about tomorrow?" Her eagerness made me smile. We confirmed that it would be a lunch date and that I would wait for her on the bench outside the arts club room. After we got the time and location organized, Bryann went back to stitching her rattle and I continued painting alongside her. I was relieved that she said yes. (Field notes, February 2, 2011)

As I look back on these field notes, I see how we were just beginning to feel more at ease with each other and in the arts club. We had already known each other for three months when I invited her to be a participant and we had often sat together, laughed, and talked while we worked on projects. I was drawn to Bryann's energy and the stories she told of her grandpa. Although I was nervous to ask Bryann to be a participant, I felt comfortable with her.

By the time Bryann was halfway into her grade 8 school year at Willow Ridge School, when she left the school, in addition to our time in the club together, she and I had engaged in 12 one-on-one lunchtime conversations. We also spent time together and had conversations during out-of-club events. These included going on an all-day field trip to an Aboriginal school (March 11, 2011) where Bryann worked with an Elder to make a dream catcher and to finish beading the rattle she created in our club and volunteering at a bannock taco lunch day that our club hosted for the entire school in collaboration with an Aboriginal organization (June 18, 2011). Also, with her aunt's consent and invitation, there were three conversations at home with her family (March 1, May 4, and June 15, 2011). Each conversation with Bryann's kinship care lasted for 2–3 hours. Below is part of a conversation about Bryann's experiences as she spoke to me during our time together.

Sliding Back: Beginning With My Story in Mind

Simmee: *What does belonging mean to you?*

Bryann: *Like um if something belongs to me or . . . (confused expression).*

Simmee: *When you hear that word what does it make you think of?*

Bryann: *(pause) I think of like what belongs to you and what you own or your children that you take care of, they like belong to you 'cause you're raising them.*

Simmee: *That's interesting. If I think about the second way that you were saying, it seems like you're talking a little bit about family. . . . What are the ways you think that you belong?*

Bryann: *Some kids like that don't really have any friends. They think that they don't belong in like a certain group of people. And like other people, the popular kids, are like, well, they don't belong here, let's just ignore them.* (Transcript, February 23, 2011)

Looking back on this early meeting with Bryann, I did not realize at the time that my story of belonging was strongly shaping our conversation and the questions I asked. I was holding on to my stories that were planted long ago, so it was difficult for me to understand what Bryann was trying to tell me about *her* experiences around belonging. I thought Bryann was confused as she tried to answer what belonging meant to her. At the time I recalled thinking how her notion of belonging was much more literal than mine. To me, it sounded like she interpreted belonging as ownership of possessions and responsibilities for people.

Bryann began talking about how some kids do not belong in or with certain groups of people. What she was telling me made sense to me because my experiences around belonging centred around striving for "sameness" and wanting to fit in. Although in my mind I was attending to Bryann's sense of belonging, the reality was that I had quickly jumped to a story I had in mind.

Coming to Meet Bryann's Kinship Care

In my first face-to-face meeting (March 1, 2011) with Bryann's family, her Aunt Tracey invited me and another researcher, Sean Lessard, into their home. Sean, who was already familiar with the family, had offered to help me initiate contact with Tracey over the telephone. I could hardly imagine how busy their daily lives were with eight children to care for, but Tracey and her husband, Steve, invited us to their home. In the first visit, Bryann, Tracey,

Steve, Sean, and I sat at the kitchen table where we discussed the research and spent time getting acquainted. In the second meeting with Bryann's family (May 4, 2011), I came alone. Sitting at the kitchen table once again, Tracey and I seemed at ease as we shared stories of our early landscapes, cultural experiences, and some of our school experiences. Bryann and her uncle occasionally joined us at the table. In the third conversation (June 15, 2011), I introduced Tracey to another researcher, Vera Caine, whose youth participant was Tracey's daughter, Kerry. Joining us at the table were two new foster children who wanted to be part of the conversation. Bryann did not want to join this conversation.

Meeting Bryann's family helped me understand more of her worlds both in and out of school. Through the vantage point of her kinship care at the time and the stories Bryann shared with me, I learned more of Bryann's life and the multiple plotlines, which shaped her storied landscapes. In the following section, I share how I came to narrative threads in Bryann's life as we continued our inquiry around belonging.

Coming to Narrative Threads

In my early attempt to write Bryann's narrative account, I became aware of stories that she often chose to tell. At first I wondered why Bryann brought me back to certain stories she had already told. I read and reread field texts and transcribed conversations across two years of coming alongside Bryann. It was a long process before I began to understand the interwovenness of the multiple storylines that shaped and continued to shape Bryann's life,

both in and out of school. I learned how, for Bryann, the stories she told were connected. I learned how the repeated telling of particular stories, gave her a sense of "narrative unity.[26]" MacIntyre's (1981) and Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) notions of narrative unity helped me attend more closely to Bryann's experience of belonging. Woven across time, relationships, and place in her life, I came to understand how the stories she told were connected much like threads woven into fabric. These narrative threads ran across Bryann's life and seemingly held her life together.

To help me make sense of Bryann's unfolding sense of belonging, I identified two sets of narrative threads. In the first thread, "Bryann's Sense of Belonging," I inquired into her stories that I understood as places and people with whom Bryann had a sense of belonging. In the second thread, "Living In, Living Out, and Living Up To Scripts of Belonging," I inquired into Bryann's storied landscapes.

Narrative Thread 1: A Sense of Belonging

The U of A Arts Club: A place to just be.

Nobody was at the club yet. I was glad that it was only 1:00 p.m. so I had some time before the club started. With all the noise in my mind, it was nice to be in a quiet, comforting space. It had only been a week since my friend died. Not only did we teach together, she was one of my closest friends. As adults, we playfully called each other BFF (Best Friend Forever). Her death was so sudden and tragic; I was still trying to make sense of it.

I must have been daydreaming when I saw a familiar face and a blonde ponytail peeking through the door; it was Bryann. When she saw me, her lips ever so slightly turned up

[26] Clandinin and Connelly (1988) describe narrative unity "as a continuum within a person's experiences which renders life experiences meaningful through the unity they achieve for the person" (p. 280).

at the corner. Bryann gave me a little smile and came in the room. She quietly sat down beside me. I knew something was wrong at that moment. I saw the same look that Bryann had whenever she shared a story about something in her life that made her sad; these stories often led to tears. By that time it was about 1:45 p.m. and the club would not start until 2:30 p.m. I knew from Bryann's friend, another participant in the club, that she had been absent from school for a week. I knew today was Bryann's first day back at school but I did not ask why she was not in class, Instead I just told her,

"We missed you last week, Bryann." Bryann explained how she was at her six year old cousin's wake held on the reserve. "He was bleeding and dying in his hospital bed."

As Bryann shared her vivid memory of these last moments with her young cousin, I realized just how different my life was compared to hers. I had never seen a family member in this kind of pain. By the end of Bryann's story, we were both crying. Following this story, Bryann told me more of her thoughts. I did not record our conversation that day, but I recall that she said,

> *My teachers do not know why I was gone. They probably think I am just skipping school. It doesn't matter because my teachers don't know anything about my personal life anyway...I know I should be in drama class, but I can't concentrate.*
>
> ***Simmee**: Usually there is no one here this early. How did you know the door would be open?*
>
> ***Bryann**: I took a chance.*

If Bryann had not come to the club space, I learned she would have roamed the hallways, hid in the bathroom, or maybe left the school grounds; I nodded as she told me this

story. I could relate to those feelings of wanting to roam, hide, or leave. We continued to talk until one of the other researchers arrived. Then Bryann got up and announced that she was going back to class. Before leaving she assured us that she would be back for the club. (Field notes, April 13, 2011)

Looking back at this moment where Bryann and I found ourselves in an in-between space filled with uncertainty in our lives, our relationship shifted again in a deeper way. Although Bryann had life experiences that were very different from mine, her stories resonated with me. When I read over field notes from that day, I realized how important that moment was, not just for me, but for Bryann. As we struggled to make sense of a hard time and place in each of our lives, we both went to the club. It had been six months since we first met, and with time, and in relationship, we learned to co-compose a belonging place where we shared not only our interests, but our living curriculum (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992) in the multiple worlds we lived within.

At the beginning: Creating belonging places.

It was our first year in the club, and by the time January came, we had already spent several Wednesdays with the youth. Our time with them in the club allowed us to slowly get to know each of them. As researchers and junior researchers (what we began to call the youth), we learned to negotiate the curriculum being co-composed in the club. Occasionally Elders came and took the time to have conversations or play alongside us. Elders also shared teachings and led circles. I was always struck by Bryann's intensity whenever she concentrated on the Elders' words and their teachings. On a wintry day, Kokum Isabelle kept us warm with her stories as we sat together in the circle.

"Will you tell us more about the story of your dad and the black bear?" Bryann asked.

A smile spread across Kokum Isabelle's face. She seemed pleased by Bryann's interest in spirit keepers. We were then invited more into her dreams. Kokum shared her vision of a black bear who told her where and what plant would help heal her father who was sick. Bryann's eyes lit up as she leaned in closer to listen. "Sometimes spirits live in animals, sometimes spirits speak to us in dreams," Kokum Isabelle told us.

After the circle, I sat with Bryann and some of the other youth to paint the rattles made weeks earlier. As we sat together painting and sharing stories of our lives, I learned that Bryann once lived on a reserve with her grandfather. Her grandfather was now very sick. (Field notes, January 5, 2011)

Looking across these field notes, I saw how Bryann, from the onset of her time in the club, was creating a belonging place for herself and others in the club. It was a space where she shared her wonders, dreams, and stories. It was a place where we were increasingly more at ease with ourselves and with each other in the arts club.

When Bryann had been coming to the club for less than four months, I was already commenting in field notes on how her comfort and confidence were growing in the club.

When the dismissal bell rang Bryann was the first one in the club. We had such a nice lunch conversation. It was nice seeing her excited to come to the club. I remember when she told me that she would forget to come to the club but would only remember because Kerry (her cousin) was not waiting for her at their usual spot. Now it appeared that not only was Bryann remembering to come on her own, she was the first one there!

I could see her comfort level rising as well as her confidence. I was really happy to see her making a place for herself. And I felt my comfort with Bryann growing as well. I did not sit with her as much in the club as our connection was growing outside of the club in our one-on-

one conversations. There was a sense of connection whether I hung out with her in the club or not.

Bryann asked Vera, another researcher, if she could see Francis, an Elder, to work on her rattle. She had not finished beading it and she remembered us talking about a visit to the high school where Elder Francis taught. Vera asked her if she still wanted to go and Bryann excitedly nodded yes. (Field notes, February 23, 2011)

Bryann wanted to continue her beading outside of the club with an Elder. She seemed comfortable to tell us what she wanted to concentrate on in the club even when other youth were working on different activities.

Figure 4-3. Bryann's photography in the club

Figure 4-4. Photography of beadwork

Here are two photographs taken by Bryann. She went around the classroom and took pictures of the rattles. Bryann carefully positioned needles and beads. The close-up images she showed me on the digital camera were amazing. I commented how they were gallery worthy; this made Bryann smile. When she was finished, Bryann proudly shared the photographs she took of the beads. (Field notes, February 23, 2011)

As I revisited these field notes, I pictured Bryann walking around the room, taking photographs of the youths' work. She was poised with confidence as though she were a professional photographer. It appeared that the club became a place where she not only created a sense of belonging for herself, but where she could pursue her interest and share her stories. The club was a place where she seemed to feel at ease. I wondered if, in part, she felt like she had attributes in them as she moved confidently around the room, interacting with not only the materials, but also with others, with such confidence and playfulness.

I was looking forward to seeing her again in the club. Usually Bryann came early to the club, often accompanied with a smile but that day, she slid into the room quietly. Apparently she had just come from another detention. Bryann told us she had not been paying attention to the teacher and had been fooling around during class. I wondered if it was a coincidence that ever since Bryann found out she was going to move out of Willow Ridge, detentions had become more frequent as if she had lost her care for school. (Field notes, November 2, 2011)

Sliding back to Bryann's last couple weeks (October 29–November 12, 2011) at Willow Ridge School, I was glad that Bryann still came to the club even though she had just been reprimanded for her behaviour in school. I wondered if it was her sense of belonging in, and to, the club place, that made her come and participate, despite challenges in school that day.

Bryann seemed to feel safe in telling us how she hadn't been paying attention in school. Her outward apathetic attitude towards school was very different to the excitement she had shown the week before. In our conversation, she had told me about the new goals she made for herself in school. For example, in social studies class she was "trying hard" because they were learning about First Nations and she was "talking more and participating more." (Field notes, November 2, 2011)

Sliding back, I saw firsthand her enthusiasm for learning about her culture and language during our field trip (March 11, 2011) to the high school where Elder Francis Whiskeyjack taught. While there we were also invited by a teacher to sit in on a grade 8 Cree class. Bryann was so focused during the class and shared with me how she wanted to take Cree class at

Willow Ridge next year. She wanted to learn so she could communicate more with her moosum[27] in his first language, Plains Cree.

Sliding to the present, Bryann's (November 2011) sudden increase in the number of detentions conflicted with the story she told of wanting to "try harder" and "talking more and participating more" in school. These detentions seemed to coincide with her finding out that she would soon have to leave Willow Ridge School. Bryann told me that she was not sure with whom she would be living. There were a lot of unknowns for her future and I saw how the threads that were giving her life a sense of narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) and belonging, were shifting and, perhaps, coming undone.

As we continued to spend more time together both in and outside of the club, Bryann shared more stories. Always present in her life was her moosum. In one of our conversations, Bryann told me, "I belong with my moosum, and wherever he is, that is where I want to be, too" (Transcript, October 22, 2011). Through her stories, and learning to more lovingly travel to her "worlds," I came to understand her moosum as not only being Bryann's special person with whom she belongs, but also to be her belonging home place. In the following storied moments, I share how the belonging space we created together brought me to closer to Bryann.

With whom I belong: Bryann's belonging place and person.

As part of co-composing field texts and in order to learn more of each other's lives, I asked Bryann to bring in photographs that were meaningful to her.

[27] In the Plains Cree dialect, *moosum* is the name for grandpa or grandfather. In this dissertation, I use grandpa, Gramps, and moosum interchangeably, as these are the different ways Bryann referred to her grandfather.

Figure 4-5. Photograph of Gramps

Along with a photograph of herself as a toddler, Bryann shared two digital pictures of her grandpa/moosum, which were on her cell phone.

> ***Bryann:*** *There's my grandpa (pointing to the first picture of him on her cell phone).*
>
> ***Simmee:*** *Oh wow, he's got long hair.*
>
> ***Bryann:*** *Yeah, it used to be down to here, but then it was hard for him to comb it and I asked him if I can cut it and he said yeah, so I cut it up to here. And last time I asked him, he can't comb it anymore, and when I went there his hair was all wacky. I combed it and did it for him every time I went there. He said he hasn't had a haircut in 20 years, so that's a really long time.*
>
> ***Simmee:*** *So if he hasn't had his hair cut in 20 years . . . wow that'd be a big change.*
>
> ***Bryann:*** *And then I'll show you him making a funny face.* (Transcript, May 4, 2011)

As Bryann spoke to this picture of her grandpa, her concern and love for him was evident. Her grandpa's deteriorating health was making it increasingly difficult for him to take care of himself. He hadn't cut his hair in twenty years, but now he allowed and trusted his granddaughter to help him. Telling this story, Bryann was inviting me into her world by sharing her grandpa with me and her love for him, and his love for her. This story was one of the many ways that she looked out for her grandpa and took care of him, just as he always did for her. Looking back now, I can see, too, Bryann was sharing how she, and he, could be playful in the world they composed together; in this world, they did not have to worry about competence or be confined or defined by rules and order. As our relationship evolved, I learned more of the significance of Bryann's sense of playfulness in this world with her grandpa as she invited me into the different worlds she lived in where her sense of belonging was continually shaped and negotiated.

From the first day I met Bryann, she spoke fondly of her grandpa whom she described as family who "started raising [her]." Travelling back to when she used to live on the reserve, Bryann described how he "took [her] to school" every day. She also shared how she moved back with him during all the times she was "whooshed back and forth from the city to the reserve" (Transcript, April 28, 2011). Over time I learned more of Bryann's bond with her moosum as his presence reverberated in her life stories. Regardless of where she was, in time, place, and relationships, Bryann saw her moosum as her belonging place, and family, with whom she belonged. As I thought more about Bryann's stories with her moosum, it reminded me of hooks's (2008) wonders around belonging as she imaginatively returned to her childhood places. hooks wrote, "I wanted to return to the place where I had felt myself to be a part of a

culture of belonging—to a place where I could feel at home, a landscape of memory, thought, and imagination" (p. 221).

There was a sense of comfort and ease whenever Bryann brought me to places with her grandpa; these stories gave a feeling of home. In a later conversation, I asked Bryann to share more of her belonging places and again, she brought me back to her world with her grandpa.

***Simmee**: Do you feel like you belong to different places?*

***Bryann:** I think I belong right where he is. I was writing down a list of what he liked to do and I said, "Where's your favourite place?" And he said, "Right here at home."*

***Simmee**: If you had a choice where would you be?*

***Bryann:** I would go back to my grandpa.*

***Simmee**: So how do you feel here though, being in Edmonton?*

***Bryann:** I feel like I'm meant to be here, but when I'm not there it feels like I just left him.*

***Simmee**: What do you hope for your grandpa?*

***Bryann:** I hope he gets better because he's going to be getting gangrene on his foot and that can cause him to pass away. His foot is all swelled up and I told him to get it all cut off or else it will spread throughout his whole body and then he'll die.* (Transcript, May 4, 2011**)**

As Bryann shared this story, she was very worried about her grandpa and felt conflicted. She feared her grandpa would feel abandoned because she was not there on the reserve with him. It meant a great deal for Bryann to be able to be there for her grandpa who was always

there for her. As Bryann puts it, “My grandpa was like a dad to me because he raised me. All my life I went with him everywhere” (Transcript, November 2, 2011).

Bryann added how her grandpa “always had her back.” She did not want to abandon him for she knew what this felt like. Since her early years, she had moved from home to home and from one social services placement to another. This fear of abandoning her grandpa conflicted with Bryann currently being in the city, and feeling happy here. She was beginning to make friends in the city, and, in her words, felt like she was “meant to be here.” At the same time, she worried about her grandpa who was growing increasingly ill.

At this time, Bryann also shared that she was unsure how much longer her current kinship care and living in the city would continue. She did not know where she would end up, and with whom she would be in the future. If she moved back to the reserve, Bryann could not live with her grandfather as he was too ill to care for her. There was a lot of uncertainty in Bryann’s life, yet she always brought us back to stories with her grandpa. Regardless of the tensions she was experiencing at home or at school, her grandpa was always a constant in her life and a person with whom she belonged or as she put it, “I think I belong right where he [grandpa] is” (Transcript, May 4, 2011).

As months passed, Bryann’s life continued to change, along with her sense of belonging. In the following fragment, I share field notes from my time with Bryann upon her return from a visit to the reserve. It was nearly six months later that I saw the image of her grandpa with long hair again. But this time the photograph had become an artifact in a way I had not imagined—Bryann’s grandpa passed away October 2011.

In loving memory of Gramps.

The club place was busy as usual with youth working on various projects around the room. Usually Bryann was painting or snapping pictures with the research camera. Sometimes she worked on a beading project of some sort, but today she seemed content just chatting with her friends. I sat with her and her friends for a little bit and then I suggested Bryann and I take a walk to look at the collage in her locker that she had told me about. Chatting quietly as we made our way to her locker at the end of the long hallway, following our earlier lunch conversation topic, Bryann reminded me that she wanted me to write about her "from the heart stories," no matter what. She told me she wasn't sure if her stories could help people but thought maybe others might have the "same perspective." I nodded and felt again the heavy weight as I pondered how I might best honour Bryann.

We arrived at her locker. Bryann first apologized for her messy locker before opening it. At the same time I could tell that she was proud of the contents from the smile on her face; she was eager to show it to me. I felt privileged that she would share this somewhat private teenager place with me. As Bryann opened her locker door, carefully positioned on the inside was a collage of photographs of friends and a close up photograph of a beaded bracelet she created in the club. (Field notes, November 2, 2011)

As I thought back to our walk in the hallway, I felt honoured that Bryann took me to her locker. Packed in that tiny place were memories and photographs of artifacts. In addition to a couple of her childhood photos, it made me smile to see so many pictures taken from her time in the club.

Although the collage stood out, what was front and centre was the picture of her grandpa who had recently passed away. On his funeral information booklet was the picture

Bryann had earlier shared with me. I knew how much her moosum meant to her. Bryann must have noticed me staring at the booklet and, without me asking, took it off her locker door. She gently handed it to me as if she wanted me to read it aloud. Bryann told me he was 72 years old. I read the words that had been added below the picture in Bryann's handwriting:

"In loving memory of Gramps, until we meet again. I love my Grandpa David."

"I wrote that a long time ago," Bryann tells me. Bryann was hoping to put these artifacts in her new locker at her new school. Once again my eyes started to tear up. I listened to Bryann speaking with such pride and love about her dear moosum. (Interim research text constructed from field notes, November 2, 2011)

A month after losing her grandpa, I learned Bryann would leave Willow Ridge School and return to the reserve. Her kinship care at the time was moving. She was allowed to stay under this care as long as she adhered to certain expectations and was a "good girl," she told me. However, having to move back to the reserve also meant she would be leaving people and places she was attached to—her friends at school, the arts club—and we would no longer be able to have conversations in person.

In one of our last face-to-face conversations, Bryann made me wonder again about her close relationship to her moosum.

> ***Simmee:*** *I've been thinking a lot about the stories that you first told me. Is there a story like a special story that stays with you all the time that you can't stop thinking about?*
>
> ***Bryann:*** *I went to the hospital because my grandpa was sick. My grandpa's sister and I were sitting there and I told him I have to leave. He was struggling to say I love you to me and it just made me cry. I was walking out and my auntie*

asked me what's wrong but I didn't really want to tell her. So I just told her that I was mad that they cut his hair[28] *but that wasn't really the reason.*

Simmee: *So what you were really mad at was that you didn't want to leave him?*

Bryann: *I wanted to stay but my auntie didn't want that memory to be with me. But when we went back to the hospital, he passed away 10 minutes before we got there. I just I think it would make me feel that I was there for him and I was trying to help.* (Transcript, November 8, 2011)

We both cried as Bryann shared this story of her grandpa's passing. Bryann wanted to stay at the hospital to be with him. Previously, she had stayed overnight, so she could be with him at all hours. In her final moments with him, she told of his struggle to say I love you, but Bryann knew what he meant. She also knew that this meant that he might pass soon. Bryann cried knowing this and she did not want to leave him. Trying to be a "good girl," though, she obeyed her auntie and kept her thoughts inside. And when they did return to the hospital to see her grandpa, he passed away minutes before she got there.

Bryann's moosum was the constant in her life. He was her belonging place, perhaps, a home place. He was her belonging person. Now her moosum was gone. As I thought about the stories Bryann told me about her moosum throughout our time together, I wondered if she would lose her sense of belonging with her moosum gone. I held on to these stories even more closely, until Bryann reminded me that she will always have a sense of belonging with her gramps. In one of our last one-on-one in-person conversations, she said she wanted other youth to hear her story.

Simmee*: What do you want other youth to know?*

[28] Bryann spoke of how the nurse cut her grandpa's hair in the hospital as part of his care.

Bryann: *I don't know. Just go with what you feel is right for you and just always think that you always have someone there for you, like my grandpa was there for me.*

Simmee: *So do you feel like your grandpa is the one that's still there for you?*

Bryann: *I'd like to think that he is. No matter where he is, I belong.*

(Transcript, November 8, 2011)

As I lived alongside Bryann, I learned of her experiences and the tensions in the different worlds she occupied where she had to live in, live out, and live up to the multiple narratives created by others *of* her, *for* her. As I travelled to her worlds, worlds that were unfamiliar to me, I imagined how she saw herself with her eyes and how she may have been constructed through others' eyes even when she may not have "held [this] particular construction of [her]self" (Lugones, 1987, p. 10). I explore these tensions[29] below.

Narrative Thread 2: Living In, Living Out, Living Up To Stories of Belonging

Proving I belong.

By narratively inquiring into my early landscapes as a child, I understood that I searched for "sameness" as I struggled to make sense of what belonging meant to me and just how to belong. In Chapter 1, I shared these stories of tensions of how I storied myself and how I felt storied by others. In this narrative thread, I turn to Bryann's telling of a childhood experience where she shared a familial and cultural narrative that seemed to shape her early experiences of belonging. To help make sense of the familial and cultural narrative that Bryann shared, and my understanding of the significance for Bryann, returned me to Okri's (1997)

[29] Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, and Murray Orr (2010) wrote that attending to tensions is an important aspect of narrative inquiry. They share the importance of inquiring into tensionality in a relational way, referring to "the tensions that live between people, events, or things, and are a way of creating a between space, a space which can exist in educative ways" (p. 82).

words which reminds me to attend closely to stories that are "planted early or along the way" (1997, p. 46).

On March 23, 2011, Bryann brought me back to an early story of her biological mother, Melinda.

***Simmee**: What do you remember of your mom growing up?*

***Bryann:** I don't really remember her because she wasn't really there when I was growing up. So I didn't really have any memories of her.*

***Simmee**: Not even just little bits?*

***Bryann:** I remember my mom telling me that she dyed my hair black when I was small. She dyed my hair pitch black when I was 2.* (Transcript, March 23, 2011)

We did not speak of her mother a lot but, when we did, Bryann returned to this particular story of how her mother tried to change her hair colour from blonde to black. It wasn't until a couple months after this March conversation that Bryann shared the importance of this early story. She shared a photograph of herself when she was a small child (Field notes, May 4, 2011). Bryann told me that this aged photograph was taken with a Polaroid camera. In the photo, Bryann remembered being about 5 or 6 years old. A smiling Bryann, with fair skin, blonde hair, and green eyes, was standing beside her cousin Justice, who, in sharp contrast, had black hair, darker skin, and brown eyes.

***Simmee**: So let's take a look at that photo you brought. Can you tell me about this photo?*

***Bryann:** That's at my grandma's house. And I don't really remember it but that's me and there's Justice. But I think the reason why my hair is like that is because when I was 2 years or younger my mom tried to dye my hair black and*

my hair was actually bleached blonde. So after that my hair was dirty blonde.

(Transcript, May 4, 2011)

Bryann told me this story before, but this time she also shared a photograph. Sharing the experience of how her mother tried to change her hair colour when she was 2 years old was important to her. In the multiple recountings of this story, I began to understand more of the complex plotline. Bryann and her Aunt Tracey both brought up how Melinda had coloured her own hair. Bryann's biological mother was born with blonde hair. Bryann's mother lived on a reserve with her family, but having blonde hair and fair skin made Melinda stand out. Visibly she was different, not only from her family, but from the other children on the reserve, who mostly had darker hair and skin. I was not able to meet and speak with Bryann's biological mother, but I wondered more about this story. Was there a story planted long ago or along the way of the physical features Bryann needed in order to look more like her family and in that way to show she belonged with them? Did being Aboriginal and belonging to the family mean she needed to have black hair, dark skin, and dark eyes like some of the other children on the reserve?

Bryann often told me she was proud to be Aboriginal, but with her blonde hair and fair skin she found herself having to prove to others that she was actually of Aboriginal heritage. She felt that people usually assumed she was "white" from her physical appearance. In the following conversation with Bryann and her Aunt Tracey, I learned of this institutional, government narrative that Bryann bumped up against as she sought to prove to others that, regardless of her physical appearance, she was Aboriginal.

Tracey: *She [Bryann] was asking for her treaty card because people don't believe that she's treaty because she looks white but she is treaty. We have it but she just wanted to prove it.*

Simmee*: [Looking at Bryann] Who do you want to show it to?*

Bryann: *My teacher.*

Simmee*: So your teacher doesn't believe you?*

Bryann: *Well she does but I just wanted to show her…but some people, like this kid Riley doesn't believe that I have one. And all his friends are, like you don't have one. Look at the colour of your skin and I'm like well look at the colour of my family's skin as well.*

Tracey: *Yeah you would never think that her and ---- are sisters because of the difference in colour but that doesn't mean that she isn't treaty.* (Transcript, May 4, 2011)

As I listened to more of Bryann's story of wanting her treaty card to show her teacher and classmates in order to prove she was Aboriginal, I wondered how these experiences shaped her experience of belonging. She seemed to have tensions around being seen as "too white." In listening to this story of the importance of the treaty card, I wondered about this institutional government narrative that shaped Bryann's identity making. The card was constructed so every child or adult had a card or proof to show they are of Indian status[30]. Bryann found herself

[30] According to Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development Canada (n. d.), a certificate of Indian Status, more commonly referred to as a Status card, first issued in 1956 is, "an identity document insured for administrative reasons by [Indigenous] Affairs and Northern Development Canada to confirm that the cardholder is registered as a Status Indian under the Indian Act." Regardless of age, any individual registered as an Indian under the Indian Act is eligible. The status card is documentary evidence provided to registered "Indians" to facilitate access to a wide a wide range of services and benefits. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) notes that the federal Indian Act, first adopted in 1876, was colonial legislation which "defined who was and who was not an 'Indian' under Canadian law" (p. 62).

bumping against this narrative as she felt the need to have formal identification to prove she was of Aboriginal heritage; a heritage she was proud of. The card proved that she had certain attributes which proved that she belonged, was Aboriginal. As Bryann shared this story, I thought of the stories her Aunt Tracey shared of Melinda's visible differences. I wondered if Bryann and her mother Melinda both felt the need to change themselves or prove to others that they belonged with their family and as Aboriginal peoples. Having a status card was proof for Bryann that she did belong.

Looking back in my field notes, I noted how I initially thought Bryann was Caucasian with her fair skin and blonde hair. Perhaps Thomas King (2003) and Trudy Cardinal (2014) might have said, with Bryann's physical appearance, she was not the Aboriginal youth I had in mind. Or perhaps Lugones (1987) might say that she was the object of my arrogant perception as I failed to see the multiplicity of who she was and the worlds she lived in. Shifting to the present, this story of needed to prove that she belonged stays with her as she thought ahead to the future. Below I share a fragment of our conversation where I asked Bryann about what a timeline of her life from growing into the future might look like. She shared this forward looking story[31] (Lindemann Nelson, 2002) of what she imagined life beyond junior high and high school would be like.

> ***Simmee:*** *Some of the kids were talking about what they wanted to do in their future. If like you made a timeline of your life from growing up or whenever to*

[31] Lindemann Nelson (2002) writes of forward-looking and backward-looking stories as being connected. She notes, "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 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).

the future, what might it look like and what would you do? What do you remember?

Bryann: *Um well, when I turn 18, when I get my card, you know that you need a [Social Insurance Number] card to work? When I get that I want to get a job because I want to start working early. So um I get money for like long time ago, when I get older. And I want to be a doctor or a psychologist.* (Transcript, March 23, 2011)

"Yes, but you have to be on your best behaviour."

By the age of 12, Bryann had already moved in both residency and kinship care several times. She moved from a small northern reserve where her biological mother, grandpa, and the mother who took care of her lived, to Grande Prairie with her grandpa's sister, back to the reserve again. Then eventually Bryann moved to Edmonton with her Aunt Tracey and Uncle Steve. When I first met Bryann, she was under the kinship care of her aunt and uncle. Given guardianship of Bryann when she was 12 years old, her aunt and uncle also cared for their biological children as well as foster and adopted children. Near the end of her grade 7 year, in a conversation with Bryann (June 1, 2011), she brought me back to a hard place and difficult time in her life when she lived on the reserve. Bryann recalls the day she had to make an important phone call.

Bryann: *I was 12. It was February 2nd around noon I think.*

Simmee*: You remember that? Were you living in [the reserve] right?*

Bryann: *Yup.*

Simmee*: So what do you remember? The phone call or what you said or . . .*

***Bryann**: I said, well this guy Joe picked me up and he was the Welfare worker... I was like "I don't want to be with my mom [the mother who raised her] anymore. She sells my stuff." I told him all about it. Then he's like, "Who do you want to live with?" And I'm like, "My aunt." He's like, "Ok I'll phone her and I'll call you right back." And then he's like, "Well she said yes but you have to be on your best behaviour!" I said, "Ok I will."* (Transcript, June 1, 2011)

The conversation the welfare worker had with Bryann's aunt stayed with me: "Yes, but you have to be on your best behaviour!" I know Bryann carried these heavy words, because she often said to me, "I'm trying to be good," referring to her actions and behaviour not only in school, but at home. At the beginning of my time with Bryann, I did not ask about this familial story even though I knew a little of her experience through my conversations with her aunt. Even if I had asked, I am not sure Bryann would have invited me into her world just yet, for I still had to learn to attend inward and outward with a more loving perception. I return to one Stó:lō Elder's teachings that remind me to listen with "three ears: two on the sides of [my] head and the one that is in [my] heart" (Archibald, 2008, p. 8).

"World"-travelling takes patience. It takes careful and gentle listening. I had to co-compose a space, which allowed Bryann to invite me into her "worlds" and, at the same time, where she knew she was invited into my world. She had to know that it was okay to trust me. In the safe relational spaces created by the research, our relationship continually shifted where we learned that we could be vulnerable with each other as we travelled with our minds and hearts to each other's worlds. In knowing more of the complexities of her unfolding life, I knew how much it meant to Bryann, and to me, that she felt safe to share this hard story of why "she called welfare on [her]self."

Perhaps Bryann made this phone call in an attempt to interrupt the familial narrative she was living in and living out. This phone call led to another move, another place, asking different family members to take her in. Bryann cried as she told me this story because leaving the reserve also meant she had to leave her moosum. She struggled to make sense of how she needed to behave in order to stay and belong under kinship care. The welfare worker's conversation with her aunt lingered, as Bryann carried with her those words, "yes but you have to be on your best behaviour."

Living alongside Bryann and attending to her experiences, I learned of the multiple familial narratives she lived in, lived out, and had to live up to. Bryann learned that being on her "best behaviour" meant she had to be good in school, be kind to her cousins, and help her cousins do chores and homework. Living up to the good girl plotline also meant not wearing make up, not dating boys, and not being a picky eater. These were just some of the stories Bryann lived in and had to live up to in order to be a good girl. She understood being good as being able to stay in order to belong with her Aunt Tracey and Uncle Steve's family.

As Bryann lived in and lived out these multiple plotlines in her life, there was another institutional narrative that she learned she had to live by, and live up to. Just as her familial and cultural narratives reverberated into the in-school place, so, too, did the institutional narratives or "stories of school" reverberate into home. In the following excerpt, I share part of my conversation with Bryann as we puzzled together how she made sense of belonging and the tensions of having to live up to a story, a story of how she needed to behave in school and at home.

What it means to "be good."

Bryann: *Sometimes I'm late and I ask my teacher if I can get my textbook and then she said yeah go ahead and then she marks me absent. So the phone call goes home saying that I was absent third period. And then I told her that my teacher let me go out to get my binder and my textbook and she was getting mad at me because she had told me to get all my stuff ready but sometimes you do forget and it's kind of hard to carry around a lot of books.*

Simmee*: So when you're late you're worried more than just about being late for class? (Bryann nods). Yeah that's a lot of pressure.* (Transcript, June 1, 2011)

For Bryann, being marked late by the teacher meant more than just a strike on her permanent school records. Being late created tremendous tension for Bryann as it bumped up against the story of what being a good student entailed. She learned she must be on time and not late for class. If she was late, she could get a reprimanding phone call home to her aunt. It was as though the multiple narratives in Bryann's life were like those stacks of binders and books she was told to carry from class to class. Each book was precariously perched. She was scared that she would make a mistake. With the slightest mistake or exhibit of "not good" behaviour, there was no knowing where she would fall or be placed.

In the following fragment, I share an institutional narrative that Bryann bumped up against as she lived in and lived out her experiences of what it meant to be good and "on her best behaviour" in the school place. This institutional story of what it means to be good in school brought me back to a lunch conversation a few weeks before. We were so engrossed in our conversation that we kept talking a few minutes after the lunch bell rang. Feeling that it was my fault she was late for class, I walked Bryann to her math class and waited with her. The

math teacher had locked the door. Waiting outside were 7 other students who apparently were also late for class.

Fifteen minutes passed before the math teacher opened the door. By that time, six of the seven kids outside had already left to hide in the washroom, roam the hallways, or leave the school grounds. I asked about this incident in a later conversation with Bryann.

> ***Simmee****: You know that day that we were late? What happened after that?*
>
> ***Bryann:*** *Well, he usually writes the names down on the board but you excused me so I was good.* (Transcript, May 18, 2011)

Bryann did not leave like the other students, instead, she waited for the teacher to open the door even though she knew the teacher was going to write down the names of all those students who were tardy and give them an after-school detention. Bryann was relieved the teacher excused her. In her words, "you excused me so I was good." For Bryann, being excused by the teacher and not having her name written down meant that she was still being good. There were other plotlines within the institutional narrative that Bryann lived in and lived out of what it meant to be "good" in school. Belonging in school also meant being on time for class, and being prepared by carrying all her books and binders for every subject with her at all times.

Wondering about how Bryann coped with the pressure of having to be good all of the time, I asked her more about this. As Bryann explained to me just how difficult it was to focus on school with all the pressures in her life to be a certain way, she started to cry and said, "I just want to go back to my grandpa because he's very sick." Referring to her grandpa having gangrene, Bryann often shared this story of wanting to visit her grandpa on the reserve. She

continued to cry as she said, "When I want to go visit him [her moosum] some people say I'm going to smoke drugs and do bad things, but really I'm not" (Transcript, November 2, 2011). Whenever we had a conversation about hard things in her life, Bryann always returned to stories with her moosum. Bryann just wanted to visit her grandpa, yet, this was a struggle as she tried to live up the story of being a "good girl" when at the same time, people were storying her as "doing bad things."

In the following fragment, I slide back to another narrative in which Bryann tells of how she learned, at an early age, the importance of being good so people in her life would not give up on her and send her away.

Simmee*: Do you still remember what it was like living with your mom?*

Bryann: *Mmm hmm.*

Simmee: *What was that like?*

Bryann: *I think it was like sometimes it was good and sometimes bad, but what really hurts me is when I was talking to my mom and she said, I gave up on you, I can't do it anymore. Like that kind of hurt.* (Transcript, June 1, 2011)

Bryann and I both cried as she told me this story of how she struggled to make sense of whom she belonged with and to. In the "stories of school," Bryann learned to live out the story of what makes a good student and the good behaviour that is necessary if she wanted to stay and be welcomed in class. The tensions of living in, living out, and living up to these stories of a good student, a good child, reverberated back and forth from the school and home. Worried about the possible consequences of not living up to the story of being on her best behaviour both at school and at home, it was difficult to know how long she was allowed to stay in a place, and with whom, and where she belonged.

There was more than what I included in the initial conversation. I was confused about what Bryann was telling me, but now I see that I ended the conversation because I didn't understand her experience.

Revising the beginning.

Simmee*: What does belonging mean to you?*

Bryann: *Like um if something belongs to me or? (confused expression).*

Simmee*: When you hear that word what does it make you think of?*

Bryann: *(pause). I think of like what belongs to you and what you own or your children that you take care of, they like belong to you 'cause you're raising them.*

Simmee: *That's interesting. If I think about the second way that you were saying, it seems like you're talking a little bit about family. What are the ways you think that you belong?*

Bryann: *Some kids like that don't really have any friends. They think that they don't belong in like a certain group of people. And like other people, the popular kids, are like, well they don't belong here, let's just ignore them.*

Simmee*: What do you think?*

Bryann: *I think they're kind of sad because they think that they're being pushed away and feel like they're not wanted.*

Simmee*: Do you ever feel that way?*

Bryann: *(long pause) No.*

Simmee*: Do you know people that feel that way?*

Bryann: *Yeah.*

***Simmee**: Do you try to help?*

***Bryann:** I don't really, I can't really do anything so . . . (long pause). My grandpa, he said that he doesn't wanna get his leg, leg cut off, 'cause um there was like some kind of thing in his foot and if he doesn't get it cut off it's gonna turn into gangrene and it's gonna spread to his whole body and he'll die.*

(Transcript, February 23, 2011)

I return to this early conversation as I see now how Bryann was sharing her sense of belonging by bringing me to her experience of family. Unlike Bryann, when I was growing up, I never worried about whether or not my family would leave me. I never worried about who I would belong to, who would raise me, or under whose care I would be. Her world was unfamiliar to me and perhaps it was my "dis/ease" (Lugones, 1987) that kept me from understanding of paying close attention to what Bryann was sharing with me. Perhaps Lugones (1987) might say I was seeing Bryann with an arrogant perception as I "failed to identify" with her or "to love" her by travelling to her worlds. As I was just coming to know her and not had not yet travelled to her "worlds, "I could not see "through [her] eyes" or imagine what her life might be like (Lugones, 1987, p. 12). While Bryann was sharing her worries about who would be raising her and "own her," I remember thinking our conversation got diverted from talking about belonging to a story of her grandpa's leg. What seemed off topic to me was Bryann talking about her experience of belonging. There was a strong thread of narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) as this story of belonging with her grandpa was one that sustained her.

Looking inward, I think about how easy it was to unknowingly plant my story of belonging into Bryann. King (2003) noted that he "defined identity in a rather narrow and self-serving fashion" when he focused on appearance (p. 59). Like King, I understood belonging in

a limited way as I viewed it in terms of sameness. As I learned with Bryann what it meant to lovingly "world"-travel (Lugones, 1987), I realized I had to revise our beginnings. I learned to let go of my present understandings and move towards "un-knowing" and "not-knowing" where I "acknowledged [my] ambiguity and uncertainty" (Vinz, 1997, p. 139) as a researcher, as a teacher, and as a human being.

In each new telling, I learned more about how Bryann's moosum was an important part of her identity making as she worked to make sense of belonging in her life. At the age of 14, she had already experienced many difficult transitions. Abruptly, she found herself in a different place, belonging elsewhere and sometimes belonging nowhere. Yet during these times of uncertainty, her knowing that she belonged with her grandpa never wavered. Now that her grandpa is gone, her sense of belonging lives in memory, in her heart, and in spirit.

The week following our last conversation, Bryann returned to the reserve with her kinship care. Shortly after she moved, she was taken out of kinship care and placed temporarily into a group home situated in a different reserve. Bryann liked this group home and wanted to stay, but her case worker explained that a group home was not a permanent home. Bryann knew she was likely going to move but she had hope and was "trying to be good to stay longer" (Phone conversation, May 14, 2012). Since then, Bryann has moved through a series of schools and group homes.

Continuing to live alongside Bryann and "travelling" with her from place to place and from "world" to "world," I see how she still lovingly carried these stories with her grandpa. These stories of belonging with him stayed with her . . . they stayed with me. I have always loved Lopez's words, but living alongside Bryann in this narrative inquiry helped me understand even more clearly how "sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay

alive. That is why we put these stories in each other's memory. This is how people care for themselves" (Lopez, 1990, p. 60).

Chapter 5: A Family Web: Sage, Robin, and Joan's Narrative Account

Belonging Collage: Beginning with Sage

Simmee: *Go ahead Sage, tell us (Sandra and Simmee) about your belonging collage.*

Sage: *What am I supposed to say?*

Simmee: *How about start with what it is called?* (Transcript, April 26, 2012)

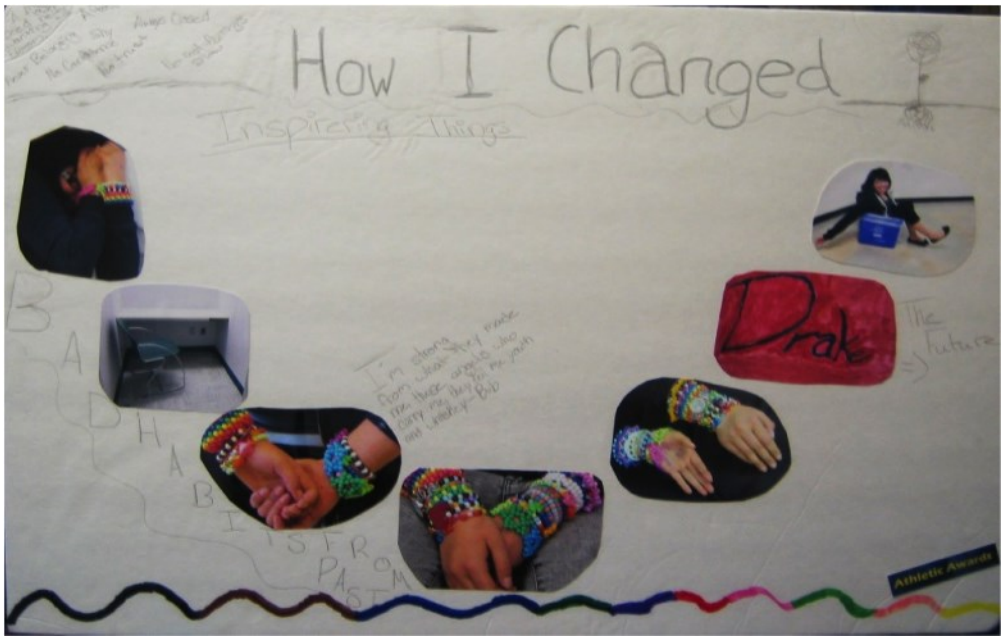

Figure 5-1. Sage's belonging collage

I begin the narrative account with these words from the midst of a transcript made as Sage, Sandra (another youth participant), and I talked. The stories Sage shared in her belonging collage were recorded after many one-on-one conversations, small-group conversations among

Sage, Sandra and me, field trips outside of school, a home visit, and our time together in our arts club over two years.[32]

During our one-on-one conversations and sometimes in three-way conversations with Sandra, Sage told stories of different places where she had lived, schools she attended, new and old friendships, relationships, and influences in her life. By our fourth one-on-one conversation, I suggested we set up a weekly task to help guide our research (March 13, 2011). We had not discussed creating a collage at that time, but had spoken of our work together as being "co-researchers in our belonging project." Sage agreed to weekly tasks because she, too, thought it was a good idea to focus our conversations.

As I looked over the multiple field notes and transcripts I had gathered from over 20 conversations, I identified the following tasks (shown below as "Task") and questions I asked Sage to engage in (shown below as "Share"). Below are the dates of conversations where I specifically asked about people with whom Sage belonged, places of belonging, and photographs and symbols of belonging.

Task: Can you bring a photograph that is special to you? (April 12, 2011)

Share: Tell me more about this photograph you brought? Why is it special to you? (April 19, 2011)

Share: What do you feel are belonging places? (May 24, 2011)

Task: Create an oral timeline of when you were growing up. (May 3, 2011; February 23, 2012)

[32] Over the course of the 2010–2012 school years, Sage and I had 22 one-on-one conversations, which took place over lunchtime inside the school. Additionally, we had extended one-on-one and sometimes group conversations when we went with other participants on field trips outside of school. We engaged in the following field trips: a visit to see an Elder at a school with Aboriginal programming (May 11, 2011), a visit to the University of Alberta (January, 23, 2012), to eateries near the school (October 20, 2011; December 19, 2011), a home visit (June 8, 2011), and a field trip to work on their collages (April 26, 2012).

Share: What are symbols of belonging for you? (June 1, 2011, December 19, 2011, January 23, 2012)

Task: Bring in memory box items/symbols of belonging. (December 19, 2011)

Share: Artifacts/memory box items. (December 23, 2011)

Share: Are there places in school where you feel most comfortable? Places of belonging? (May 10, 2011; October 20, 2011; February 23, 2012)

Share: Are there places outside of school that are belonging places? (May 24, 2011; February 23, 2012)

Share: What do you imagine and hope for yourself? What are your in-the-future imagined stories? (January 23, 2012; March 19, 2012)

Sage brought me stories composed around questions of belonging places, people, and symbols/representations. On March 20, 2012, I told Sage that Sandra and I had talked about creating a collage[33] as a way to represent our experiences of belonging. I asked Sage if she wanted to create a collage as part of our belonging project. Sage said yes and suggested that we (Sage, Sandra, and I) go on an after-school field trip to work on it. Following this conversation, I gave Sage a disposable camera and encouraged her to freely take photographs both in and outside of school. We discussed attending closely to people (relationships), places, and symbols as possible ways to represent her experiences around belonging. We also talked about the

[33] The idea of a belonging collage and engaging students in autobiographical narrative inquiry research came out a SSHRC-funded multi-site national study in which I undertook my master's research in 2007–2008. The larger study worked to attend to the experiences of teachers, children, and the children's families' curriculum making. In our Alberta school site, Jean Clandinin, Jennifer Mitton, and I worked with children in a grade 3 classroom. As we lived alongside the children for the school year, stories emerged that were shaping their identity making and sense of belonging; this led us to wonder how to negotiate and co-compose curriculum that attended to their experiences. As a way to negotiate curriculum with the children and their families, we named the project "Citizenship Education Project" (Chung, Clandinin, & Huber, 2008).

following tasks to create and imagine how she wanted to represent her stories of experience around belonging.

Task: Think about how you want to represent your experience around belonging. Over the next few weeks, take photographs for your belonging project. (March 20 to April 20, 2012)

Task: Bring in disposal camera for Simmee to develop photographs for collage. (April 20, 2012)

Task & Share: Create and share belonging collage. (April 26, 2012)

On April 17, 2012, I sent Sage the following text message to remind her of the tasks we discussed both in our one-one-conversation and in the club.

Hi Sage,

Just a little reminder:

5 pics: People with whom you belong.

5 pics: Places inside school where you belong.

5 pics: Places outside of school where you belong.

Please bring the camera to the club and I will develop these photos before we go on our field trip to work on our belonging project.

(Text message, April 17, 2012)

In the making of her belonging collage during our field trip on April 26, 2012, Sage was very focused and determined to get it just the way she envisioned. I recall her constantly arranging and rearranging the photographs on her poster board. She did not want to glue anything in place until she was absolutely sure of how she placed them. The photographs and words she chose, the pencil sketches she erased and redrew multiple times, the long squiggly

line at the bottom of her poster which changed colours, the careful placement of photographs alongside words, the white spaces in between were all given careful consideration. Everything in Sage's collage was carefully thought out and represented important pieces of her stories of belonging.

As Sage and I inquired into her experiences, we recognized the challenge of trying to capture the temporality of her unfolding life. Sage, now in grade 8, shared many changes in her life, and in her thinking, since I first met her in grade 7. Aware of the fluidly in her life, Sage decided to call her collage **"**How I Changed Through the Times Since Grade 7." This collage became Sage's account of her experiences around belonging and identity making.

With the collage propped on her lap so that it was facing Sandra and me, Sage giggled nervously. Pointing to the corner of her collage, Sage began.

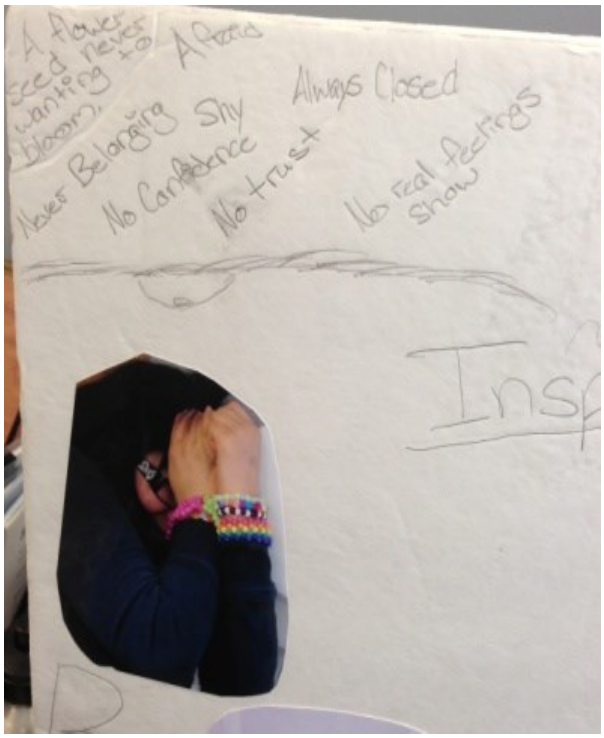

Figure 5-2. Corner of Sage's collage

A flower

A seed

wanting to grow

to bloom.

I always wanted to stay the same

and never really changed

I never belonged wherever I went.

Afraid of meeting new people

afraid of doing different things.

I had no confidence

scared of speaking in front of the class

just even public speaking.

(Transcript, April 26, 2012)

Crammed into the top left hand corner of Sage's collage were single words. Her drawing of a seed planted underneath the ground accompanies these words. Sage first told a story in her collage where she compared herself to "a flower, a seed, wanting to grow to bloom." She told Sandra and I how she once wanted "to stay the same" and "never really change" and felt like she "never belonged wherever [she] went."

Carefully placed below this drawing of a seed is a photograph of Sage covering her face and hiding behind her beaded arms. In the image, it was hard to know the place where the photograph was taken. However, I had been with Sage at the time the photograph was taken. Leaning against the toilet paper dispenser in the girls' washroom, a story of belonging lived here. The washroom was a place where some youth went to hide, to escape detention, or to take

an extended break from class instruction. Telling us more of this story of wanting to escape and of being afraid, Sage explained:

I didn't really trust anybody,

too afraid they would turn on my back

so I am making myself see it…

well back in grade 7.

I was always closed

never really talked to anybody

nobody really knew anything about me

my feelings didn't show.

You would only see me smiling

and being happy for a little while

then it would fade away.

(Transcript, April 26, 2012)

Sage's words, along with her photograph where she covered her face crouched in a bathroom stall, brought me back to when I first met her. My first impression of Sage was that she was reserved. I did not know then that she was wondering whom she could trust in the club and how she wondered if she belonged.

Meeting Sage in the Club: Grade 7

Did she say her name was Sage?

Large beads

covering her arms and legs.

She must really like jewellery

Sinking into her chair

is she uncomfortable?

I wonder what brings her here.

(Field notes, January 5, 2011)

It is January 5, 2011, our first Wednesday back after the Christmas holidays. Like the other researchers, I wondered, and worried, if new kids might come to the club and if the other youth who had previously attended would return. We were excited as both new and familiar faces gathered in the club. Florence, another researcher, suggested we start with a sharing circle to have the kids share something about their holidays. One of the new girls shyly introduced herself as Sage. She said nothing of her holidays and quickly passed on the heart stone, our club's version of a talking stick[34]*. I did not know much of this youth from her brief introduction. From what I saw, I thought she must really like wearing jewellery. Standing out were colourful large beads that covered most of her arms and neck. The way Sage sank uncomfortably in the chair conjured up for me an image of a turtle, a little scared, retracting into its shell. Was she uncomfortable? Her thick-rimmed glasses and bangs covered a lot of her face. What brought her to the club? As we sat in the group circle, I kept these wonderings to myself, hoping I might be able to know her better outside of the circle.*

After the prayer, Elder Isabelle Kootenay returned to her medicine wheel teachings, reminding us that December 21st was the first day of Solstice. She told us that we were now in

[34] The talking stick is commonly used in Aboriginal circles to designate who was speaking. It was also a way to encourage others in the circle, to listen to the speaker, the holder of the stick. Often an Elder holds the talking stick to begin the discussion. When the Elder finishes, he/she held out the talking stick and whoever wished to speak took it. The stick is then passed from one individual to another until all who wished to speak had done so. In our club, we used a heart stone in place of a talking stick and passed it clockwise around the circle so everyone would have a turn to speak.

the season of renewal. Then Elder Isabelle Kootenay showed us a mineral totem, a rock from the mantle of the earth, and passed it around our circle. In this teaching, she asked the group why the buffalo are important to the Aboriginal people. A few vocal youth answered, Sage was not one of them. She was silent. When we broke off into activities, I noticed that Sage wandered towards the beading tables where Vera and some other youth were sitting. It was the quieter table. By the time club was over, Sage had already beaded one earring, which looked like a turtle. Trudy commented on how she seemed to be a natural at beading and I agreed. (Field notes, January 5, 2011)

Now as I lay these field notes alongside Sage's story told in her collage, I understand more of why she was so quiet that first day at the club. Much like the image of her hiding, Sage chose to be "closed" until she felt a sense of belonging with the people in the club. Although she did not physically hide behind her hands as depicted in her bathroom stall photograph, she did mask her arm with bracelets. In the following field notes I share more of my early memories of meeting Sage:

She sits all by herself.

Head down, almost touching the notebook.

Is she writing a story?

(Field notes, January 12, 2011)

Figure 5-3. Photograph of Sage in the club

Sage returned to the club. We did not start with a circle that day so the youth went right to work on projects. Some worked on beading and rattles, and some chose to work on the painting of individual medicine wheels. At first Sage, along with some other girls, worked at the beading table. I did not join any group but circulated around the room with another youth in the club where we took turns taking photographs of everyone.

Looking through the lens of the camera, my attention moved towards Sage. I was not sure when Sage moved away from the beading table and the other girls, but it was hard not to notice her as she sat there all by herself. With her head down, almost touching her notebook, even from across the room, she looked engrossed in her writing. I wondered if she was writing a story. There was something about the intensity and quietness in which she worked alone that made me not ask questions, but observe her from a distance. Eventually Jean joined Sage at the table.

Immortal story of a vampire.

She is a writer.

Everyday experience is her inspiration she says.

(Field notes, January 12, 2011)

An hour and a half passed quickly and we cleaned up for the day. Most youth cleaned up their projects at the table. Sage just closed her notebook and quickly left. I later learned from Jean that Sage was working on an immortal story of a Vampire. Jean told Sage that she, too, was a writer. Sage shared more with Jean of this story she had started months ago. It was about a female character that was much like Sage. Jean learned that Sage used her everyday experiences as inspiration for her writing. Apparently, Sage had not shared this story with anyone before, but told Jean she would share this story with her one day. (Field notes, January 12, 2011)

Thinking back to Sage's words from her belonging collage, "afraid of meeting new people" and "afraid of doing different things," I wondered again what brought Sage to the club. The club was a new place. There were new people here. We did different things. What made Sage come even though she was afraid? In later conversations, I asked what brought her to the club. I learned that her trusted friend, Sandra, had convinced her to give the club a try. Sage came to the club, but with reservations and serious doubts as to whether or not she would fit in, but she took a chance. She had at least had one friend in the club to make her feel more comfortable. Eventually the club became a place where, she later told us, we "made her feel welcomed." It was a place that she said felt "like home."

Asking Sage to be a Participant

I joined Jean, Sandra, and Sage, who were beading. They seemed engaged in a conversation when I joined in. They were talking about a book that Sage was reading. A book about vampires, specifically an adolescent vampire named Vladimir. Sage was quiet so Jean and I asked her to say more about a series called "The Chronicles of Vladimir Tod."

I enjoyed seeing Sage so excited as she talked about books she had read. We got into the topic of book writing. I think Jean asked her about this as she knew of Sage's interest in writing. Sandra said she wanted to write a story about a care bear with abs. We all laughed. It was nice to see both girls opening up a bit as they had been rather quiet up to this point. (Field notes, February 16, 2011)

Looking back across the field notes, I saw how Sage began to feel more at ease in the club and was allowing herself to be more playful. In the following months, I did not see Sage bring the notebook to the club anymore, but she explored different art media with other youth and researchers. In these field notes, I describe how I began to connect with Sage as she shared her love of music.

After the other kids went off to work on their projects, Sage sat in the circle of chairs by herself. She was playing with her phone. I went over to keep her company. I asked Sage what kind of music she listens to and she told me the name of a band that I could not remember. She told me that she was hoping to go to Vans Warped Tour in America. She showed me a picture of the band on her iPhone.

We chatted about her other musical interests. She said some of her music was a "little inappropriate." I asked her how inappropriate, slightly afraid of what I might hear. We gave each other a funny look and laughed. Then Sage played me a song and said she didn't usually share with adults. I listened carefully to the lyrics.

Oblivious to what was happening around us. Sage and I realized the other youth and researchers had already cleaned up the place. Some youth had left, but Sage seemed in no rush. She stayed and we talked some more. Our conversation seemed to flow with ease. I began

to think about asking Sage to be a participant in this study around belonging and immediately asked her. She said yes to being a participant. (Field notes, February 23, 2011)

I came to learn more about the many layers of who she was and wanted to be from her stories of belonging shared from her collage and in our conversations. As a way to create a framework to make sense of the stories Sage shared with me, we also co-created an annal.[35] Below is an outline of significant events in Sage's life. We constructed her annal using a timeline beginning with her birth.

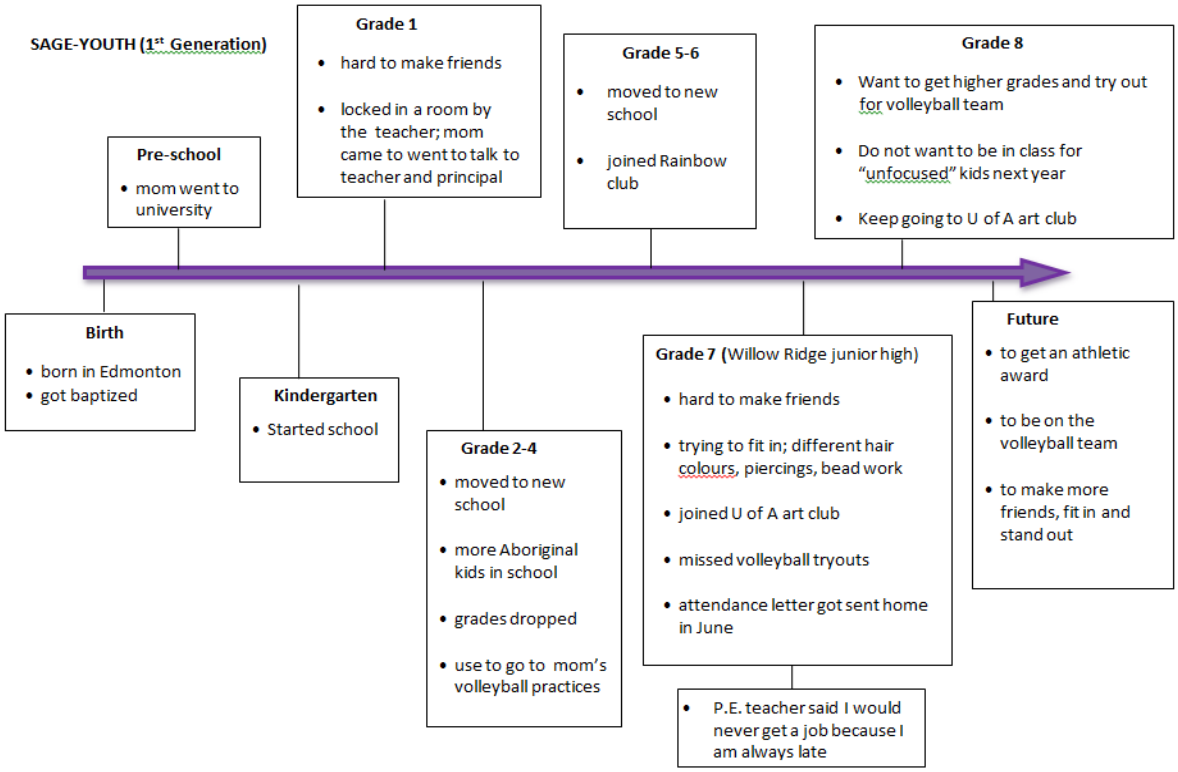

Figure 5-4. Sage's annal

[35] Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe narrative inquiry as frequently involving participants in creating "annals and chronicles as a way to create a framework on which to construct their oral histories. Through this process of composing annals and chronicles, participants begin to recollect their experiences and to construct the outlines of a personal narrative" (p. 112). An annal may be composed of a "list of dates of memories, events, stories and the like." Participants may construct a timeline. A chronicle may be thought of as the "sequence of events in and around a particular topic or narrative thread of interest" (p. 112).

Sage: Coming to Know Her Stories of Belonging

Figure 5-5. Image of Sage's beaded bracelets

Bracelets

Not really belonging.

Non-belonging because I didn't.

(Transcript, April 26, 2012)

As she spoke more of her belonging collage, Sage told us the story of this photograph of her arm covered with colourful beaded bracelets. As she told this story, I flashed back to memories of Sage wearing an armful of beaded bracelets when she first came to the club. I thought it was because she loved jewellery. Now I was learning that these bracelets were a symbol of belonging, or as she told Sandra and I, of "not really belonging or non-belonging." Sage explained why the bracelets represented her sense of belonging.

I used to express myself through physical ways.

I didn't really understand that I could express better

with my own self in a mental way

instead of anything physical.

Sage shared more of her story of how she struggled to belong. She told how she tried to change her physical appearance on the outside in order to become more visible to others. Sage experimented with other physical ways to change herself.

Like hair, these bracelets

I guess I wanted to hide.

I'd always wear long sleeves or a sweater.

(Transcript, April 26, 2012)

Sage's words stayed with me as I returned to the story of her covering her face in the bathroom stall: "Like hair, these bracelets, I guess I wanted to hide." The bracelets were a physical way to hide, a way to cover herself as she wanted to hide. Yet, the large, colourful beaded bracelets Sage decided to wear drew attention. I recall more than Sage's bracelets standing out. So too did her hair colours. She often changed her hair colour and made this visible in the club. Whenever she coloured her hair, she asked me if I noticed what was different. It was difficult to not notice how her hair had changed from blue to pink to purple to black since I first met her in grade 7.

Sage also made visible other forms of expressions such as her desire for body piercings. She already had a nose ring and was hoping to get snake bites or, as she explained them, stud earrings in her chin to look like fangs. She thought it might make her look like a "bad ass." During these experimentations, I thought it was Sage being cool and edgy. I knew she had an alternative style and taste in music.

Now as I listened to Sage's story, I realized it was much more than her trying to be visible or to be seen as a "bad ass." I wonder if these physical ways of changing herself were part of her attempts to try on different stories where she could fit in, be noticed by others, and feel a sense of belonging. Perhaps experimenting with these physical changes was Sage's way of making sense of who she was and wanted to be.

Sage acknowledged how she tried to express herself in "physical ways," but began to realize she could also express herself "in a mental way." In Sage's words, "I didn't really understand that I could express better with my own self in a mental way." These words recalled for me the early image of Sage with her head down, writing a story. I wondered if by bringing her notebook to the club and showing us she was a writer, Sage was trying to express herself in a "mental way." She wrote herself into stories where she shared her dreams, hopes, and fears. Sage was the strong and confident main character in her stories. I wondered if by being a strong and confident main character in the stories she was finding another way to belong.

The stories she told me included important people in her life, particularly her mother (Robin) and her grandmother (Joan). In the following section, I share how I came to meet Robin. I learned from Sage that her mother was extremely protective of her family and was a private person. Below is an annal constructed out of the stories that Robin shared with me in our conversations during the 2011–2012 school year and on January 11, 2013.

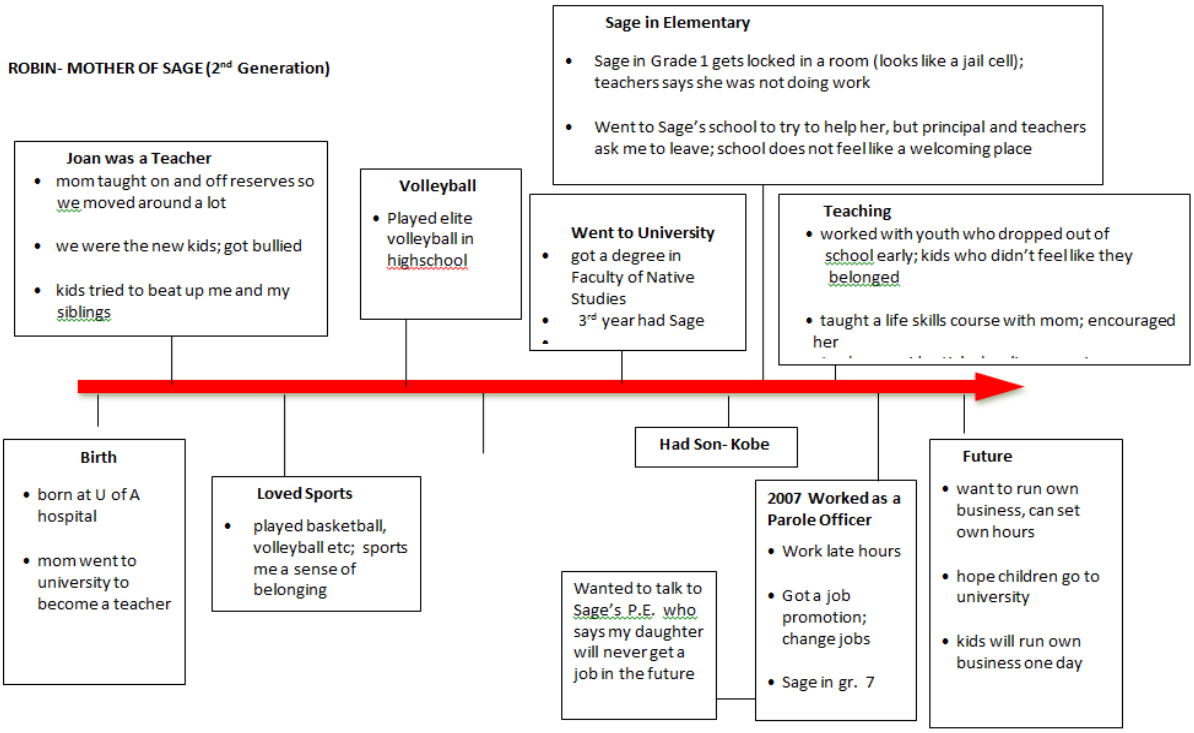

Figure 5-6. Robin's annal

First Encounter to Coming to Know Robin

It was April 4, 2011, and the club had just ended for the day. Most youth had already left. As usual, Sage was one of the last to leave. Rather than taking the bus home, Sage told me that her mom, Robin, had the day off work so she was picking her up from school. Knowing that I wanted to have conversations with her mom, Sage asked, "Do you want to meet my mom today?" She told me I could go with her to meet her mother at the front door where she was being picked up. I was nervous and surprised, as I did not think my first meeting would be so impromptu. I imagined it would be more formal or that her mother would know ahead of time before she met me. I knew from previous failed attempts to connect with Robin through Sage when I asked for her mother's phone number, how cautious her mother was. In an effort to perhaps mask my nervousness, I brought the papier maché mask that Sage had been working

on. I hoped that by bringing Sage's work from the club, Robin and I could possibly have a starting point for a conversation.

Sage and I waited at the main door adjacent to the office. A few minutes later, Robin came into the school with Sage's younger brother, Neil. Robin was a tall woman with long dark hair. I felt slightly intimidated and awkwardly introduced myself to Robin. She greeted me with a very firm handshake. Thankfully, Robin told me she had heard about me from Sage and she recalled signing the consent forms. Seeing I held a mask in my hand, I told her that it a mask that Sage made in the club. Robin shared how it conjured up thoughts of a mask project she heard about which provoked identity work with youth. She explained how, in a former position, she worked with street youth. In this alternative school program for youth, they hired artists and rented a studio to work with youth considered to be at risk, through art and poetry. The youth had been unsuccessful in mainstream institutions she explained. Robin spoke confidently and with passion about her work with youth and now her work with adults who experienced challenges. Immediately feeling more at ease with Robin, I explained the larger study in more depth, then the doctoral research, and hopes for not only Sage's participation but also Robin's.

Robin listened carefully to what I said and then she shared her worries of misuse of Aboriginal people and research on Aboriginal people. I nodded as I had heard of similar worries and concerns from my Aboriginal friends, peers, professors, and the research team. Robin told me she also had to think about her job, which required discretion in order to provide for the protection of her children. I told her more about the confidentiality of the research for the participants and my hopes to involve her and her daughter as co-researchers, people to research with and alongside, not on.

It was almost 5:00 p.m. and we had talked in the hallway for some time before I sensed that she was feeling more comfortable in the possibilities of the research, and I think, perhaps even more importantly, began to feel comfortable with me. Robin gave me her email to set up a conversation date. I saw providing me with this information was a sign of her beginning trust in me. Sage and her brother had been waiting patiently this whole time while Robin and I were chatting. It seemed like Robin and I had much to talk about.

Walking down the hallway back to the club, I breathed a sigh of relief. I was glad I finally got to meet Robin. I felt a deep sense of gratitude for Sage, and the other youth in the club who trusted us enough to bring us to their parents. I knew I would not have been able to meet Robin if it weren't for Sage's help and her reassurance to her mother that it was okay to trust me.

Following this first unexpected meeting in the hallway, Robin and I began exchanging emails. We decided to have our second meeting (May 12, 2011) in a coffee shop after Robin got off work. We spoke for three hours until the barristas began putting up chairs to let us know they were closed. "My mom, Sage, and I, we are one" (May 12, 2011) she told me as we shared stories of important people in our lives. We continued to share stories and our lives through several emails in between meetings. One day I got a surprise when Robin invited me to meet a significant and important person in her and Sage's life. I received this invitation in an email from Robin: "Would you be interested in meeting my mom so you can get an even better idea of what a great line of women we come from?" (Email from Robin, May 17, 2011)

I was elated and surprised because I had not imagined I would have an opportunity to meet the woman I had heard so much about from Sage and Robin. I felt a little nervous about the complexities of attending across three generations until I thought back to Robin's words

from our second meeting: “My mom, Sage, and I, we are one” (May 12, 2011). I accepted Robin’s invitation to meet her mother. We planned for me to meet Joan at her home on June 8, 2011.

Coming to Know Grandma Joan

I was as nervous about meeting Joan as when I first met Robin. I knew nothing of what Joan knew about me yet I was going to her home. In the following excerpt, I share field notes on meeting Joan.

Before today, I have not spoken to Joan. I wasn’t sure what to bring as a gift. Last time Sean and I brought tobacco as protocol for another participant youth’s family. For this first meeting with Joan, I decided to bring chocolates. When I got to the address I wrote down, I wasn’t sure if I was at the right house. There was a small toddler bicycle in the yard. As I stood in the middle of the tiny front yard, I was reminded me of the row housing I lived in when I was a little girl. I knocked on the door until a lady that I hoped was Sage’s grandmother appeared. “May I help you?” she asked in almost a whisper. She looked surprised to see me. Still wondering if I had the right house, I introduced myself.

“Hi, I’m Simmee. I know your granddaughter Sage and your daughter Robin. You must be Joan. I’m very excited to meet you. Robin said it was okay for me to meet you today.”

I can’t remember what else I said but I do remember there was silence as Joan studied me for a moment. I was relieved when she said that she knew I was coming today because Robin told her. She then invited me in to her home. (Field notes, June 8, 2011)

It was around 4 p.m. by that time. I had hoped to have Sage or Robin there to introduce me to Joan but they were not home yet so it was just Joan and me-two strangers meeting.

Joan invited me to sit down on the couch. She was in the middle of watching Joyce Myer, a minister on a television show. It seemed appropriate to give Joan the box of chocolates then and I thanked her for letting me come into her home. She seemed surprised as she did not expect a gift. As we got more comfortable with each other, I told more about who I was. I explained a little more about how my research was part of a larger study, with a focus on belonging and identity making of youth and their families. I gave Joan the information letter we gave to the youth and their families. I told her how I met Sage at the U of A arts club. We talked about what youth do in the arts club. Rattle making, drum making, beading were some of the art activities youth participated in. I noted that Sage did not partake in a lot of these activities, but she often came to hang out with the researchers and her friends. She brought in her own beads or activities to work on such as writing.

After sharing more of how I came to meet her grand-daughter in the club and meeting her daughter Robin, I told Joan that I was also hoping she would be a participant. I wanted to learn more about Sage, Robin, and her experiences in and out of school.

"I don't know how to do anything Native," Joan told me.

"That's okay, I don't know how to do anything Chinese," I replied.

This comment seemed to break the ice as we both laughed. Joan agreed to be a participant. We were both more relaxed as Joan spoke about how she didn't really bead or know how to make a rattle and other things like that. I nodded in understanding.

After signing the consent form, Joan went to photocopy it to have a copy for herself. Leaving the room for a couple minutes, Joan returned with the form and a larger binder. Proudly flipping through her meticulously organized binder, she showed me the numerous certificates, the life skill course she taught, and other professional development activities

gathered over her 25 years of teaching. Almost all the documents were laminated or placed in clear folder pockets to preserve them. I felt honoured when she put a copy of the signed consent form in her binder. Before closing the binder, Joan turned to me, stating, "Education, nobody can take that away from you." These words were familiar to me as I recalled Robin saying the same words to me in our meeting on May 12, 2011.

After we flipped through all the pages in her binder, we sat back down on the couch. Sitting side by side, Joan's eyes lit up as she was excited to tell me stories. "Oh I have a story," she told me. "Oh, I have another story…" Asking permission to take notes, I could hardly keep up with Joan as I learned about her life as a child, mother, and grandmother.

Before I left her house, Joan looked at her calendar noting there was a healing gathering on July 23rd. She told me I should go. I thanked Joan for the invitation, and explained I would have loved to attend except I would have just finished teaching a course and was getting married in less than a week after I finished teaching. We made plans to see each other again. (Field notes, June 8, 2011)

Over the 2011–2012 school year, Joan and I had several phone conversations as well as three one-on-one conversations (June 8, 2011; June 30, 2011; February 27, 2012). Over time, I learned how the stories Joan told in our initial meeting had shaped and continued to shape her experiences as a child, a mother, and grandmother. With Joan's input, we co-constructed an annal with events told to me during our conversations.

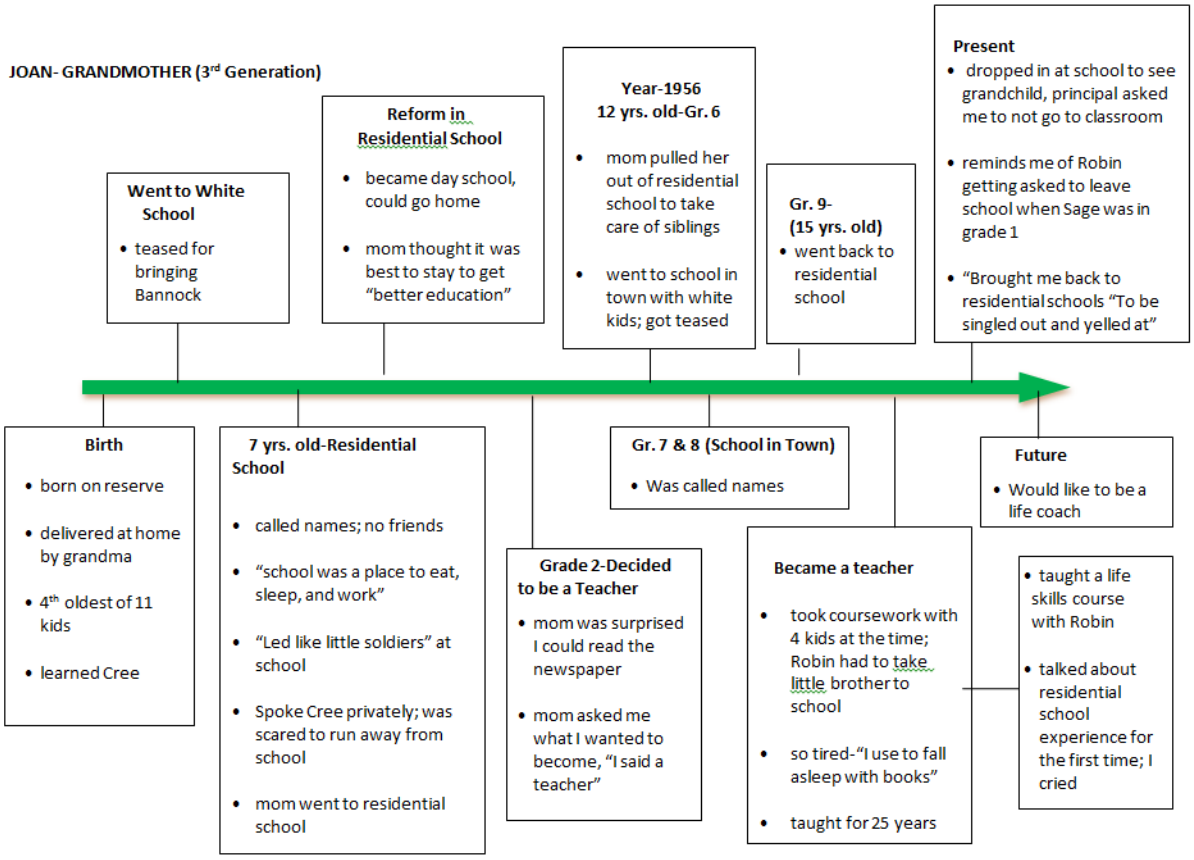

Figure 5-7. Grandma Joan's annal

Early Stories: What You Know First

Figure 5-8. Image of "detention room"

Kicked out of the classroom

To do work and stuff.

Even just to do a test

You still get put in there.

It's isolating

Saddening

And depressing to look at.

(Transcript, April 26, 2012)

Sage spoke to this photograph of a small closet sized room in the school office, a place youth were sometimes sent if they were asked to leave the classroom or "to do work and stuff." She called this room "the detention room" even though she acknowledged it was not always a place of punishment. Sage described how students were frequently sent here to "do a test" if they were absent from class. As I listened to Sage's story and looked at this photograph, her

words, “it’s isolating, saddening, and depressing to look at,” lingered. The picture of the room did look sad and isolating. Even though it was a place youth were sent to not just for detention, but “to do work and stuff,” Sage had a negative story of what being sent to that room meant. It was not a belonging place for her.

At 13 years of age, Willow Ridge was the fifth school Sage attended. During the time she created her belonging collage, Sage said she might transfer to a new school. When I asked her why she wanted to move to a different school, she described her difficulties, particularly with feeling comfortable in asking teachers for help. She said, “It’s hard to ask for help here. I think I can only remember once [the math teacher] asked me a question about how, how I was doing” (Transcript, March 17, 2011).

Sage’s telling of this story of not feeling comfortable to ask a teacher for help was a sharp contrast to the excitement she expressed whenever she spoke of the events happening in her life and in the lives of her family members. She had no difficulties expressing her feelings and thoughts in these stories. As I listened to the complexities in her out-of-school stories, I wondered if Sage shared these stories with her teachers. Sage replied, “No, I tell nothing to anybody ’cause I don’t know if it’s—what’s going to happen” (Transcript, March 17, 2011).

Sage stated that she only shared her out-of-school life with friends. In school, with teachers, she was silent. When she told me this story, I did not know what she meant by “I don’t know if it’s—what’s going to happen.” I wondered what Sage imagined might happen if she asked a teacher for help or shared more of her life. Living alongside Sage, Robin, and Joan, I learned more of the multiple plotlines that Sage lived in as she told stories from her early landscapes.

Sage's account of the detention room reminded me of a story she mentioned first in the club and again in our first conversation (March 15, 2011). It was a story of her in grade 1. I learned more of how this grade 1 event was an intergenerational narrative that reverberated across three generations in the family's life. In what follows, I share Sage's telling of her experience of an event that occurred in grade 1 when she was locked in a room, as well as Robin and Joan's experiences around the event.

Reverberations Across Three Generations

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

Setterfield's (2006) metaphor of a web reminds me of the interwovenness of our storied lives and the importance of attending to not only Sage's stories of experience, but to the stories of her mother and grandmother. I understood how it was "impossible to understand one part without the sense of the whole" (Setterfield, 2006, p. 59).

Intergenerational Reverberations: Sage, Robin, and Joan's Interwoven Story

Sage's Story of Grade 1: Being Locked in a Room

In my first one-on-one conversation with Sage (March 15, 2011), I told her I was interested in hearing about her experiences of school, as well as her mother's experiences of her own schooling and of being Sage's parent as she attended school. Sage told me how in grade 1 the teacher had locked her in a room that looked like a closet. She thought it might have been

for being too quiet or maybe she was a lazy child in grade 1. The following day (March 16, 2011), Sage spoke more of this grade 1 memory. She recalled,

> *These twins, I don't, I can't remember what they were but they spoke Arabic and they started to say, no my culture was here first, but then I knew that clearly Natives*[36] *were here first. And then they started arguing saying that their culture was here first. I tried to be friends with them but we, we were sort of friends and then we were sort of not friends and it was difficult. And then I got locked in a room because of schoolwork and everything, because I didn't understand.* (Transcript, March 16, 2011)

In another conversation on December 20, 2011, Sage shared more details of her memory of this event.

> *I can still remember a flash of it. I'm just sitting on the floor and there's a worksheet and a pencil on the floor that's not too far away from me. It was just like a white room, and empty, and there was a paper and little pencil. And behind me there was the door and it was locked. There was a little window. An every day school window-there for the teachers to look at me and see what I'm doing. They isolated me.* (Transcript, December 20, 2011)

Sage spoke in such detail about this memory that I wondered about the significance of it. She had already mentioned this early school story twice, once in the club and again during our first one-on-one conversation. I wondered what "everything" meant. Earlier she expressed it was because she was quiet and added that maybe it was because she was a lazy student. It seemed as though in trying to make sense of why she was locked in the room by the teacher,

[36] The youth and their families often used the terms *Native* and *Aboriginal* interchangeably.

Sage took all the responsibility and even blamed herself. It was hard to imagine how a 6 year old would have experienced this and now as a teenager she was still trying to make sense of it. Unknown to me at the time, Sage's story of school in grade 1 lingered in conversations over the next three years. When I met with Sage's mother and then together with Sage and her mother, I heard more layers of this story (Field notes, May 27, 2011; June 8, 2011). I learned how Sage's experience of belonging in grade 1 evoked different experiences for Sage's mother and grandmother as they, too, worked to make sense of belonging.

Robin's Story of Sage in Grade 1: Her Daughter Locked in a Room

> *Do I need to have a degree on my head to have a teacher listen to what I say rather than jumping to conclusions?* (Transcript, May 12, 2011)
>
> *Do I have to wear it [a degree] on my sleeve or my back or forehead for people to know I'm a university grad? That I might know what I'm talking about and that's not even to say that people who don't know what they're talking about. There's experience.* (Transcript, June 8, 2011)

I share Robin's words from two of our conversations as I thought again about how she felt storied or categorized in particular ways by others. The first reference to "people" were about the administrators or teachers in school whom she thought may have considered her as being less knowledgeable, less educated, and not interested in her children's education. In our emails and conversations, Robin spoke of these feelings as she told how she felt school was not a belonging place for her daughter or for her as a parent. It was the same event I had heard about from Sage, but now I heard Robin's story.

Robin took us back to that day in grade 1 when she first found out Sage had been locked in a room. She was picking up her daughter from school.

It just happened we were walking down the hallway and she [Sage] said, "Oh I was in that room." And that's what started the conversation. Then I went to her teacher, who explained. I thought in the back of my mind, when were you [her teacher] going to tell me all this happened? (Transcript, June 8, 2011)

This incident apparently had happened days ago, and Robin had not heard anything about this from the teacher. She only found out about it when she picked up Sage from school. Passing the closet-like room, Robin recalled that Sage, embarrassed, had admitted to her, "Oh, I was locked in that room." At six years of age, Sage could not explain to her mother why she was put in the room and locked inside. Robin told me how concerned she was with this news because she imagined her daughter in this room, which she likened to a "jail cell with only a small window to peer out of above the door knob" (Transcript, June 8, 2011).

Robin told how she approached the teacher to ask if this was true—had her daughter, Sage, been locked in a room? She recalled the teacher saying that Sage did not look her in the eye, refused to work in the classroom, just sat at her desk, and didn't want to do any work. As Robin told this story, she explained how she had taught Sage not to look at people in the eye because it was impolite—this was what Robin had been taught by her mother, Joan. Robin shared the teacher's explanation of why Sage had been locked in the room.

So the teacher gave her three more chances and then moved her to the back of the room, and they gave her three chances there and moved her to outside of the room, gave her three chances there and moved her to the locked room. And the teacher admitted, "Yeah we did do all that." I said, "Well, you left her in a room to work by herself and you locked her in there?" And she said, "Well, a TA was outside the door!" And I said, "Well, what good is that? Nobody is

helping her and nobody's asking her, or trying to work one on one with her, and if that was the case, when were you going to pick up the phone to come and tell me?" (Transcript, June 8, 2011)

As Robin confronted the teacher, Sage sat there, silent and scared. Robin, an educated and concerned mother, wanted to help her daughter, so she decided to sit in the classroom.

So, as a result of all that, this was before I went back to work, Neil was still little and I took him in with me, we sat with her one morning at her desk and she had a whole bunch of homework every night from grade 1. So we're sitting at her desk and she started doing her work and the bell hadn't gone yet, so I was sitting with her at her desk, had Neil on my lap, and she started doing her work and I was working with her. The teacher came in and she came to tell me, "Well, you have to leave." And I said, "Excuse me?" I said, "But I'm here to help her" and she said, "Well, you can't be here." And I said, "Why can't I be here?" And she said, "Because class is going to start." And I said,

> *"OK, you're not making any sense to me. I just finished telling you, I'm here to help my daughter. I'm tired of her bringing all her homework home where I have to sit with her for two hours to do all the work that she should've done at school, but yet it comes home with her. So what are you doing for her? You're the teacher."*

She got offended and she left us there like that and went to get the principal, but not right away. I lined up with the class. So we're sitting there in the music room and the principal comes in and I'm just watching to see what's going on. I thought, "Well I'm going be with her in every one of her classes to see for

myself what's going on and why this girl doesn't want to do any work at this school."

The principal comes to get me and she says, "You can't be here." And I said, "Why do you guys keep telling me I can't be here? On your website and part of your school board's mission statement is parents are first teachers. OK, I've taught my daughter things at home and expectations, they've followed her to school, so if I'm her first teacher, why am I not her first teacher here? This is what you're promoting and now you want to boot me out of the school. You don't make any sense to me." (Transcript, June 8, 2011)

Robin explained more of her confusion around the incident of being asked to leave the school:

Well, it made no sense to me. This is my daughter and I'm trying to help her and the teacher was blocking it and the principal was blocking, and I thought, "You should only be so happy to have a parent come in here who wants to help their own kid."

Robin wanted to help her daughter at school, but shared how she was not able to do this.

Basically all she [the principal] did was escort me out, and she told me, "Well, I have to escort you out." And I thought, "You're going to escort me out of this building and you're going to keep my daughter here?" (Transcript, June 8, 2011)

As Robin told this story, I knew this event was still upsetting even though it had happened so many years ago. In her telling of the story, Robin recognized that she unintentionally offended the teacher and principal when they questioned why she was there.

Eventually they said to her, "You can't be here," and asked her to leave the school. I wondered what Sage was thinking at this time as her teacher, the principal, and her mother were arguing in front of her. Sliding back to her words in grade 7 that she was "afraid to ask the math teacher for help," I wondered why was she so afraid to ask the teacher for help. I wondered what the teachers were thinking of Robin's intentions in being there. Robin shared what she said to the principal of the school:

> *"I'm sorry. I'm here trying to help my child and you're not allowing me to do that." Then the principal took offence and said, "Well, you just can't be here. If you're going to be here, you have to come here as a volunteer and you need to let us know ahead of time." And I said, "OK, that's enough! This obviously isn't going to go anywhere. You're not going to allow me to be in this school to help my daughter so we're leaving and I'm taking her with me."*
>
> *And the principal got all flustered and said, "OK, OK, OK!" She was angry and I was angry. She didn't deal very well with the situation and so we went back to the classroom and brought her things and she looked at her teacher and said, "go get her work for home."*
>
> *And I thought OK, fine, here we go again, I'm doing this teacher's job and she [the principal] stopped herself, she said, "no, don't give her any work, she's taking her daughter out voluntarily. She doesn't get any work." So that made things even worse. So we left and I went to my mom's and I vented to her about this whole situation.* (Transcript, June 8, 2011)

After this incident, Robin explained how she contacted the superintendent in an attempt to resolve this problem of how the teacher and principal treated her and of not being allowed in

the classroom to help her daughter. She received a letter and a response back the following morning from a liaison worker. She was told that the principal and teacher were willing to meet with her to discuss the incident. Robin shared what happens next.

> *So they called us into the school, her dad and I, and we sat with the principal and the teacher and I told him [Sage's dad]. I said, "I'm too angry, after all of this has gone on and to actually talk to this woman [referring to the teacher] …you're going have to do all the talking. What are you teaching my daughter by locking her in the room, how to be an inmate?"*

When Sage was in grade 1, Robin had not yet returned to work because she was with her new baby, Neil. As she recounted this grade 1 event, I was struck by her comparison of the room that Sage was locked into and an inmate's cell. At the time of this conversation with me, Robin was working as a correctional officer. Robin continued,

> *And at first, they had nothing to say and her solution was, "Well, if she's not working in the classroom, is it OK then if she moves to outside of my office here?" And then I spoke up and I said, "It's not OK at all. What I would like is for my daughter to be working in the classroom with the rest of the class, with her teacher, doing her job." And it was after that we just withdrew her and put her in another school.* (Transcript, June 8, 2011)

Robin's recollection was incredibly descriptive. It was a storied experience that continued to be lived and carried by not only Sage, but also her mother. When Sage first told me the story, I did not fully understand its importance. The story of grade 1 was a story that Sage carried with her into junior high shaping her detention room story represented in her collage.

As I travelled to their worlds and listened to Sage and her mother share their re-memories[37] of the event, I began to understand that this story of Sage being locked in a room was a different experience for Robin. For Sage she remembered being locked and being "isolated" in a room when she was in grade 1. Robin's experience was a different story shaped around how she recalled being treated as a parent. She remembers being disrespected and described school as not feeling like a welcoming place for her as a parent who wanted to help her child be successful in school.

Living in between this detention room photograph and Sage's story were Robin's stories as a mother who wanted her daughter to do well in school and as a parent who wanted to feel a sense of belonging when she came to her child's school. Robin wanted her daughter to feel safe and to experience belonging in school. Robin recalled her own childhood and youth, where she struggled to have a sense of belonging. Growing up with her mother teaching on and off the reserve, Robin frequently moved from school to school. Being the new students in school, Robin and her sister experienced bullying.

Now as a mother, she hoped school would be a safe and welcoming and safe place for her children. She also wanted to school to feel like a welcoming and safe place for her as a parent. As a mother, she hoped her knowledge and ways of knowing could be seen as helpful and valuable to her child's learning. She stated, "They [the school] don't even know what we are doing at home, all they have to do is ask" (Transcript, June 8, 2011).

[37] Greene, in *Releasing the Imagination* (1995), pointed to the importance of returning to early landscapes. She describes how the search for shapes of childhood is not a "memory game," rather more of a "re-memory," where we search to "restore a visibility to the shapes of a primordial, perceived landscapes…making visible what has sunk of out sight, of restoring a lost vision and a lost spontaneity." In this way, we "make present the shapes and structure of a perceived world, even though they been have been layered over with many rational meanings over time" (p. 77).

Robin shared how she was not the only one who felt unwelcomed in schools, but her mother (Joan) who recently had a negative experience in her grandson's school. Robin described how Joan recently went to her grandson's (Sage's brother Neil) school and did not feel like it was a very welcoming place.

> *My mom phoned me right away and told me what happened and then said, "I don't want to go back." What she was doing was she was bringing [her grandson's] lunch and she went before the bell rang. She wanted to go see because she's come with me in the past to the school and she's met some of the other teachers because her grandchildren, two of them were in that school before my kids were or at the same time. So she kind of felt like she had this relationship.*
>
> *She's [Joan] taking him lunch and did not want to interrupt his class so she just kind of peeked her head in there. My mom dropped off the food and then left, and on the way out the principal stopped her. What I remember her telling me is that [the principal] told her, "You just can't come during school hours when classes are in because you're going to disrupt the class." I'm like, "OK, you are talking to a retired teacher and you're talking to a grandparent, where's the respect?"* (Transcript, June 8, 2011)

As Robin told me this recent story of her mother's experience at school, she was noticeably upset at the incident and how it hurt her mother. In our previous conversations she spoke of her mother as someone who had been in residential schools and the lasting effects it had on her. Robin encouraged her mother to share her past experiences with others, but these memories of school were difficult for Joan to tell. Trying to repair things between her mother

and the school, Robin hoped to convince her mother to ignore what the principal said. Like Sage and Robin, Joan's experiences of not feeling safe or belonging in schools as a child reverberated into her present as a grandmother. I had already met Joan by the time I had this second conversation with Robin. As I thought about the early stories of school that Joan shared with me, I understood more of the intergenerational reverberations (Clandinin et al., 2006; Young, 2005) that Sage, her mother, and her grandmother lived out around the grade 1 event from Sage's childhood.

Grandma Joan: Reverberations of Early Landscapes (Residential Schooling)

I don't think schools are inviting places. (Transcript, Joan, June 30, 2011)

It was my second conversation with Joan, and this time we sat in a quaint diner close to her house. Joan started off by telling me about what it was like being the fourth-oldest child in a family of 11 children and growing up on a reserve. She thought that things had not changed much from when she went to school. Joan told me about her recent experience visiting her grandson's school to drop off his lunch. When she began telling me this story, I realized this was the same event I had heard of from Robin: "I was walking towards the door and I turned around to see who was walking behind me, it was her [the principal]. 'Can you please come to my office?' the principal asked." At this point, Joan had no idea why the principal wanted to speak with her, only that it must be something important she must have wanted to tell her. She told me, "She [the principal] said, 'The next time you come can you report at the office?' And no she didn't even say please, she wasn't very polite. She said, 'And don't go to the classroom.'" Being a teacher herself for 25 years, Joan explained more of why it was important for families and for her to feel welcomed in schools:

Joan: *I'm going to the school, I should feel welcome . . . but not with her attitude . . . we had that with residential schooling.*[38]

Simmee*: You had that?*

Joan: *To be singled out and yelled at . . . and they wouldn't even allow Robin in the room to go sit with Sage.* (Transcript, June 30, 2011)

Referring to the aftermath of Sage being locked in a room in grade 1, Joan thought her daughter Robin had been "singled out and yelled at" by the school principal. Because Joan lived alongside her daughter and granddaughter, who were experiencing tension within the school landscape, this brought forth memories of Joan's childhood. In particular, she was reminded of her painful experiences as a child in a residential school.[39] The stories of residential school lingered in her present life. Joan wanted to share these stories [of residential school] with her children and grandchildren, and with me. She explained why:

It's where I came from. They should know. Yeah, what I did in elementary school, it was tough. It was really hard for me in school. No parents, and I didn't really have any friends in residential school.

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[38] I was not aware of the deep history and devastating legacies of residential schooling until Joan began to share her experiences with me. In an effort to understand more of her experiences of belonging, as I lived alongside her, I also turned to the growing literature to help me understand more of the history and contextual influences in which her experiences of belonging were embedded.

According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (n.d.), "For over 100 years, Aboriginal children were removed from their families and sent to institutions called residential schools. The government-funded, church-run schools were located across Canada and established with the purpose to eliminate parental involvement in the spiritual, cultural, and intellectual development of Aboriginal children. . . . More than 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were forced to attend these schools, some of which were hundreds of miles away from their homes" (para. 1-2).

The Legacy of Hope Foundation (formerly the Aboriginal Healing Foundation) (2014) is a national Indigenous charitable organization founded in 1998 "to raise awareness and educate Canadians about the history and legacy of the residential school system and its impact on First Nations, Métis, Inuit" (n.p.) and to support the ongoing healing process of school survivors. According to the Foundation (2014), "the residential school system was comprised of 139 schools which ran from 1831–1996. Residential school was mandatory for all Aboriginal children ages 7 and up" (n.p.). Learning these facts about residential schools made me think of Joan's story, because Joan was taken from her home and placed in a residential school when she was 7 years old.

Even though residential schooling was difficult for Joan, she was required to attend or else her parents would be charged, she explained. Joan recalled her dad telling her how he ran away from residential school when he was just a little boy in grade 2. His parents did not send him back, but that was before parents were being charged, Joan told me. Reminiscing, Joan spoke more about how residential school laws changed again:

> *And another time, everybody went to residential school, but they had a day school where the kids were supposed to be in school but they lived at home . . . but my mother did not allow it.* (Transcript, June 30, 2011)

Joan described how her mother was "raised" in residential school, but unlike Joan's dad, she did not run away, she stayed. Joan's mother wanted her children to stay just as she did. Joan told me how she was too scared to run away, saying that her mother would "probably give me a lickin' if I ran away." Referring to her mother's decision to keep her in residential school when it was a parent's choice by then, Joan stated, "I don't know why. She thought we were getting a better education at residential school. Well, that's what she thought" (Transcript, June 30, 2011). As Joan told me this story, she became quiet and started to cry. We sat in silence together until she spoke again. She wanted to tell me more about her experiences of how she made sense of belonging in school. She said:

> *I remember all kinds of things. How we were led like little soldiers. We all had jobs to do. It was kind of a good thing, not all of it was negative—cleaning, working, chores, every body had a chore. And they rotated it—they didn't have*

the same chore for three months. It was like a month. So we'd clean the dining room for a month. It changed. (Transcript, June 30, 2011)[40]

Joan also learned to not speak her Cree language because it was forbidden at her residential school. As Joan told me this story, she proudly told me how she communicated with some of her peers who were also of Cree heritage: "I spoke privately in Cree." Joan explained more about why her Cree language had to be hidden in school.

In my parents' time, my grandparents' time, they weren't allowed. The priest learned the language, ours, so they could understand what we were saying to each other. The nuns not so much but they spoke in French about us. The nuns also spoke in English but some of the kids didn't understand English.

(Transcript, June 30, 2011)

In order to not be "singled out and yelled at" by the nuns, Joan learned to stop speaking her Cree language and always did her chores perfectly. Joan described the nuns as being the "teachers, supervisors, laundry people, they had to—like a supervisor to make sure you do the laundry properly." (Transcript, June 30, 2011)

Now as an adult, mother, and grandmother, Joan continued to carry these stories of residential schooling with her. The recent event at her grandson's school and being asked to go into the principal's office brought her back to these memories of residential school. Even now, as a retired teacher and grandmother, she learned that school for her was a place where she did as she was told because she did not want to be "singled out and yelled at." The story of

[40] Joan's story called me to study the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's report (2015a), which noted that, in residential schools, "Discipline was harsh, and daily life was highly regimented. Aboriginal languages and cultures were denigrated and suppressed. The educational goals of the schools were limited and confused, and usually reflected a low regard for the intellectual capabilities of Aboriginal people. For the students, education and technical training too often gave way to the drudgery of doing the chores necessary to make the schools self-sustaining" (pp. 3–4).

residential school continued to reverberate into Joan's present landscape and shaped her knowing as a mother. As a child, she learned that school could be a belonging place if you fit in and spoke the same language as everyone else. This story of belonging reverberated into Joan's life at home as she remembered her mother telling her not to teach her children to speak Cree. Not daring to disobey her mother, Joan "just dropped the Cree" (Transcript, February 27, 2012). Now, as a mother and grandmother, not having been allowed to pass on the Cree language to her children still made Joan sad and full of regret. This also made Robin sad, because she wanted to learn Cree and wished her mom had taught her.

Joan told how her early memories of residential school still lingered and reverberated into who she is and how she has made sense of belonging:

> *I fear rejection. You're never going to know. When I'm cooking and I make a mistake or whatever, put too much of this or that, I have to start over and it has to be perfect. That's what we were expected to be. . . . When my daughter is cooking and making a mistake, she forgives herself. "Oh well, they'll still be good," she says. That's not me. And even cleaning house. . . . But that's residential schooling.* (Transcript, June 30, 2011)

Although Joan realized she couldn't be perfect all the time, she felt she needed to execute things and chores perfectly; that's what she did in residential schooling. Joan recalled that by her grade 6 year, residential school was no longer mandated but a choice. She recalled her mother taking her out of residential schooling temporarily only to take care of her siblings. During these years, Joan continued to go to school by taking a bus to a nearby town. Her first year at the "white school," she remembers,

the kids, they're French oriented I guess you could say. They'd call us bannock or wagon burners and bannock eaters and all kinds of stuff they used to call us. The boys couldn't handle it. They beat up the kids and got in trouble. And you never, ever brought bannock to school! (Transcript, June 30, 2011)

Joan spoke of how she recently shared this story during a life skills course for teenagers and adults that she co-taught with her daughter Robin. She ended up crying in front of her class. In order to belong at the "white school" and not be teased, Joan learned to "never ever" bring bannock to school. She tried hard to be the same as the other children in order not to be singled out. As I travelled back with Joan to her early memories of school, I began to understand how these stories continued to vibrate in Sage's family's life. These interwoven, intergenerational reverberations shaped Joan's, Robin's, and Sage's lives.

In the following fragment, I return to Sage's collage, which invites us into more of her family stories of belonging.

Family Stories of Belonging

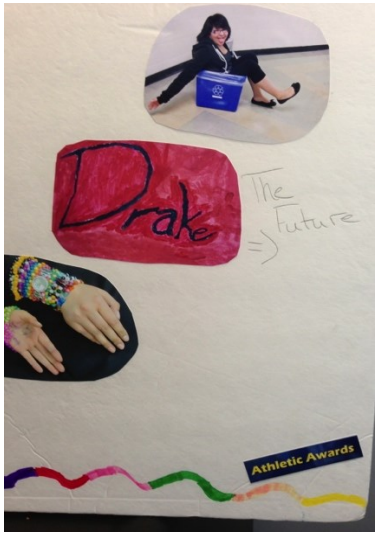

Figure 5-9. Sage's collage, a family story

At the bottom,

for the future,

there's athletic awards.

For 2 years,

I've wanted to get onto the volleyball team at my school.

(Transcript, April 26, 2012)

The words "Athletic Awards" were glued to the bottom of Sage's collage. Sage had cut these words from a photograph she had taken of a poster displayed in the main hallway at her school. There were different posters for most of the subject areas and they listed the names of students who had received awards. The posters were highly visible in the school. Although Sage's name was not on any of the posters, she took a picture of the athletic awards category for her collage.

From my multiple conversations with Sage and her mother, Robin, I understood why the athletic award was significant for Sage. Sage told us how she hoped to receive an athletic award in her future. By this time, Sage was in her grade 8 year at Willow Ridge School. For the past two years, she had wanted to get on the school's volleyball team.

Earlier in Sage's collage she spoke of how changing her physical appearance by wearing bracelets and experimenting with body piercings was her way of trying to belong. As she realized these physical changes did not work, she tried other ways to belong. Listening to this athletic awards story, I understood more of why being good at volleyball was a way Sage learned from her family of how to belong.

In the construction of our belonging collage, I asked Sage to consider these questions: Where are places you belong? Places outside of school? Symbols of belonging? Sage often

brought me to stories of her family. Sage was very proud of her mother and shared with me stories of her mother in school.

> *My mom was really big in volleyball and since I was a little girl and I was about 8, 9, 10, she would play volleyball and she would go to her practices or whatever and then I'd bring my own volleyball and practice there, like just with the wall. I was really excited to go into junior high to finally get onto the volleyball team and actually play with somebody, and sure enough, I didn't make it.* (Transcript, June 1, 2011)

As I attended to Sage's story of the athletic award in the collage, I understood more of its significance as I threaded the stories she told me of wanting to be athletic from other conversations. Sage spoke fondly of bringing her own volleyball and practicing alongside her mother. From the time she was a little girl, she imagined herself playing volleyball just like her mother. She said, "My mom she was more educational and athletic, and I'm not really that educational. I'm trying to be" (Transcript, June 1, 2011). I wondered if Sage was emulating her mother by wanting to be "educational and athletic." I knew that excelling at sports, particularly volleyball, was a way that Robin had learned to belong. In a conversation with Robin she told me, "We were bullied, my sister and I. Kids tried to beat up my siblings and me. Playing sports helped me fit in" (Transcript, May 12, 2011).

When she was a youth, Robin recalled moving around a lot. Her mother taught on and off reserves, so Robin and her siblings often found themselves being the new students in a school. School was a tough place for Robin, having to make new friends each time she went to a different school. One thing gave her life coherence and was constant for her: "I loved sports. I played basketball and volleyball. It gave me a sense of belonging." Robin got excited when she

spoke about how she played elite volleyball in high school. She dreamed of playing volleyball in places such as Korea and other countries. In Robin's telling of how she learned to "fit in" and belong in school by playing sports, she also shared how Sage had wanted to join the volleyball team for the past few years. Like her mother, Sage wanted to do well in physical education. Even as Sage told these stories of wanting to get on the volleyball team and get an award, she did not speak or think of sports as a way to belong for herself. Playing sports and excelling seemed to be a belonging story for Robin more than a belonging story for Sage. Playing sports was a way for Sage to be like her mother, whom she admires and loves.

Getting Stuck, Getting Out

Figure 5-10. Image of Sage getting "stuck"

> *"I got stuck for a while and then I got out."* (Transcript, Sage, April 26, 2012)
>
> *As Sage carefully situated and glued all her photographs from left to right, this picture of her getting stuck in a recycle bin was the last piece to her story.* (Field notes, April 26, 2012)

In our earlier conversations, Sage had already shared with me ways she had learned how to belong. She tried on different ways of belonging by changing her hair colour, covering

herself with bracelets, and experimenting with body piercings. She told me how all these things made her feel a little "bad ass" (Field notes, January 23, 2012):

> *I just wanted to change something of myself and that turned into hair or wearing other things, now it's the bracelets and that wasn't enough for me, so instead I changed my personality. I was just getting sick of not getting to see different people and like seeing their views—like to be able to see how they view the world.* (Transcript, January 23, 2012)

Putting bracelets on and covering her arms was a way for her to be different and also, as Sage pointed out, "to get noticed." Like her picture, Sage metaphorically felt "stuck in the middle." More than school subject matter, she focused on other things, such as fitting in or gaining the approval of others. Sage spoke more to her focus:

> *Yeah, like the part in between subjects. I have to choose my friends, too, because that's interesting being a teenager and what subjects they are talking about. I just skipped a lot last year. I mean, I felt so bad ass when I did it.* (Transcript, February 23, 2012)

Sage shared how she had started to hang out more with a friend who may have been in a gang. She wanted to be friends with this girl. She wanted to belong. She described more about "getting stuck" and almost joining a gang, when she "went more bad." As Sage moved us through her struggles to make sense of belonging, she ended her collage with a story of how she "got out" of being stuck and back to her "real roots."

Roots of Belonging

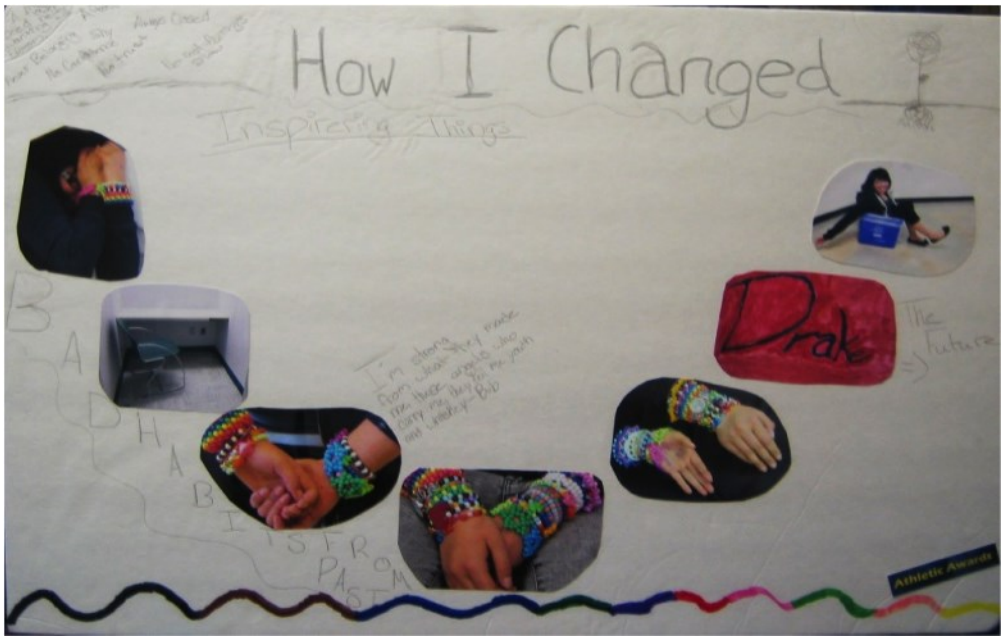

Figure 5-11. Returning to Sage's belonging collage

That's the rose.

I drew the roots of it.

The roots represent that I'm strong,

No one will take that away,

or make me their puppet or something.

(Transcript, April 26, 2012)

Sage started her belonging collage with a seed metaphor. Now, completing her semicircle and story of belonging, Sage spoke to the rose she had sketched and its roots. As she created her collage, I watched Sage make several attempts at drawing before she asked Sandra to help her. Sage then meticulously drew the roots underneath the ground. Pointing to her colourful big beads around her wrist, she told us, "I'm trying to get back to my real roots. I'm wearing these again" (Transcript, April 26, 2012).

Wearing her bracelets again was a symbolic way Sage represented her experiences. Experimenting with bracelets and her hair, changing her personality to make friends, Sage went to great lengths in order to belong. She had fun trying these different things that were new to her. She referred to these experimentations as moving into "different territories," but now she explained, "it's just time to go home" (Transcript, March 19, 2012).

I asked Sage about her hair and piercings, wondering, "Do they help you belong?" Sage explained:

> *They probably wouldn't help. Most people at the first sight of a different person—you're mostly judged about how you look, and once they hear you speak and talk and talk about yourself then they start to understand it's not about what's on the outside, it's more about what's on the inside. It's not mostly about how I look, more about what's inside of me, because I do have lots of layers.* (Transcript, April 26, 2012)

Sage's understanding of belonging had changed since I first met her, as evidenced by her words: "it's not mostly about how I look, more about what's inside of me because I do have lots of layers." As Sage ended her belonging collage story, I returned to the image of her when I first met her in the club. I thought back to my multiple conversations with Sage, Robin, and Joan; each of these women had multiple layers to who they were and were becoming as they continued to make sense of belonging.

Chapter 6: Sandra and Mary's Narrative Account

Simmee: *How do you decide what goes into your memory box?*

Sandra: *Well, I hold it and then I look at it. Then I start to daydream about what happened with it.* (Transcript, April 29, 2011)

Figure 6-1. Sandra's memory box

Carefully laying out artifacts from the memory box she created in the arts club, Sandra described this as a "box that holds a memory that you make" (Transcript, April 29, 2011).

As I lived alongside Sandra and her mother, Mary, I learned about stories, which centred around places, people, and relationships in their lives, stories that shaped and re-shaped their experiences of belonging. In our sixth and seventh conversations (April 29, May 6, 2011), Sandra and I began to tell stories of our memory boxes. Sandra began with the following story:

Bracelet

The bracelet reminds me of the club.

I made it the first day I came.

All I know is that I was really shy and scared.

All I saw was food over there and all these beads.

I made a bracelet using red, green, and white beads.

The bracelets make me think of the club

and Christmas morning.

When I walk into a classroom,

The first thing I look at is the

teacher's face to see how her

expression is.

If they [teachers] are mad,

I freeze up and I don't say anything

at all.

When I walked into the club,

The adults were all happy.

I was happy.

(Transcript, May 6, 2011)

Speaking to the memory her bracelet held, Sandra explained how she was often "shy and scared" in school, but this artifact held a happy memory. The bracelet she made in the club reminded her of her first day there. Sandra remembered seeing the happy faces of adults in the club. As Sandra shared this story of coming to the club, I felt honoured that we had made her

feel happy and that she experienced a feeling of being welcomed. Sandra shared the story of her next artifact, a feather:

Feather

Reminds me of my family,

I am proud of my family,

I am Aboriginal.

I also painted a picture of a feather in the club.

I brought it home to hang in my room

I left it on the kitchen table

My mom hung it up in the hallway.

(Transcript, May 6, 2011)

For Sandra, the feather was a symbol of her family and her Aboriginal heritage, which she was proud of. In later conversations, she told me, "I belong to my family" (March 21, 2011; April 26, 2011). I learned that her strong connection to family was an important thread in her stories of belonging. Lastly, Sandra shared an artifact that reminded her of the past: a hair barrette.

Hair Barrette

My friend from childhood gave it to me years ago.

We played.

I could be myself.

(Transcript, May 6, 2011)

Sandra kept this hair barrette given to her by a childhood friend. Even though she had grown apart from this friend, the hair barrette held a storied memory. It reminded Sandra of a

time when she played and "could be [her]self." At the time, I wondered what Sandra meant when she said she "played" and "could be herself." Had this changed now that she was in junior high? As I lived alongside Sandra in both in and out of school places, I learned more of her storied experiences and why it was hard to "be [herself] in certain places and with different people."

In "travelling" to her different "worlds" I can see Sandra constructs herself differently in the different worlds she inhabits, depending on her "sense of ease" shaped by the contexts in her worlds of the arts club, at home, and in school. Her sense of ease and playfulness is shaped too by those she is in relationship with, within the worlds she occupies. Living alongside Sandra and learning to "world-travel" (Lugones, 1987) to the different worlds she lived in taught me more about what it means to "stand on the other side of the hill once in a while" (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 90). To see Sandra as she saw herself and others, as she saw from within her worlds, required me to have the capacity to go into her worlds and yet, at the same time, to "see both of us as we are constructed in her world" (Lugones, 1987, p. 8).

As this inquiry unfolded, I learned more of what Lugones (1987) meant by "world-travelling" and in these ways, I attended more closely to Sandra's unfolding experience of identity making and belonging. Being in relation with Sandra required continual shifts in my thinking, in my ways of knowing as I worked to move away from an arrogant perception.

Moving from Arrogant Perception

Sandra seems a little nervous in our group circle. She's tall, but when she sits hunched in her chair, she appears smaller somehow. She fiddles with her long, wavy brown hair. Her large brown eyes are looking to the ground. She's not making eye contact. It's Sandra's turn to

speak, but she doesn't. She's passing the glass heart[41] *to the next youth. She seems shy.* (Field notes, January 12, 2011)

It's been over a month since Sandra first came to the club, yet I haven't spoken much to her. Today I actually got to know her better. She made a joke when we were at the beading table. It made us all laugh. She is usually quiet as a mouse. (Field notes, February 16, 2011)

In retrospect, I realized I was seeing Sandra with narrowed vision. I didn't see her in the ways she saw herself. Returning to memories of her first day at the club, she described herself as "feeling happy" in the club, whereas, when I looked back on my field notes taken in the club, I focused on her shy and quiet demeanour. I even compared her to a mouse. Unknowingly, I made assumptions about who Sandra was and what she might be feeling as a newcomer in the club. Lugones (1987) might describe me as viewing Sandra with "arrogant perception." Lugones wrote:

> To perceive others arrogantly or to come to see them only as products of arrogant perception and continue to perceive them that way, we fail to identity with them—fail to love them—in this particularly deep way. (p. 8)

As I looked back, I realized I projected my storied experiences of belonging onto Sandra. She was the object of my arrogant perception. I had not yet learned to see her with the "loving perception" Lugones (1987) spoke of where "[I could] understand what it is like to be [Sandra] and what it is like to be [myself] in her eyes" (p. 17).

By storying who I thought Sandra was, I thought I was relating to her in a thoughtful way. I saw myself in her, so much so that I created a story of her based on my childhood

[41] I described the use and significance of the glass heart we passed around during circle time in the methodology section.

experiences. Carrying my own childhood story forward, I imagined Sandra in my world of school when I was around her age. In my classroom school world,[42] I was quiet and scared to speak in front of people. Seeing myself in her, Sandra's shyness in the club and during our circles times took me back to my school experiences. I could still picture the teacher calling my name in class repeatedly in order to get me to answer a question or share an idea. I often froze in these public speaking situations, fumbling through words. In my stories of experience, *I* was as quiet as a mouse. I thought I was relating with Sandra's experience, but what I failed to do was recognize, and attend to Sandra's construction of herself, her experience, and the attributes she shared in the different worlds she lived in. Instead, when Sandra did not speak during the opening circle or when she had looked down at the ground, I arrogantly perceived her experiences to be like mine. I also assumed the worlds she lived within were similar to the worlds I lived within.

As Sandra and I co-composed a world together in the arts club and in this study, she taught me the importance of "world"-travelling with loving perception (Lugones, 1987). Coming alongside her, I awakened to new possibilities and ways of belonging as she brought me to her different worlds. As I learned more of what it meant to "world"-travel with a "loving perception," I revisited stories Sandra told me. I wondered what Sandra meant in her story of the hair barrette when she could "be herself." Did being herself mean being in a world where she could play? More questions came forth as I wondered if there were some worlds in which Sandra was more at ease and more playful. Could she "be herself" in some worlds but not others? What were Sandra's different worlds? What were her experiences in these worlds?

[42] I use *classroom school world* because as I came alongside Sandra I came to learn that the place of school can hold multiple worlds within it.

Becoming a Participant: Co-composing Field Texts

By early March of 2011, Sandra had already come to one of my conversations with Sage. While Sandra was not one of my participants at the time, she seemed comfortable with me. I first said she could join my conversation with Sage because Sandra told us she had nowhere to go at lunchtime because she was a "loner." I did not want Sandra to be alone or to feel like a loner. However, it wasn't until we went on a field trip (March 11, 2011) to visit an Elder at a high school that Sandra became a participant in this study. I asked her at the end of our field trip if she was interested in being a participant in the doctoral study around belonging and identity and she said yes.

Following Sandra's agreement to be a participant (March 11, 2011), I began to see her three times a week for the remaining three and a half months of the 2011 school year. In addition to our one-on-one lunch meetings, I also saw Sandra in the club every Wednesday, and she often came to the lunch conversations I had with Sage. Sage was fine with Sandra joining us because Sandra was her friend at the time. From March 2011 to June 2012, Sandra and I had 24 individual conversations outside of the club time. By the time Sandra was in grade 8, I had moved to another country, but I returned to the club every month and we continued to have one-on-one conversations. Some conversations were held at school and others took place on field trips to places Sandra suggested.[43]

It was during our third one-on-one conversation when I asked Sandra when I might be able to meet her mother, Mary. I felt Sandra had reservations about bringing me home because she gave me a few reasons why her mother would be busy or difficult to reach. Her hesitation

[43] Field trips outside of school during the 2011–2012 school year included visiting an Elder at an academy (March 11, 2011), going to the museum (March 17, 2012), and going to the mall (April 26, 2012). Additionally, Sandra and I continued to have conversations outside of the school (home, the mall, coffee shops) in order to work on our research around identity and belonging.

made me realize the need to slow down the process and spend more time being in relation with Sandra. It was important for her to feel comfortable with me. Guided by Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) emphasis on the relational aspect of narrative inquiry, Sandra and I began to co-compose field texts alongside each other. This co-composing included the reciprocal sharing of our memory boxes and photographs and the creation of annals.

Photographs

During our one-on-one conversations, Sandra and I brought photographs as a way to share more of our lives with one another (March 21, 2011; March 28, 2011). Sandra showed me one photograph of when she was just a baby being held by her father. They both had big smiles on their faces. Taking me back to her childhood, Sandra shared memories of her dad, who lived in another province. She recalled visiting him once and getting a skateboard. This was a "big deal" because she did not get to see him much. I showed Sandra three photographs; my family's shack house, a letter from my mother, and a photograph of me as a little girl. For Sandra, the photograph of my family's shack house and my story of not knowing how to belong, brought forth a story of her discomfort in school.

Temporally, taking me backwards and forwards in time, Sandra told me more details of her life. I learned that she is the second oldest of five siblings. She grew up on a reserve, but her family moved around a lot. Currently, they were trying to move into a bigger home. Her mother, Mary, raised Sandra and her siblings. Her oldest sister still lives on the reserve, but the rest of the family lives in an apartment across the street from Willow Ridge School. Sandra explained how her entire family fit in their small apartment:

It's kind of small. There are only two bedrooms and my brother, he has one. I have to share with my two sisters. My mom, she has a bed in the living room and so does my baby sister. (Transcript, March 21, 2011)

Sandra also shared her hopes to attend a different school next year. She loved the arts program at Willow Ridge School, but overall, school was hard for her. It was very different from school on the reserve where some of the students were her cousins. Sandra described more of her memories of school life when she lived on her home reserve:

Growing up on a reserve, well my school was underneath a church so there were stairs. If you go upstairs and turn, there are seats and a stage where the priest talks and the people sit down and listen. The teachers were nice and stuff. It was all mixed up. It was grade 2, 3, and 4s and kindergarten and stuff like that. Some of them were my cousins. (Transcript, March 21, 2011)

Sandra's experience of school on the reserve were in contrast to her experiences at Willow Ridge School where she did not feel as comfortable or know as many people. Sandra explained how at Willow Ridge School there are "mean" girls who "always call [her] names and stuff, but [she] just ignores them" (Transcript, March 21, 2011). There were also other students who called her names outside of school on social media sites such as Facebook.

Returning to the past, Sandra remembered the teachers being "nice" on the reserve, but at Willow Ridge School, some teachers "yelled." She added, "It's kind of scary." Sandra told more of this story in the next conversation. When she had to speak aloud to share with others in school, she told me, "I don't know what to talk about and if I do, I'm scared. Everybody stares at me and I have a nervous breakdown" (Transcript, March 28, 2011).

Inquiring into each other's photographs helped Sandra and I get to know each other in new ways. In the mutual sharing of our lives, our conversations seemed more relaxed and natural. As we began to feel more at ease, we shared new layers of our stories with each other. We continued to co-compose field texts in the weeks to follow.

Memory Boxes

At the start of this narrative account, there is an image of Sandra's memory box and artifact (April 29, 2011). I also shared memory box items. Below, is a picture of our memory boxes laid side by side. Sandra's artifacts are enclosed in the cylinder-shaped memory box that she painted in the club. My artifacts are laid out on the right hand side outside my memory box.

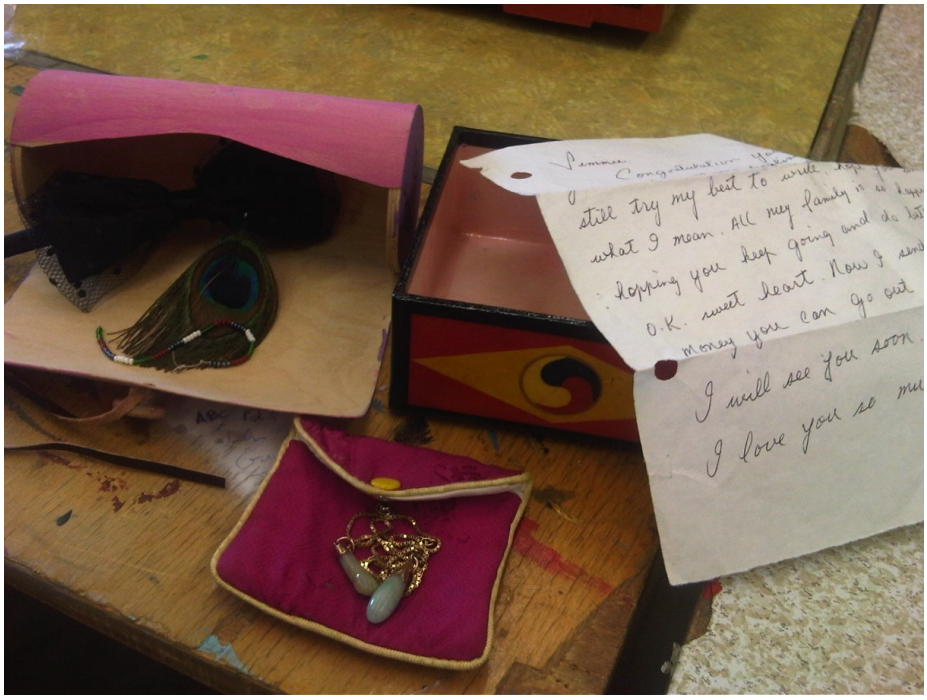

Figure 6-2. Sandra and Simmee's memory boxes

Even though I painted a memory box in the club, I brought in a different memory box. It was given to me by a former student of Korean heritage. Before we brought in our artifacts, I told Sandra which memory box I was going to share (April 29, 2011). I explained how the box itself held special memories for me. Sandra understood because she also had a memory box at home. It was a heart-shaped Valentine's chocolate box. However, she chose to bring the memory box she made in the club because it held new memories. I shared the artifacts in my memory box first. I began with the story of the letter. When I won a teaching award from the government, my mother wrote me a congratulatory letter (Chung, 2009). It was the first letter she had ever written in English. It took my mother a long time to find the English words to write this letter.

Sandra listened quietly as I told my story. There was a long pause and silence afterward. As we sat there together, I began to think more about the silences in my story. Why was I

telling the same story I have told others, again? It was Sandra's silence that prompted me to retell this story. Inquiring into the story, I shared more of why the letter was a symbol of my mother's loving perception.

> *I think this letter is special because my mother wanted me to know that she was proud of me. I told Sandra how words of endearment, hugs, and saying I love you, was awkward for our family. We didn't grow up expressing ourselves like that with each other. Instead, I would indirectly hear what my mom thought or felt from other people.* (Interim field text based on research text, May 6, 2011)

In retelling this story, I realized the letter held a special memory for me, not just because my mother painstakingly took time to write it, but also because it was a symbol of her loving perception. It was her way of travelling to my world, which was literally foreign to her, in order to tell me that she loved me. As I retold this story, I wove in the story of another artifact in my memory box. Speaking to the teardrop and fist-shaped jade on a necklace, I shared how my family gave this to me when I was a baby. For me, this necklace represented my sense of security and was a symbol of my family. Like the fist, our family was strong, yet vulnerable, like the tear drop.

After listening carefully to the telling and retelling of my memory box items, Sandra shared her artifacts. By the time we shared our memory boxes, Sandra and I had known each other for over six months. In the telling and retelling of our photographs and memory box items, it began to feel like the world we were co-composing was one where we both belonged.

When we said goodbye after sharing our memory boxes and artifacts, Sandra surprised me by giving me her phone number and home address. She thought her mother would be able to meet me in a few days. She told me to call. While I already had her mother's contact

information through the consent forms she signed early on, I had not called Mary. I had been waiting for Sandra's permission and approval to call home. Now that Sandra felt comfortable to bring me home, I gladly accepted the invitation to meet her mother.

Meeting Sandra's Mother, Mary

I recall the nervousness I felt when I first met Mary. Sandra arranged the meeting, so I had not talked to Mary myself. Below are memories of my first meeting with Mary on May 4, 2011.

With her address and buzzer number in hand, I rang the buzzer at the front of the apartment complex. A woman's voice answered and I said my name was Simmee, Sandra's friend who had come to meet with her. Then I heard a click of the door, which let me in. Their apartment unit was on the main floor. Before I even knocked on the door, a woman around my age opened the door just a tiny bit. She had large brown eyes and her hair was swept back into a tidy ponytail. The resemblance between Sandra and her mother was noticeable. Likely uncertain about who I was, she hesitated before inviting me in. I was nervous, and Mary seemed nervous too. I began wishing Sandra was there with us.

I walked through the front door into the kitchen. Mary apologized for the smallness of her apartment and told me they were moving soon. I glanced to the hallway and saw a display of children's drawings, colourful paintings, and what looked like a collage in the shape of a circle. The words "A mighty heart" were in the centre of the collage. I commented on how her home felt very warm and cozy. "I love your hallway gallery," I added.

She said we could sit at her kitchen table to chat. I sat down across from her. That moment of not knowing what to say next reminded me of my early meetings with Sandra where I initiated conversations. Mary and I began with small talk, then talk of the research, and

whether she would agree to be a participant. "I don't think I have anything important to share," she said as she signed the consent forms. With formalities over, we gradually relaxed. "Tell me about you," I encouraged. Mary was still nervous but began to tell me a little bit about her family. Later on in the conversation when I noticed she was more relaxed, I asked if it was okay if I took out my notebook. I did not take out my tape recorder. It was supposed to be an hour-long conversation, but by the time I left, it ended up being three hours long. Time flew as Mary and I shared stories of growing up. (Interim research text based on field notes, May 4, 2011)

This conversation was the first of four one-on-one conversations that took place in Mary's home between May 2011 to April 2012; in addition we also had three telephone conversations. As I was privileged to know Sandra and her mother, Mary, I came to understand and learn from this family's experience.

Mary's Collage Work: "A Mighty Heart"

My next visit to Mary's home (June 23, 2011) was a month after our second conversation. By this time, Mary and I had shared many stories of our lives and I felt comfortable asking her about the "Mighty Heart" collage on the wall. The collage stood out. I saw family photographs, pictures, and words cut out from magazines. Mary explained that the collage was something she made during a parenting program. "I try to go into a program that will help me. I've taken four parenting programs," she added (Transcript, June, 23, 2011). I asked if she could tell me about her collage.

Nodding, Mary took the collage that was tacked to the wall and placed it on the kitchen table so we could see it more closely. The collage was dated May 2010. In the following, Mary

shared stories from her collage work. As I listened to these stories, I began to understand how part of Mary's early landscape reverberated into her present stories as a woman and mother.

A Mighty Heart

I put things in here that are important to me.

My native culture,

my family.

I know I have a good heart.

One of my dreams was to become a nurse.

I was taking a nursing program when I was in my 20s,

but Sandra's dad was very abusive.

I couldn't do anything with him there.

He kept knocking me down and I just gave up on that actually.

(Transcript, June 23, 2011)

The photographs of Mary's five children were central in her collage, along with the words "a mighty heart." Taking me back to a time and place in her life where home was not a safe place, Mary told me why she gave up her dream of being a nurse. She decided to move to another province with her children to get away.

Sandra was two years old at the time. Four months later, Mary and her children returned home because they missed their family, but "he was still there," she told me. Although Mary never finished the nursing program, she remains hopeful, saying, "I still want to become a nurse in an emergency room one day."

Mountains

If I was ever to get married,

I'd like to get married on a mountain,

traditionally in a buckskin dress,

barefoot, overlooking, I think that would

be beautiful.

(Transcript, June 23, 2011)

The cut out picture of a beautiful mountain was at the top of Mary's collage. She shared more of how she didn't want to be a spinster or as she explained it, a woman that never married. This story led to a symbol of who she is:

A Peacock

The peacock will probably represent me,

my family,

who I am.

(Transcript, June 23, 2011)

The photograph of a peacock in Mary's collage reminded me of Sandra's peacock feather from her memory box. I asked Mary if she had shared these stories out of her collage work with Sandra. She had not. Even though they had not shared this story with each other, the peacock was a symbol of who they were for both of them.

Bringing me to the next image in her collage, Mary pointed out the words trust and honesty that were handwritten on her collage.

Trust

Trust is a big issue for me.

If I don't trust you then I just can't know you.

I don't have very much trust in a lot of people

but when I do have trust in you it's probably a good thing.

Honesty

I like people who are

honest and truthful with

me. And balance, I like to

balance all this out. In my

life I try to balance it all out.

Like my children, I try to

treat them all fair and if I'm

talking to them I try to put

myself at their age group on

how I felt when I was that

age and put myself in their

shoes and at the same time

I'm trying to be the mother

and be fair.

I learned that Mary grew up on a reserve until her mother chose to move to Edmonton. Her mother remarried when she was young. In Edmonton, Mary went to 7 elementary schools,

where she remembered herself as "floating around school." Her home life increasingly grew unsteady. Mary recalled how she felt at one point:

> *I remember in grade 4 feeling depressed but didn't want to tell anyone.*
>
> *I didn't want children's services to take us away.* (Transcript, June 23, 2011)

When the situation worsened at home, Mary and her siblings were temporarily placed in foster care. She remembered how her French foster parents were nice to her, so nice that she "was sad to leave." As Mary moved into her teenage years, school life was no easier. She went to two different high schools and recalled being bullied in school as girls tried to fight her until she learned to fight back. "I've gone through too much to be shy," she said. Now, as a mother, Mary tried to remember how she felt when she was her children's ages and imagined what they might be going through when they experience challenges or problems. When she needs guidance she goes to her dad, Stan, for help. "My dad is an important part of our lives. He's always been there" (Transcript, June 23, 2011).

Mary shared another important part of her life story, her children. Smiling she said, "I added pictures of my children after I came home from the parenting program." Apparently, the collage was a surprise class project so she didn't have any pictures with her when she first created it. What began as a class exercise grew to be something meaningful to Mary. She explained why she continued to work on the collage and added pictures of her children even after the course ended:

> *Yeah, I did that for myself so that people know that these are the ones that drive me to be who I am and to make me be, they make me want to be a better person, my children.* (Transcript, June 23, 2011)

When Mary was 21, she returned to school by going to a community college. In a previous conversation, Mary told me, "It's natural for me to take care of others. I've been doing it all my life" (Transcript, March 1, 2011). As Mary told this future story from her collage, she seemed to hold on to hopes and dreams of being a registered nurse someday. Mary took great pride in being a mother and how she took care of others; her collage reminded her of the most important things in her life. Smiling, Mary spoke more to the photograph of Sandra that centred her collage:

Photograph of Sandra

She is my gift

Strong-mind, creative,

playful and cheeky.

I want her to be happy.

I want her to finish school.

(Transcript, June 23, 2011)

This story prompted me to return to an earlier conversation I had with Mary about her own experiences as a youth. Mary once told me she went to Willow Ridge School, the same school Sandra attends. Mary described her school world back then.

> *When I was in school, I got lost in the cracks. Nobody noticed if kids were left alone. Some schools want to hurry kids along. I left school in grade 10. Sandra and I were very different at age 13. I had a specific group of friends that I always hung around with and were always up to everything, mischief. That was my club. And Sandra is not like that, thank goodness.* (Transcript, May 5, 2011)

As an adult and mother, Mary wanted Sandra to have a different experience than she did. Mary became pregnant at age 16 when she was in grade 10 and had to leave high school early. She wanted her daughter to be happy and to finish high school. Mary spoke more of how Sandra started off with a bad start in junior high and the problems continued, yet she still wanted to go to school. In my conversations with Sandra, I knew she had experienced cyber bullying and name calling at school. I knew a letter from the attendance board had recently been sent home. Mary spoke of how she perceived Sandra to be at school.

> *[Sandra's] very good at ignoring people. She's very strong minded. She's a strong little girl. She's strong to keep going to school after everything that's happened. She can stand up for herself. She keeps saying, "Mom I want to go back to school*. (Transcript, May 5, 2011)

As Mary told this story, it was clear she was co-composing a story of belonging alongside Sandra. Attending with a "loving perception" Mary lovingly travelled to her daughter's worlds and imagined school . . . and life . . . through her daughter's eyes (Lugones, 1987). I wondered more about what sustained Sandra in her desire to keep going to school. This story made me think back to the story Sandra told of the hair barrette. I wondered, were there some worlds where Sandra could be more herself? Did she feel more playful and at ease in these worlds?

Construction of Annals

In order to create a temporal framework of our experiences in the tenth conversation (June 24, 2011), I asked Sandra if she was interested in creating an annal. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote of how an annal may be composed of a "list of dates of memories, events, stories, and the like" (p. 112). I explained to Sandra how she could create an annal

using whatever frame she wanted. She seemed a little stumped at the openness of the task so I said, "I might write about important times or events in my life. You can do what you like. You decide how you want to do it."

We sat side by side that day, first constructing and then sharing our annals. Through sharing our annals, Sandra and I came to know more of each other's life stories—past, present, and our hopes and dreams in the imagined futures. Sandra created two almost identical annals. She wanted to redo the first one because she wanted it to be perfect. She shared her annal first.

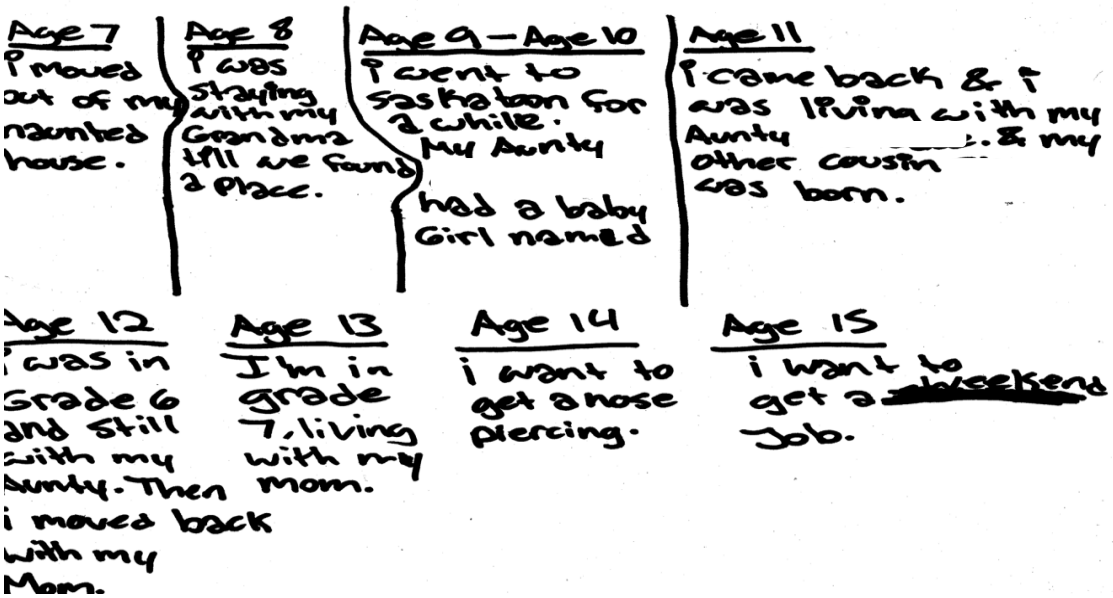

Figure 6-3. Sandra's annal.

Sandra explained her annal in this way:

Well, at age 7 I moved out. Then at age 8 I was staying with my grandma until we found a place to live. Then from age 9 to 10 I went to Saskatoon for a while. At age 11 I came back and I was living with my Auntie. At age 12 I was in grade 6 and still with my Auntie, then I moved back with my mom. At age 13 I'm in grade 7 because I've been living with my mom. At age 14, I want to get a nose piercing and age 15, I want to get a weekend job. (Transcript, June 24, 2011)

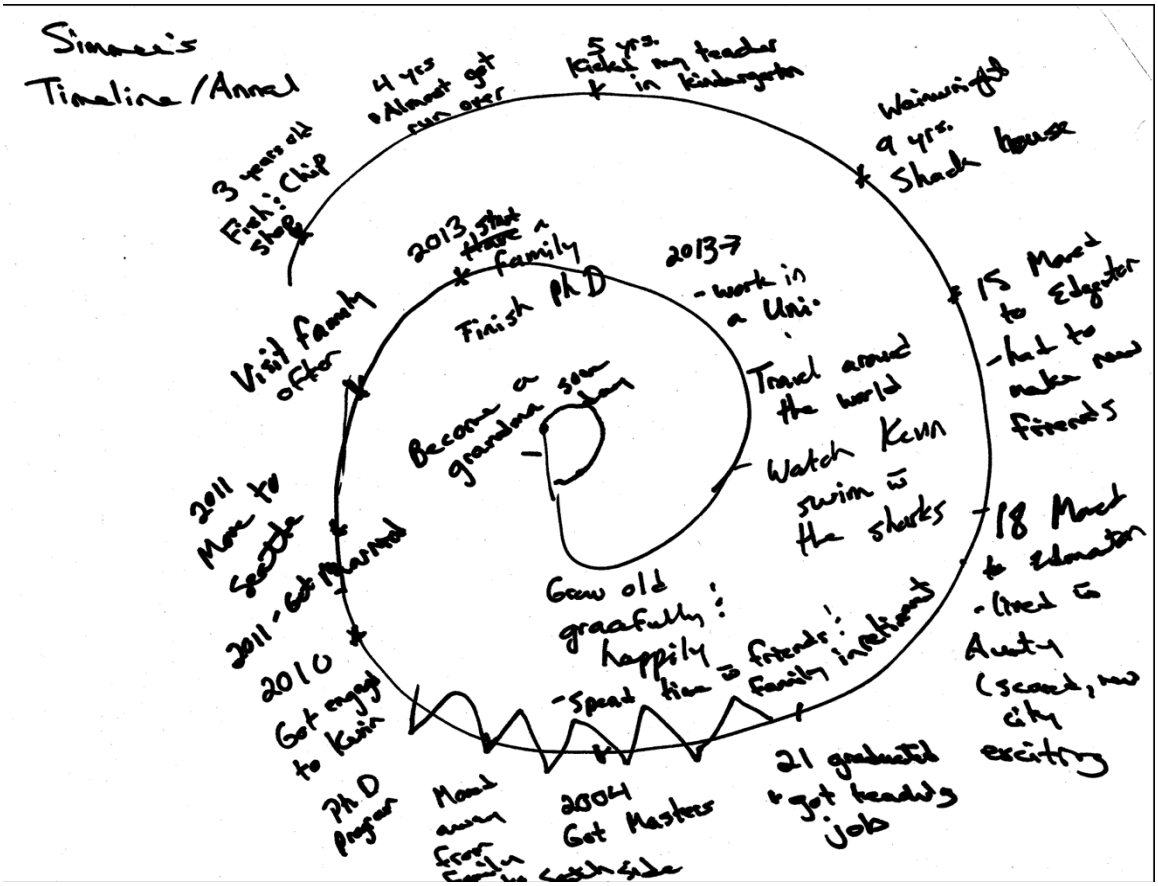

Figure 6-4. Simmee's annal

I described my annal in the following way:

When I was 3, we had a fish and chip shop in England. When I was 4 my mom told me I almost got run over and she saved me because I wandered off. And at 5 I kicked my teacher in the knee. I was really shy. Then we moved to Wainwright when I was 9 and we lived in that shack house. When I was15 we moved to another town and had to make new friends, Edgerton. Then when I was 18, I lived with my auntie and cousins when I came here to the city, Edmonton, by myself. When I was 21 years old I graduated and got my first teaching position. In 2004, I went back to university and met some of my teachers there like Jean and Pam. I moved away from the north side to the south side, which was really hard because I always loved being with my family. I'm kind of losing track of time now. I went back for my PhD so I'm in school. Then I got engaged. This is my imagined future. I'm going to get married. I'm going to move to Seattle. I'm going to come back and visit my family and my friends, and you and the girls often. And then eventually I want to have a family, a small one, like you want. And then I want to work maybe when I finish school—maybe work in a university. I want to travel around the world. I'll watch Kevin [my fiancé] swim with the sharks because he wants to. I want to grow old gracefully and spend time with my friends and family in retirement. I want to become a grandma, one day. (Transcript, June 24, 2011)

In the sharing of our annals, our understanding of where each other have been, where we are now, and where, and who we both wanted to be, deepened. Sandra spoke with confidence as she shared how she moved a lot from place to place. She had a confidence early on that I did not see in myself at her age. When things were "rough at home," I wondered how difficult it was for Sandra to move out and live with her auntie for two years. She eventually

moved back home with her mother and siblings to start her grade 7 year at Willow Ridge School. This story certainly did not fit with the initial story I told of the "quiet as a mouse" girl I once perceived and wrote of in my field notes (Field notes, February 16, 2011).

Co-composing a World Where We Both Belong

As Sandra and I inquired into each other's photographs, told stories of our memory box artifacts, and constructed annals, we allowed ourselves to be in relation with each other and to travel to each other's worlds. As we played together and learned to playfully "world"-travel, a growing sense of ease developed between us. I wondered if we created a world that we both inhabited and seemed to feel at ease in.

Attending to Sandra's "Worlds": The Club, Home, and the Worlds within School

Working to attend more closely to Sandra's experiences, I learned how important it was to travel to the multiple "worlds" she occupied in relation with others in her life. As I lived alongside her for 2 school years at Willow Ridge, Sandra invited me into her "worlds"—at the club, at home, in her different worlds within school. I learned more of what it was like to be her in her worlds and how she negotiated and constructed her stories of who she was and was becoming along with her stories of belonging.

In some of these worlds I learned Sandra was more at ease and playful. She was able to live out constructions she held of herself and be more of who she wanted to be. I also learned Sandra inhabited worlds where she was not at ease and could not be playful. Instead, these worlds of dis/ease (Lugones, 1987) were ones where she closed herself and became silent because she was worried that others would see her as "weird or strange."

In the following story fragments, I travelled alongside Sandra as she brought me to the different worlds she lives in and her stories to live by.

In the Club: Creating A Belonging Space

An early memory I have of Sandra's playfulness in the club was when she made a dog out of duct tape. Laughing, she walked it around the club and then into the hallway. I recalled her happily sharing how she "made a bird out of a clump of feathers tied together with string but Kerry killed it." And "it was just weird and funny" (Field notes, September 23, 2011).

Reflecting on these memories of Sandra engaging in "play" (Caine & Steeves, 2009; Paley, 2004) and being "playful" (Lugones, 1987) in the club, I realized that in the club she was "playful" as she did not worry about her competence or the school rules and norms; rather, she felt at ease in this world with us. In the club she made "birds out of a clump of feathers" and walked a pretend dog built out of duct tape. Caine and Steeves (2009) wrote of the importance of relational play within imagination and their words helped me understand Sandra's play as part of her identity making (Paley, 2015). Seeing imaginings as narrative constructions, Caine and Steeves (2009 helped me see that it was through play that Sandra brought forth her "embodied knowing" and it was "the notion of play within imagination that helps us move inside the stories of others, of being and becoming" (p. 5). For Sandra, the club was not school or a classroom place but a distinct world for her. This distinction was important because as she told me, "I don't feel like I belong in a classroom. I belong in this room [the club]" (Field notes, September 23, 2011).

Even though the club was situated within the school and we occupied an empty classroom, Sandra and the other youth constructed it to be a different kind of place. I asked Sandra why she felt it was different. Sandra told me, "The club is a place where I feel

comfortable. I have made a lot of memories here that are funny and weird" (Field notes, September 23, 2011).

Through attending to Sandra's continued play and playfulness in the club, her stories taught me how important it was for her to feel safe and welcomed in order to create a belonging space for play and to be playful, for her, and with others, in the multiple worlds she lived in.

Intersection of the Home World and the Multiple School Worlds

My second visit with Mary was different from my first meeting with her. This time we were both much more relaxed. With our growing ease with each other, I decided to bring up a comment made to me by the Foods teacher because I noticed Sandra had been less enthusiastic about Foods[44] class lately. Before, she used to talk about how much fun she had in Foods class all the time. Now she said little about Foods class. I recounted my conversation with the Foods teacher for Mary:

> *It was a Wednesday afternoon and I was setting up the club. The Foods teacher approached me before the youth came and said, "Do you notice something peculiar about Sandra? She sometimes talks to bubbles in class. Sometimes her eyes go a little weird. She never looks at me."* (Field notes, May 18, 2011)

As I recounted my interaction with the Foods teacher, I was not sure how Mary would react. I was not sure how Sandra would react. At this time, I had not yet told Sandra about her Foods teacher's comments to me. I did not want Sandra to feel uncomfortable with the teacher. I did, however, ask Sandra if her Foods teacher had talked to her or asked her anything recently. Sandra responded, "My teacher does not ask me anything" (Transcript, June 3, 2011).

[44] An introduction to Foods Basic (or Foods class) is part of the Career and Technology Studies (CTS) curriculum (Alberta Education, 2014). In the past, it may have been referred to as Home Economics.

After hearing the teacher's story, I was not sure meaning the teacher was trying to convey to me. I knew from my earlier conversation with Mary that Sandra had injured her eye at home when she was younger. It did not seem like the Foods teacher knew of this story since Mary told me that she's never been contacted by the Foods teacher or any other teacher. The only communication thus far was an attendance letter sent home. I wondered if the Foods teacher thought Sandra was "peculiar" because she appeared to talk to bubbles while washing dishes. Did she interpret Sandra not looking at her as peculiar or, perhaps, disrespectful? Was this what Sandra meant by not wanting to be [her]self and worrying about appearing strange or weird at school?

After I shared with Mary what the Foods teacher said to me, she did not appear at all concerned. Instead she shared her experiences as a mother.

> *Sandra talks to herself a lot. She has a real imagination. About three or four years ago, Sandra and her sister used to dress up and I used to sit on the couch and they used to come out making plays. Sandra would have it all set out on what she was going to do. They [Sandra and her sister] would come out all dressed up and they would be acting. Play acting. I think she was just expressing herself.* (Transcript, June 24, 2011)

Listening to the story of Sandra play acting at home, I imagined her playfulness with her family. Mary knew and perceived Sandra in different ways than the teacher. Wondering about how Mary made sense of the teacher's comment about Sandra talking to bubbles, she responded.

> *Sandra talks to herself sometimes in the shower and when she washes dishes. She [the Foods teacher] is probably just singling her out thinking she's weird because Sandra*

talks to herself. She doesn't really know Sandra. You know and I know Sandra. She's very imaginative. She's like a big kid at heart. (Transcript, June 24, 2011)

Sandra's playfulness was welcomed in her home world with her family, but this openness was interpreted very differently in Sandra's Food's classroom school world. Mary saw Sandra's playfulness when she talked to bubbles at home. She understood her daughter to be "imaginative" and "expressing herself."

Thinking more about why Sandra seemed less enthusiastic about Foods class lately, I wondered if the Foods teacher's perception of Sandra shaped their relationship and interactions in class. I wondered if Sandra was beginning to feel less at ease in her Foods class, a classroom that she used to have fun in.

A Story of Teacher and Student

Paley (2007), a preschool and kindergarten teacher and early childhood education researcher, wrote of her experiences working with children and learning from them through play. In *On Listening to What the Children Say*, Paley (2007) noted how young children "engage in social play and private monologues without self-consciousness," whereas older children may have already "learned to fear exposing their common ideas" (p. 157). Paley's attentiveness to experience helped me think about how play can be a way for children and youth to live out and share their stories of experiences. I held onto Paley's words as Sandra unexpectedly brought Sage and me to her other worlds. It was during a lunch conversation when Sandra asked to join Sage and me. Unknowingly, Sandra invited us into her classroom school world by acting out a play, bringing to life a private monologue she must have held. In the following field notes, I shared how I learned more of her story of teacher and student in her school world.

As Sage and I sat in the empty classroom for our regular weekly conversation, we became part of Sandra's impromptu script of teacher and school. It was not Sandra and my turn to meet at lunch but she had joined Sage and I again so she wouldn't be by herself at lunch. "I will be quiet," she assured us at the start. Sandra was quiet at first but then we couldn't help but stop our conversation. We were distracted and captured by her frantic scribbles on the chalkboard and the script she wanted us to play out.

What's the answer to my question? Sandra demanded.

We were the imagined students who suddenly became real as we stared at Sandra who transformed into a teacher. She wrote another complex math equation on the chalkboard and called out for someone to answer.

Wrong answer! Sandra exclaimed, even though Sage and I said nothing.

Speaking louder, she aggressively demanded that her imaginary students speak. A reward for getting the correct answer, Sandra pretended to throw candy at them, at us.

You didn't get the right answer so you get nothing! Sandra shouted.

The students who did not answer correctly appeared to receive nothing.

(Interim research text based on field notes, June 21, 2011)

The lunch warning bell interrupted my thoughts. It was the school signal for the students to head to class so Sage, Sandra, and I did not have a chance to talk about what just unfolded. I wanted to wait to talk about it with Sandra alone. In my next one-on-one conversation with Sandra, I asked her about this story of teacher and student.

Simmee: *I noticed you were playing teacher. Do you play teacher a lot?*

Sandra: *No, not really.*

Simmee: *What do you think teachers do?*

Sandra: *I don't know, yell at kids.*

Simmee: *Why were you throwing candy at the students?*

Sandra: *They were making me mad and stuff. When teachers get mad, some will give you a detention where you have to go sit somewhere else, like the office or a spot out of the room.* (Transcript, June 24, 2011)

Thinking back to Paley's work with children and play, I wondered if Sandra was perhaps living out the script and private monologue. In her classroom school world, she described how teachers "yell at kids." Students were sent to the office when they made the teacher mad. By positioning Sage and I as students in the play, I wondered if Sandra was letting us know what her school world was like. I wondered how she came to construct the role of the teacher and student. Was this a narrative she lived in and was living out for us?

I thought about how vulnerable Sandra was in sharing this story with us. She was inviting us into her classroom school world as she experienced it through her improvisational play. As her story of teacher and student unfolded, I began to see that Sandra's play and playfulness allowed her to enact her school world for us. In this world, Sandra, playing the part of teacher, demanded competency and the right answers from the students. There were certain attributes the students had to have in order to be successful or to get the candy such as getting the answers right. Being part of the audience of imaginary students, I found myself feeling uneasy and a sense of dis/ease with Sandra's yelling and her seriousness as she acted as teacher.

When I read and reread the transcripts and field notes on our conversations, I realized that this was not the first time Sandra shared her story of teacher and student. Not only had she given me a glimpse of her world in the club, she had tried to bring me to her classroom school

world through the telling of her memory box artifact—the bracelet. I returned to Sandra's words, which spoke to her fears and silence in school, "If they [teachers] are mad, I freeze up and I don't say anything" (Transcript, May 6, 2011).Threading the bracelet story and Sandra's playacting of the teacher and student, I understood more of Sandra's experiences in her classroom school world. The good students in this world get the answer right. The bad students don't get the answer right. They sometimes get detention. Travelling to Sandra's experience in this world, I understood her experience of being scared to speak in class and to say little to her teachers. In this world, she could not play or be playful. She constructed herself as being quiet in her classroom school world and also in the school worlds in between classes—that is, in the hallways, at lunchtime, before, during, and after school where she learned to be good at ignoring the students who made fun of her and called her names. In her hallway school world, she storied herself as a "loner," someone who does not "have anywhere, anyone, or any place to hang out with." (Transcript, December 14, 2011). I began to understand why she wanted to join Sage and I at lunchtime, because in her lunchtime school world, she storied herself as someone with "no place to go."

Travelling between Sandra's club, home, and school worlds, I wondered more about how she made sense of belonging in her worlds at school and home. I wondered more about her experience of the relationship between teacher and student and how this story shaped her sense of belonging. Sandra explained,

No more playing at school because I look kind of crazy.

Like I'm talking to myself or something.

I don't like being myself,

I believe in unicorns and stuff.

People give me weird looks.

When people say mean things to me,

I feel like oh my gosh why did they say that about me.

Sometimes I say something nasty back,

Sometimes I just let it be.

(Transcript, December 14, 2011)

Sandra told me stories prior to this conversation about how she could not be herself because she did not want to "appear strange or weird" at school. As she retold this story of why she could not play (Caine & Steeves, 2009; Paley, 1997, 2004) or be playful (Lugones, 1987) in school, I understood why she had to be different in different worlds. Sandra's words, "No more playing at school because I look kind of crazy" sounded like she was learning she needed to be different in her school worlds than she was in her home world and in the club world. I wondered if it was her comfort and playfulness with Sage and I and in the club that allowed her to share her playacting with us. Her Foods classroom school world was a world where she thought she could be playful. Now Sandra seemed acutely aware of the constructions others held of her, and therefore, she shifted who she was in this particular world. She no longer felt at ease.

By travelling to Sandra's worlds, I learned she was more at ease when she could express herself using different forms of representation. For instance, from my conversations with her mother, I learned that playacting was a way Sandra expressed herself at home. I learned of her love for drawing, photography, and creating from our time together in the club. In the next section, I share Sandra's multiple tellings and retellings of a story she entitled "The Really Bad

Burn." She stories a school incident that resulted in her school suspension. This story is told and retold from Sandra's vantage point using different forms of representation.

"The Really Bad Burn": Living Out A Story

Sandra did not come to our lunch conversation today. She usually lets me know if she can't come. I wonder where she is. (Field notes, June 7, 2011)

It was unlike Sandra to not show up for our lunch meeting. I wondered where she was and hoped to see her at the club. The following day (June 8, 2011), I learned from another youth in the club that Sandra would not be at school. She was suspended from school and was not allowed by the school administration to come to our after-school arts club or to meet for lunch conversations. Sandra would also miss the year-end feast that our club was holding on June 15th, an event I knew she had been looking forward to. The youth did not know many details as to why Sandra was suspended and not allowed in school, only that "something bad happened" in Foods class (Field notes, June 8, 2011). It was almost two weeks later (June 24, 2011) when I learned more about the event that resulted in Sandra's school suspension.

When Sandra was allowed to return to school, I asked her why she was suspended. Sandra described the burn event that occurred in her Foods class in this first telling.

Telling 1

Simmee: *What happened in Foods?*

Sandra: *In Foods, I accidentally burned this one chick. I guess she told on me. I got suspended.* (Transcript, June 24, 2011)

Following the burn incident, Sandra told me how she was sent to the office.

Simmee: *Were you upset to get suspended?*

Sandra: *Mmm, well no, not really.*

Simmee: *Did you tell the teacher it was an accident?*

Sandra: *No. I forgot what the vice principal said to me. It was two weeks ago, so I kind of forget.* (Transcript, June 24, 2011)

At the time, I was not sure if Sandra really had forgotten the details, if she was over the incident, or if she just didn't want to talk about it anymore. She seemed uncomfortable telling this story. Following her lead, we talked about other things. Sandra told me again about her hopes to move to a different school for grade 8. She had a good friend at another school and wanted to go there. I knew the next time I saw Sandra was likely to be after the summer break. As we said our goodbyes, I was not sure if we would ever revisit the story of why Sandra got suspended or even if it was important to.

I thought more about the stories Sandra shared with me throughout the year. It seemed like I was just learning how to travel to her worlds. There was much I still wanted to understand of her experiences and what it was like to be Sandra in different worlds at school, at home, at the arts club, and with her friends. I wondered more about her identity making and experiences of belonging in these different worlds. I revisited lingering questions and my research puzzle; how do we create belonging spaces in and out of schools. I travelled back to the worlds where Sandra was at ease and playful. In the club and at home with her family, she created belonging spaces for herself. I thought about the school world where Sandra was not as comfortable or as playful—in the classroom, in the hallway with peers, with the teacher.

Turning back to the incident that occurred in Foods class that resulted in Sandra's suspension, I wondered if this story shaped and re-shaped Sandra's experiences of belonging in school. In our first lunch conversation of the new school year (September 23, 2011), I learned from Sandra that going to a new school was no longer possible. Her family was not moving

after all. Sandra was sad when she told me this because she hoped to have a new start with new friends at a new school. She wanted to participate in new and different things, like cheerleading. Sandra shared her hopes to move to a new school so many times, I began to see how this was a sustaining story for her; now this forward looking story (Lindemann Nelson, 1995) seemed to be put on hold. Sandra shared other changes in her life as she told me, "In grade 8, I'm not taking Foods class" (Transcript, September 23, 2011).

I knew Sandra loved to cook in Foods class. When I asked why she was no longer taking this class, Sandra shrugged in response. Wondering if there was more to this story that led to her decision, I asked Sandra if she would tell me again what happened in her grade 7 Foods class. Nodding, Sandra gave a second telling of the burn incident.

Telling 2

I accidentally burnt someone.

I didn't mean to.

The teacher went, "Don't burn anybody ever again."

I told her it was an accident.

She's like, "Sure it was."

The assistant principal said, "How can we believe you?"

Then they sent me home.

I wanted to cry."

(Transcript, September 23, 2011)

Sandra shared more of the burn incident than she had in June when it occurred. It was still a short telling of the story, but there were more layers to her story. In her second telling, she described how she didn't think the teacher and vice-principal believed her when Sandra

tried to tell them it was an accident. “Sure it was,” “How can we believe you?” she recalled them saying. I imagined what it was like to be her in this world as Sandra told how they sent her home and she wanted to cry. I wondered how this experience shaped her identity and experiences of belonging in her classroom school world. Did she want to cry because she was worried that teachers were perceiving and storying her in a negative way? Following this telling, I suggested to Sandra the possibility of co-composing a script. I knew she felt comfortable with this form of representation so it seemed a way for us to inquire more into her experiences in her classroom school worlds. Sandra was excited about this idea.

She decided on the title, the characters, and the props needed in this story. Speaking to the gaps and silences in her initial two tellings, Sandra retold a story through the script we co-composed.

Retelling: The Really Bad Burn

Who: Sandra, Natasha, Natasha's friend Mylie, Ms. Lewis (the Foods teacher), Mr. Harris (the vice-principal)

Props: Pot, stove, butter knife, dishcloth

Narrator: Sandra

SCENE 1: *I was in Foods making something. A butter knife was on the stove. I picked it up, turned around, and brushed Natasha.*

Natasha: Ow.

Mylie: Are you okay?

Sandra: (turning to Natasha) Sorry, I didn't know you were there.

SCENE 2: *We are all in the office using the phone. I was calling a friend.*

Ms. Lewis: Sandra, you are in big, big trouble! You left a third-degree burn!

Sandra's inner thoughts: Oh crap, I'm going to get into trouble and the teacher is going to get involved and all that. They are going to tell my mom.

In this scene, Sandra explained that she hadn't known that Natasha was hurt at the time. It was after class when Sandra went to the office to use the phone. The Foods teacher walked into the office with Natasha holding her arm. It was then that Sandra realized that Natasha was actually injured. Sandra told more of the story that played out between her and the teacher in the office.

Ms. Lewis: Why did you burn her? I didn't think *you* would do this…

Sandra: Calm down . . . it was an accident. I didn't mean to.

Ms. Lewis: DON'T TELL ME TO CALM DOWN!

Sandra's inner thoughts: I feel so ashamed. Ms. Lewis must be disappointed in me because I am usually quiet. She probably thinks I am rude and mean. I don't want her to think that. . . . I better keep my mouth shut. I wish I could run out of the school.

"Ms. Lewis must be disappointed in me because I am usually quiet." There was sadness in her voice as Sandra shared these thoughts. I wondered if being quiet and keeping her "mouth shut" was her way of belonging in school. She did not want her teacher to think that she was rude or mean for telling her to calm down. She tried to explain how it was an accident, but in not wanting to disappoint her teacher anymore, she decided to keep her "mouth shut."

In this classroom school world, I wondered if Sandra wanted her teacher to see her as quiet, and perhaps a good student. I wondered if she thought by showing these attributes to her teacher, rather than her playfulness, was her way of living out a counterstory[45] (Lindemann Nelson, 1995). It seemed like she was trying to construct herself differently in others' eyes by trying to carry out a story of what she thought a good student does and does not do. In this story, she did not want her Foods teachers to see her as being "rude" or "mean" and she did not want to appear "weird or strange" to others. I understood why she felt like running out of the school. Her teacher's words meant a lot to Sandra. It seemed to shape her experience of belonging in this classroom school world.

[45] Lindemann Nelson (1995) wrote of *counterstories* as "narratives of resistance and insubordination that allow communities of choice to challenge and revise the paradigm stories of the 'found' communities in which they are embedded" (p. 24).

As I looked back, I wondered if her knowing of teacher and student was being lived out in "The Really Bad Burn" story. Or, I wondered if Sandra was living out her experience in Foods class in her playacting of teacher and student. I awakened to the lingering reverberations in her stories as Sandra tried to make sense of who she was and how to belong in her classroom school world. Telling us more of the script, I learned how a familial story reverberated into this classroom school world.

Ms. Lewis: You could go to jail and get charged.

Sandra's inner thoughts: Am I going to get taken away to a group home? I don't want to get charged because my mom and grandpa will have to pay for me to get out of jail.

In my conversations with Mary, I knew she had been temporarily placed in foster care as a child (Field notes, June 23, 2011). When Sandra's Foods teacher told her she could go to jail and get charged, her words impacted Sandra. There were reverberations of her mother's past as Sandra worried that she, too, might get taken away from her family and put into a different home. Just as this familial story reverberated into Sandra's experience in school and how she made sense of her teacher's words, she was learning that her classroom school worlds could potentially impact her family and home. I understood why Sandra's tensions grew with her teacher's words. Her home world with her family was usually a world where she felt she belonged. Now I wondered if she thought her home world might be in jeopardy because of her actions in her Foods classroom.

Mr. Harris: I talked to your mom. You're going to be in big trouble at home!

(After the vice-principal called home and spoke with Mary, Sandra was given a one-week out-of-school suspension).

Sandra's inner thoughts: Oh no. I'm going to miss out on a lot of school work. I won't be able to see my friends.

In a world where she did not always experience belonging, the impact of a week long suspension affected her school work in other classroom school worlds and her world with friends.

SCENE 3: *I am at home with my mother.*

Mom: Why did you burn her?

Sandra: It was an accident.

Mom: You are grounded and no phone and no laptop.

Sandra's inner thoughts: Oh no. I can't really do anything . . . now. . . . I don't want to get into the trouble with my mom or the teacher. I'm scared. . . . I hope my teacher doesn't give me dirty looks when I get back to school. I wish people would believe me.

As Sandra shared how "[she] can't really do anything . . . now," did she mean being grounded at home or a sense of helplessness? She did not feel like the teachers believed her. And after getting a call from the school and hearing the teacher's story of the incident, she thought her mother did not believe her either. Sandra's usually felt at ease in her home world. Now, this negative construction of her from the Foods classroom school world was entering her home world. With these worlds bumping up against each other, Sandra was worried. She did not want to get into trouble with either her teachers or her mother.

SCENE 4: *I am at home because of my suspension**.** I decide to cook soup. There is a butter knife resting on the table.*

Mom: You better not burn anyone with that knife, Sandra.

Sandra: I did NOT burn that girl, okay?

Mom: Then why did the teacher say that you did. . . . So you didn't?

Sandra: No, it was an accident.

Sandra's inner thoughts: Yes! I think my mom kind of believes me now. . . . I wish the school would believe me.

There was a sense of relief as Sandra told me how this was when they "finally started to talk." She described how her mother started to laugh a little bit and then "it got serious." She explained to Mary how it was an accident. Her mother said she understood and believed her.

SCENE 5: *It's Friday and I am not allowed back at school until Monday. I'm in the house, looking outside. I asked my mom if I could go outside. I waited behind a tree for my friend. I hid because I was not allowed on the school grounds.*

Sandra's inner thoughts: I don't belong here. . . . I know I shouldn't be on the school grounds, but I really want to see my friend. I don't feel good being sneaky. I hope I don't run into a teacher and they tell me to leave.

"I don't belong here." Sandra's words and thoughts revealed her vulnerability and her experience around belonging at school. On the outside looking in, Sandra longed to see her friends, but she was not allowed on the school grounds. She feared a teacher would see her and ask her to leave so she hid behind a tree. As she shared this story with me, I imagined what it might feel like to have to hide. School did not sound like a place where Sandra felt welcomed or safe. I wondered what it might be like for her when she returned to school.

SCENE 6: *It's one week later and I am back at school. I walk into class with my head behind my binder, not realizing that I'm behind the girl I accidentally burned.*

Sandra's inner thoughts: I'm scared to go into Foods. I feel nervous to talk to the teacher and to Natasha and her friend. I'm embarrassed and ashamed.

Natasha: I didn't mind you accidentally burning me. It wasn't me who told on you—it was my friend Mylie…

Mylie avoids eye contact with me when I look at her. Ms. Lewis keeps giving me long glances but doesn't say anything, except when she calls my name for attendance.

Sandra's inner thoughts*:* Everyone is looking at me. People probably think I'm violent, but I'm not. I think Ms. Lewis still thinks I did it on purpose. . . . I don't think I can ever change their minds. I better just keep quiet.

Following her return to the classroom, Sandra told me that this incident was not mentioned again by her teacher, the vice-principal, or the principal. Now she avoided these teachers as much as she could. She explained how she even ran away from one when she saw a teacher in the hall.

"I better just keep quiet." Sandra's ending to the script played over in my head. I wondered, as she learned to lived out these stories in her other classroom school worlds, was there was room for playfulness and for her to play and "be [her]self." As a way for Sandra to continue to express herself and share her experience, we also came to act out the script that we had co-composed.

Other Representations: Acting it Out and Drawing

Months later following the co-composition of the "The Really Bad Burn" script, Sandra asked me if I could take her to the museum (March 17, 2012). After we toured part of the museum, we talked over lunch about the experience of writing the script. We decided to act it out. Sandra played herself, Natasha, Natasha's friend Mylie, and read her own inner thoughts. She wanted me to play, the teacher, vice-principal, and her mother. As Sandra and I acted out the script, at one part, she asked me to reread the Foods teacher's lines. She wanted me to yell the words, "DON'T TELL ME TO CALM DOWN!" so I did. Silence followed. We both paused, as it seemed to make us both uncomfortable. Sandra asked me to add some words to her inner thoughts in the original script.

Travelling back to Sandra's Foods classroom school world, I knew this was a hard story for her to tell and retell, but she seemed less inhibited playacting as she brought the characters to life. I drew upon Paley's (2007) work once more as she shared how children may "disclose more of themselves as characters in a story than participants in a discussion" (p. 159). These words helped me think about how important it was to make spaces for Sandra to playact her story of experience.

Knowing Sandra's interest in drawing, I wondered if she would be interested in drawing her experience. Smiling, Sandra said yes. I gave her a blank piece of paper. With no instructions, she began a series of pencil sketches and gave an alternate telling of "The Really Bad Burn" story.

Figure 6-5. Sandra's drawing, scene 1

In Figure 6-5, Sandra showed us how she accidentally burned her classmate. In the other tellings, she shared how she did it by accident, but in this story, she shared how she thought the butter knife was warm but not burning. "I even tested it on my arm." She was trying to be funny. She was teasing her friend, but the knife apparently was hotter than she thought.

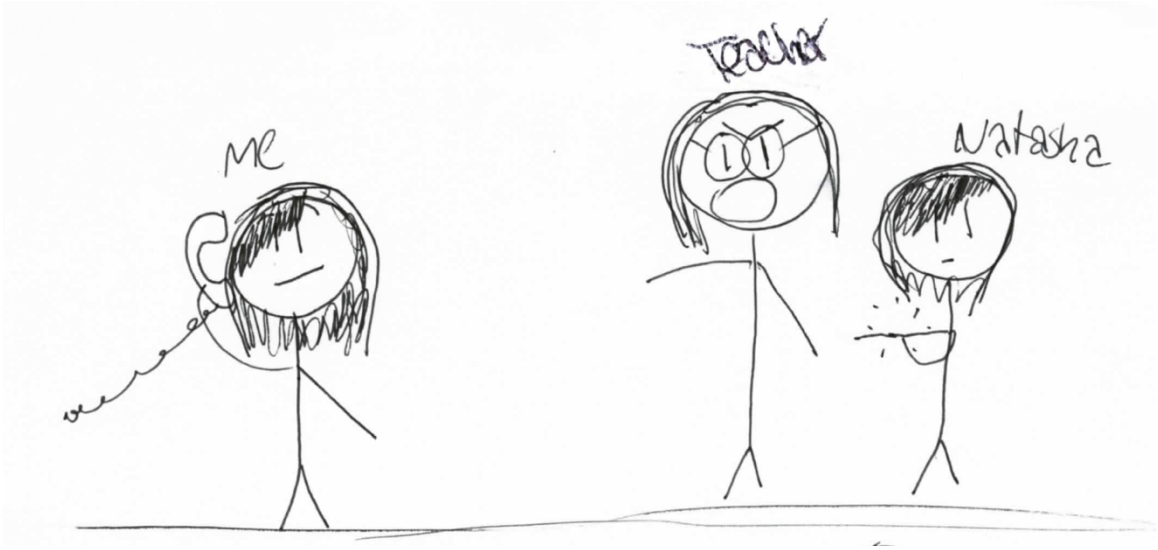

Figure 6-6. Sandra's drawing, scene 2

It is after school and Sandra is calling a friend using the office phone. Then the Foods teacher comes in the office with Natasha. This is when Sandra realizes that Natasha is actually hurt. There is a bandage on her arm. The Foods teacher is angry and begins to yell at Sandra.

Figure 6-7. Sandra's drawing, scene 3

In Figure 6-7, Sandra depicts the vice-principal giving her a lecture in the detention room, which was located in the office. Sandra is thinking, “Crap, they are going to call my mom.” Displayed on the wall in the detention room is a poster with the title “What is life?” What the vice-principal said to her is a blur because she is preoccupied with worries over the school calling her mother. She decided to “keep [her] mouth shut” while the vice-principal talked.

Figure 6-8. Sandra’s drawing, scene 4

Figure 6-8 is a drawing of Sandra looking at the school from the window of her house. The school is across the street. She’s sad because she wants to be back at school. She can’t go because she is still suspended.

Figure 6-9. Sandra's drawing, scene 5

Figure 6-9 is a picture of Sandra when she is allowed back at school after her suspension.

Figure 6-10. Sandra's drawing, scene 6

Figure 6-10 shows Sandra's first day back in Foods class after the burn incident. The Foods teacher is calling attendance.

Figure 6-11. Sandra's drawing, scene 7

Figure 6-11 shows Sandra "embarrassed and ashamed" in Foods class. She wants to hide. Someone else answers for her when the teacher calls attendance. She doesn't want to speak.

A Shifting Sense of Self and Belonging

As I looked back on my time with Sandra and the stories she told and retold, I learned more of her experiences around identity making and belonging. I understood more deeply how her sense of self and sense of belonging continually shifted in the multiple worlds she inhabited; worlds where she fell in and out of ease. It was a gradual process in which we came to tell, retell, relive Sandra's stories of belonging. In addition to our meetings, and field trips, we also began to explore people, places, and symbols of belonging.

In the field notes below, I share more of how we came to create her collage, later named her belonging project.[46]

We arrived at the local museum just before noon. It was a cold and snowy Saturday (March 17, 2012). Planned weeks before, Sandra asked me if we could go to the museum because she had never been there before. She heard there was an Aboriginal exhibit and really wanted to see it. I thought it was a great place to spend more time with Sandra and have a longer conversation than lunch visits and club time allowed.

As we walked around the archives and displays, Sandra snapped pictures with her camera phone and I with my camera. She stopped to study the scene of a Blackfoot Transfer ceremony. In this display, there was a young Aboriginal girl wearing a traditional dress who was watching a boy receive a weasel tail suit, a distinct outfit name for the white weasel pelt

[46] Sandra and I came to name this collage project as her "belonging project" as she shared stories of belonging and not belonging in it. We also came to know and name this study as "our belonging project."

fringes. I noticed Sandra studying the girl so I asked if she wanted me to take a picture of her. She said yes.

When we got to the Smudge box display, we stopped to reminisce. It reminded us both of our field trip to another school where we visited Elder Francis Whiskeyjack who performed a smudging ceremony just for us. We decided to sit in the tepee where the smudge box was displayed and shared our memories of that day. (Field notes, March 17, 2012)

It was on this day when we sat in the teepee that I asked Sandra if she was interested in working on a project where she could share more of her experiences. I recalled Sandra smiling and saying yes. I asked her what she kind of project she might be interested in doing. Together we brainstormed these possibilities: storyboard, a video, artwork, photography, or collage work. Sandra told me she was interested in creating a collage because she could combine these ideas. I smiled at her suggestion of a collage as it was somewhat familiar to me. As part of my master's thesis, I had worked on collage work with children in a grade 3 classroom. However, I knew that Sandra's representation of her experiences would be much different than working on a collage project with a classroom of students.

We began our work almost immediately. We talked about how her collage might take shape and I asked what she wanted to include in it. We divided two large pieces of papers into quarters and I recorded Sandra's ideas.

Belonging People

Mom

Friends

Family

People from the club

Elders

I'm a part of my family.

I care for my friends and I respect Elders.

I am Aboriginal.

I am proud.

Belonging Places in School

Art, I like to draw

Cree class, I like to learn my Cree language

Club, I belong here

Belonging Places Out of School

My house

Grandpa's house

The mall

The park

Pow Wows

I Don't Belong Here

Police Station

School office

Mean People

Court

These places make me feel scared.

Pressure, frustration, Anxious, Confused.

Why am I here?

(Field notes, March 17, 2012)

As I wrote down Sandra's ideas, I thought about the stories that her words conjured. Along with belonging places and people, she wanted me to write down places where she did not belong. As we talked about these ideas, we began to see it as her "Belonging Project." I hoped this project would be another way for her to express herself and share her layers of experiences that she had in other ways already shared with me in our meetings in the club and over lunch. I asked Sandra if she wanted photographs in her collage, which she did. Thinking about people, place, and symbols of belonging, I encouraged her to take pictures both in and out of school to share her experiences. In the following 5 weeks (March 17–April 26, 2012), we continued to work on the collage. Bringing us back to the multiple worlds she inhabits, Sandra retold stories told during our inquiry.

Retelling and Reliving Stories: Belonging Collage

Sage had already shared her belonging collage with us so now it was Sandra's turn.

Figure 6-12. Sandra's belonging collage

Figure 6-13. Sandra's collage, symbol 1

Belonging People,

Courtney, Michelle, and Tristan

are all standing together.

My brothers and sisters.

They're all part of my family.

(Transcript, April 26, 2012)

Next, Sandra told us a story about her classroom school world. It was a resonating story—one that she had lived out in different ways. Pointing to her family picture again, she said:

This is something teachers don't know about me.

I don't really talk about them in school,

to teachers.

They [teachers] don't really ask about my family.

(Transcript, April 26, 2012)

The picture of her 3 siblings was situated near the middle of Sandra's collage. Bringing us back to her home world, she reminded us of how her family was an important part of her stories. She wanted Sage and I, and others to know she belonged with her family.

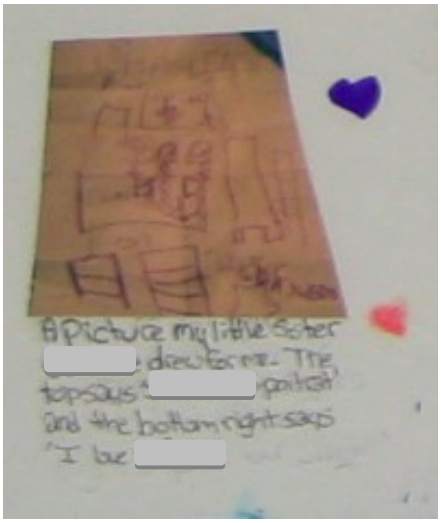

Figure 6-14. Sandra's collage, symbol 2

This one's a picture my sister made for me.

It says Sandra's portrait.

Then on the bottom it says, I love Sandra.

It's a family belonging picture.

(Transcript, April 26, 2012)

Next, she brought Sage and I to symbols which reminded her of who she is and how she belonged.

Figure 6-15. Sandra's collage, symbol 3

Symbols

I took a picture of my bed,

my posters, my stuffies I have.

They're my things

and they remind me of me.

My bed isn't big, it looks comfy.

The picture of Sandra's bed, posters, and stuffies brought us again to her home world. This is a place where she surrounds herself with comfortable things that remind her of who she is.

Figure 6-16. Sandra's painting for teacher, symbol 4

This is a picture of my painting for my art teacher.

I put it there because it's a symbol of me.

He wanted a smaller version of it but I said I no.

Then I felt so bad so I painted this for him now.

It's hanging up in his classroom.

(Transcript, April 26, 2012)

As Sandra shared this photograph and story with Sage and I, I remembered her painting and drawing this dream catcher in the club. She wanted to draw it for her art teacher who had expressed an interest in her work. From listening to her experiences in some of her classroom school worlds, teachers rarely asked about her life. Her art teacher wanting one of her paintings

and hanging it up in his classroom made Sandra feel like she was important. Caught off guard she tells us that when the art teacher first asked if she would re-create a smaller version of her dream catcher, she said no. He wanted to display it in his art classroom for everyone to see. I could tell that her teacher's interest in her work and perhaps, who she was, meant a lot to Sandra.

I came alongside Sandra at a time where she did not feel at ease in particular school classrooms and learned that she could not construct herself playfully in these worlds. Here in this photograph, she retold a different story of teacher and school. It was a new story about a teacher who cared. Sandra was not afraid to show this teacher who she was. Thinking back to our conversation that day at the museum, her words, "I am Aboriginal. I am proud of my heritage" showed. She had painted a medicine wheel at the centre of her dream catcher. I wonder if by creating a new painting for her art teacher to hang in his classroom was Sandra's way of reliving her worlds of school and classrooms.

Figure 6-17. Sandra's room, symbol 5

This is my room,

My bed

My Family Guy poster

The reason why I took a picture of

it because it reminds me of me.

My home,

Of where I belong.

Figure 6-18. Sandra in the club, symbol 6

And this is me,

when I got my hair done.

Here's someone pretending to iron my hair in the club.

It's a symbol of people, I think.

People in the club.

They're pretending to iron my hair.

(Transcript, April 26, 2012)

I laughed as Sandra told us the story of this photograph. I vividly remember another researcher, Vera Caine, playfully pretending to iron Sandra's hair. I wonder if it was this playfulness that added to Sandra's ease and experiences of belonging in this world that the researchers and youth created together. In the next photograph, Sandra spoke more to the importance of playfulness not only in the club but in her worlds with family and with friends.

This picture has a story to it.

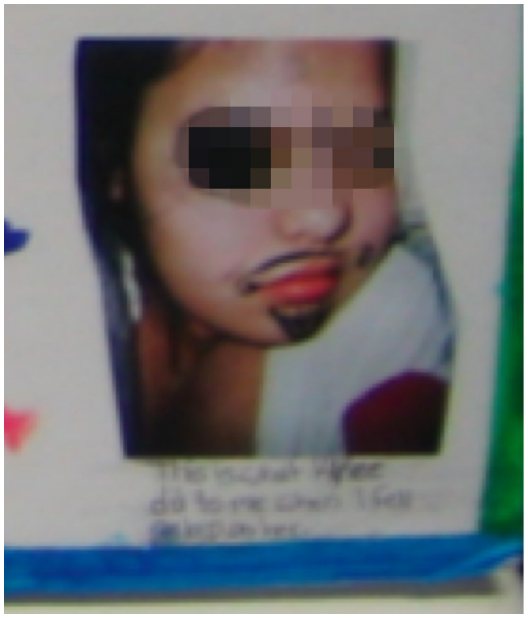

Figure 6-19. Sandra's collage, symbol 7

This was a picture of her friends who drew on her face during a sleepover when Sandra was asleep. Even though Sandra was not too happy when she saw the markers on her face, she thought it was funny. She wanted us to know that her friend was being playful. Her world with

her friends and her home world with family were worlds where Sandra experienced openness and sense of ease.

Figure 6-20. Sandra's collage, symbol 8

This is Courtney at the park.

She was her room crying

because no one wanted to take her.

I felt bad so I said, I'll take you to the park.

I told her to stand there and I'll take the picture.

Then she started to get bad and bossy

I put a bug on her.

This is a symbol of not belonging

Because I don't like bad kids.

(Transcript, April 26, 2012)

Sandra wanted to share this story of not belonging with us. “I don’t like bad kids” she stated. There were consequences for her little sister for being “bad and bossy.” I wondered as Sandra told this story, if it was her way of bringing us back to the worlds where sometimes she did not feel at ease. To know who she is and her unfolding sense of belonging, we had to know all of the worlds she inhabits as she saw herself and others within her worlds. She told us in this collage story and photograph that she did not like “bad kids.” It did not sound like Sandra identified herself in this way. Bringing us back to items from her memory box, she pointed to the photograph of the feather.

The beaded bracelet.

I made this when I first came to the club

And I was really really shy.

This story of the beaded bracelet she made in the club brought me to when we shared our memory box items almost a year earlier. Recalling her words from that day,

When I walked into the club,

The adults were all happy,

I was happy.

(Transcript, May 6, 2011)

An Unfinished Story

Sandra did not want to attend her grade 9 graduation ceremony in June of 2013, but to me, her name danced across the pages of the awards pamphlet, handed out to parents and friends in attendance. Under the category, *Complementary Course Award* for “recognizing outstanding effort and achievement” Sandra had won the Cree award. Although she did not

want to attend the ceremony because she did not feel comfortable, her mother told me, she "[kept] going to school" (Personal communications, June, 26, 2013). I travelled back to the many stories Sandra shared where she was learning to compose worlds within her school worlds and in worlds distinct from school—where she belonged. I return to Sandra's words:

Belonging Places in School

Art, I like to draw

Cree class, I like to learn my Cree language

Club, I belong here

(Field notes, March 17, 2012)

Sandra and Mary's story are not complete. There are stories yet to be written and rewritten by them. This is only the beginning of their stories. I was fortunate to live alongside Sandra over the course of three school years and continue to do so as she ventured into high school. Sandra and her mother continue to teach me of the importance of "world"-travelling with a loving and playful heart. Our inquiry has taught me to be a better listener and care for their stories (Basso, 1996). I am still learning as Sandra teaches me how she, and her mother, are retelling and reliving their stories of being and belonging across their multiple worlds.

Chapter 7: Resonant Threads—Looking Across the Narrative Accounts

In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I shared the narrative accounts of three youth, carefully pulling forward threads of place, relationships, time, and events to show how their stories to live by were threaded together around their experiences of belonging. Clandinin (2013) notes that in "intentionally focusing on what we called threads, we were interested in following particular plotlines that threaded or wove over time and place through an individual's narrative account" (p. 132). Within each youth's narrative account, the stories of parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, situated within home places, community places, and school places, became evident. What was also visible was how each youth lived and told unique stories. And yet, as I laid them side by side, I began to discern resonant threads of place, relationships, time, and events that seemed to speak across their experiences, creating storylines that, as Carr (1986) suggested,

> combine to make up make larger stories, or unrelated they [appear to] criss-cross and interrupt one another, sometimes hindering and sometimes contributing to one another's progress. Elements of one . . . [appear to] be elements in another . . . [sometimes] by accident or design. (p. 98)

In this chapter, I lay the individual narrative accounts co-composed with each youth and their family side by side and pull forward reverberations nestled within each thread. I read across the accounts but stay within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, attending closely to the three co-composed narrative accounts in order to seek awareness of the youths' experiences around belonging as they are interwoven with their identity making. I am reminded that this process is "not so much as generating a list of understandings achieved by analysing

the stories" as it is "thinking with [the stories] to understand the lives being lived" (Downey & Clandinin, 2010, p. 385). These narrative accounts are contextual compositions reflective of particular times, places, and relationships. As I shift to discern resonant threads across the three narrative accounts, I recognize that I am, at least to some extent, appearing to "freeze" individual lives in motion (Clandinin et al., 2010, p. 43) in order to represent these threads across their experiences. However, I know that the lives of the youth and their families continue to be in motion, and so too are their unfolding experiences around belonging and identity making.

This chapter explores three resonant threads around experiences of belonging as part of identity making: Belonging and Connectedness to Family; Belonging and Connectedness to Place and the Place of Home; and Intergenerational Reverberations. The last thread includes Institutional and Familial Narratives, and Living Up To and Learning to Try On Stories of Belonging. In this chapter, I elaborate each thread as a way to better understand the experiences of belonging interwoven with identity making.

Thread 1: Belonging and Connectedness to Family

The connectedness between storied experiences with, and of, family and belonging resonated across the lives of Bryann, Sage, and Sandra. The uniqueness of each youth's stories of family and how they belonged in, and to, their families were part of their narrative accounts. However, as I looked across their experiences, I saw that, for each, connectedness to family was interwoven with their experiences of belonging.

At a young age, Bryann, Sage, and Sandra navigated through shifting familial landscapes. They lived in different households with very different care arrangements and experiences, such as the separation of two parents, moving out of a parent's house to

temporarily live with relatives, being placed in kinship care, and moving through various foster homes. While each youth's experience of family was different, what remained constant and threaded across their lives was their sense of connectedness to family. As I read and reread the narrative accounts, what became visible was how their stories of family sustained them and kept them going, giving them a sense of belonging. The love and care they had for other in their family circles was pronounced (Archibald, 2008) and within their circles, there seemed to be an embodied knowing that they belonged (Archibald, 2008; Brendtro et al., 1990, 2002, 2005; Brokenleg, 1998).

Bryann helped me see how she composed stories of belonging, which were interwoven with stories of family, stories that began long before I came to know her and that were continuing to sustain her as our lives came together in the inquiry. Her movement into kinship care and then to a series of foster care situations created uncertainty and disappointments for her. She was never sure where her next home would be. Bryann yearned to live with a family where she would have a sense of permanency and belonging. She continually tried to make sense of who her family was through the transitions in her home life. I think of how Bryann shared her uncertainties around being "stuck in the welfare system" and the challenges she experienced at home and at school. Even with this search for a family to live with where she would belong, Bryann held on tightly to a long-ago story of family, a story in which her stories of belonging were deeply rooted. Bryann continually brought me to stories of her grandfather, whom she called her "Gramps" or moosum. From our first meetings, she spoke of her grandpa, whom she described as someone special in her life, the one who "started raising [her]." She shared how she moved back with her grandpa multiple times as she was "whooshed back and forth from the city to the reserve" (Transcript, April 28, 2011). Amidst changes and

uncertainties, in safe conversational spaces, Bryann always came back to stories of her moosum; he was always interwoven and present in her stories and central to her ongoing composing of stories to live by. Bryann's words from an early conversation helped me think about the importance of attending to family as her sense of belonging is interwoven with family. She said, "I think of like what belongs to you and what you own or your children that you take care of, they like belong to you cause you're raising them" (Transcript, February 23, 2011).

Bryann's stories of her moosum were her stories of family. In these stories, she had an unwavering sense of belonging. For example, Bryann once told me that she was always connected to, and belonged with, her moosum. She saw her moosum as her family, a family that never changed, and "always had [her] back." As she said, "My grandpa was like a dad to me because he raised me. All my life I went with him everywhere" (Transcript, November 2, 2011). Bryann's stories were often disrupted when she was moved or was placed into a new home with a different family. These changes in where, and with whom, she lived were times of tension for Bryann as she questioned who she was and how she belonged.

Looking back on the stories Bryann told of "calling Welfare on [her]self" at 12 years of age, I was awakened to her negotiations and need to navigate multiple living arrangements. Within these moves, she sustained a sense of narrative unity (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; MacIntyre, 1981) and coherence (Carr, 1986) around belonging by telling stories of herself as belonging with her grandpa. These stories of her grandpa and her time with him sustained Bryann and gave her a sense of belonging that enabled her to imagine forward-looking (Lindemann Nelson, 1995) stories. Her hopes and dreams often included memories of her grandpa. For example, she spoke of wanting to learn how to speak Cree one day and passing it

on to her future children, just like her moosum. When Bryann's moosum passed away in October 2011, we cried together when she shared stories of him. Bryann's stories of her moosum shaped a strong thread of narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) in her struggle to belong. After her grandpa passed away, I wondered if Bryann's stories of belonging would be disrupted. Bryann spoke to my wonders as she shared her hopes with me. In articulating her desire to share her experiences of belonging with other youth who may feel alone, she told me she wanted them to know "just always think that you have someone there for you, like my grandpa was there for me . . . no matter where he is, I belong." Sliding forward in time, I see how this spirit of belonging carried her from day to day (Brendtro et al., 1990; Sewall, 1996), as she composed her life in different places, across time, and relationships in her multiple "worlds" (Lugones, 1987). The importance of imagination became clear as Bryann's rememberings (Sarbin, 2004) with her moosum appeared to be her way of sustaining the stories she told herself, and others, about who she is, what she is about (Carr, 1986), and how she belongs. By drawing on the familiar, her imaginings (Caine & Steeves, 2009) with her moosum, her family, gave her a sense of belonging.

When I think of Sage, I also think of her mother (Robin) and grandmother (Joan), who taught me how important it is to attend to each family's stories in order to understand a youth's experiences of belonging. As Robin said, in order to have any sense of who Sage is, I needed to understand her connection to her family. I hold onto the words Robin told me at the outset of the inquiry: "My mom, Sage, and I, we are one" (Field notes, May 12, 2011). Robin invited me to meet her mother so I could "get a better idea of what a great line of women" she came from (Email from Robin, May 17, 2011). Robin began with her story of family, "a great line of women" that she, her daughter, and mother come from and belong to. I could see how this

family was “one” in that their experiences of belonging were deeply connected with their love and respect for each other.

Like Bryann and Sage, Sandra’s connectedness to family was also an important thread in her stories of belonging. Sandra experienced a lot of movement with her family. She grew up on a reserve and recalled moving to different homes in the city. At times, she chose to live with her aunt. In her narrative account, there were multiple stories of her family. For instance, as we created memory boxes around belonging and who we are and want to be, we pondered symbols that represented belonging for us. Sandra went first to stories of her family. Speaking to one artifact, a feather, she said, “Reminds me of my family. I am proud of my family. I am Aboriginal.” Later Sandra simply stated, “I belong to my family.” Her story of a feather brought me back to memories of her home and the beautiful artwork proudly displayed in their hallway. Sandra painted a picture of her feather in the club and brought it home to hang in her room. Forgetting about it, she had left it on the table, but as she told me, her mom hung it up in the hallway gallery. I knew that her mother’s actions meant a lot to Sandra. All three youth, through their stories of connectedness with their families, taught me more about their “loving perception” (Lugones, 1987) of family members.

As Sandra invited me into her familial world, I understood the importance and role of imagination in her identity making (Caine & Steeves, 2009; Paley, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2015; Sarbin, 2004) In her familial world, she was more “at ease” and “playful” (Lugones, 1987), more, as she said, “myself.” For instance, her mother spoke of her daughter’s “playfulness” (Lugones, 1987) and sense of “play” (Caine & Steeves, 2009; Paley, 2004, 2007, 2010), as she often dressed up (along with her sister) and engaged in improvisational plays at home. Mary, through her stories of her daughter and her own experiences as a youth in search of belonging,

understood the importance of playfulness and play as part of her daughter's identity making. "Play acting. I think she was just expressing herself," Mary explained (Transcript, June 24, 2011). Sandra's playfulness was welcomed and understood in her familial world. However, her playfulness was interpreted differently at school, where one teacher noted that she was seen as "peculiar." Her mother's acceptance of who she was and her ability to construct herself in her familial world as she saw herself made Sandra feel like she belonged with her family.

Bryann, Sage, and Sandra brought me their stories of family as they were interwoven with their belonging stories. For Bryann, her grandpa was her story of family. Sage's story of family was interwoven with the stories to live by of her mother and grandmother and their experiences around belonging. Sandra's stories of being with her family, particularly her mother, allowed me to travel to a world in which Sandra felt most at ease and a sense of belonging.

The literature around identity emphasizes the importance of relationship (Baumeister & Leary, 2005; Lee & Robbins, 1995; Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Soudien, 2008) and having a sense of belonging, or a connectedness to someone or something in their lives (Brendtro et al., 1990, 2002, 2005, 2014; Brokenleg 1998; Lambert et al., 2013; Pym et al., 2011). I understood the resonances across the experiences of the youth around the ways their relationships with their family shaped their experiences of belonging and identity making. With their relationships with their families, Bryann, Sage, and Sandra had a sense of connectedness and feelings of trust. Perhaps this was what Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (1990, 2002) and Brokenleg (1998) might say was a spirit of belonging: they knew they were loved, and so, with their families, they felt and acted like they belonged.

Thread 2: Belonging and Connectedness to Place(s) and the Place of Home

> Why do people have a sense of who they are? A sense of who we are is tied to the land. Anchored to the land . . . if you are anchored in who you are, you have a better chance of dealing with the world around you. (Blood, 2010)

Blood's words remind me of the importance of attending to each youth's sense of place as they navigate who they are and want to be in this world. In this resonant thread, I return to storied moments across the youths' narrative accounts, which bring me to understand their connectedness to place and what I understand as the place of home in their lives. Resonating in Sandra, Sage, and Bryann's stories to live by are the places, and the relationships within these places that have anchored them, especially as they co-composed stories of belonging for themselves. Through their individual searches to belong, I gained insight into how the stories they lived by and told, over time and in relationship with others, were nestled within, and closely tied to, places. As I thought more about what I have learned about place from the lived and told stories of the youth, Lessard (2014) reminded me of the relational aspect of place. He wrote place can be "the physical location where stories are both lived and told but [can] also includes the places that we have travelled to and in-between within our experiences. The sharing of stories and learning to listen to them is shaped by place" (p. 44).

As I think about the physical and metaphorical places the youth and I "travelled to and in-between our experiences," I am drawn to how Bryann, Sage, and Sandra all held on to stories of particular places. At times, places spoke to the land or physical landscapes where they once lived. Sometimes they physically brought me to these places where their stories were lived, places with significant people in their lives. All three youth invited me to their homes to meet their family, including their kinship caregivers. When we were not able to physically go

to certain places, we travelled to these places through their stories as we inquired into photographs and artifacts.

As I learned to "world"-travel (Lugones, 1987) to their worlds in these places, I began to understand more fully the importance of their connectedness to place and how these places were sustaining stories of belonging for each of them. Looking across the stories the youth and their families lived and told taught me to stay awake to the particulars of place. Marmon Silko (1996) reminded me of the importance of attending to place as it was interwoven with the youths' identity making. Marmon Silko's understanding shaped my thinking as I attended to how each of the youth negotiated who they were and their experiences of belonging in different places. As I think of the different places the youth brought me to, physically as well as through their rememberings (Sarbin, 2004) of lived and told stories, I came to understand how they were inviting me to enter their worlds and to "world"-travel (Lugones, 1987) with them.

I also understand what a home place, or the place of home, meant in their lives. I think first of Bryann's experiences of living in many temporary places and different homes since early childhood, and how those experiences shaped how she was connected to place. Bryann's stories of family, that is, of being with her moosum, were connected to growing up and being on the reserve with him or visiting him there. As I "world"-travelled to Bryann's world with her grandpa that gave her a connectedness to place, Bryann was sharing her experience of belonging; she was sharing a part of who she is and where she came from. Bryann also brought me to her other belonging places. As I retraced the storied moments we shared, I think back to the day she invited me to walk to her school locker. This was another important place for her. Packed inside the tiny space of her locker were artifacts of many storied moments that brought her, and me, back to particular times, relationships, events, and places; this place was a "world"

(Lugones, 1987) in itself, and at the same time, a window into her experiences of belonging in different worlds. As she carefully opened her locker for me to see inside it, she took out her grandpa's photograph on the cover of the memorial card from his funeral. As Bryann read the cover aloud for me in the middle of the empty school hallway, I was brought back to many of her stories with her moosum. I remember the other images she had taped to the sides of the locker, including photographs she took while in the club, and pictures of her as a child growing up on the reserve. Each artifact represented her connection to places and relationships in her life.

As I look back to Bryann's narrative account, I wrote of her moosum as being a belonging person and person with whom she belonged. I began to see him as a home place. When I began to "world"-travel to her world with her grandpa, it evoked for me a sense of comfort, much like a sense of home. Woven throughout Bryann's narrative account, I see how each time she returned to the places in her memory with her moosum it seemed to give her a sense of belonging. Lessard (2014), in his work alongside Aboriginal youth, also wrote of a sense of a "home-place," which he described in the following way:

> A 'home-place' to me provides a sense of belonging, it is an identity marker that provides comfort. It is a place where stories begin and a place where they continue to evolve. . . . The very idea of a home-place is filled with multiple meanings and evokes imagery of places long ago in memory for each of us. (p. 236)

As I lived alongside Bryann, I learned more about what a home place can mean. I began to understand how memories with her moosum sustained her, especially during times when the books and binders in her life were on the edge of falling. By returning to her home place, her moosum, these were the stories that seemed to give her life meaning (MacIntyre, 1981),

holding her life together (Carr, 1986). These were the stories that kept her standing. She was teaching me how we can have multiple home places. Home places can live in our hearts and in memory. She was teaching me how home places can be "from the heart stories." In her home places, there was a spirit of belonging, as she acted and knew she belonged. I see now how "wisdom [sat] in [these] places" (Basso, 1996) as I learned more of who she was and who she wanted to be in these places where she knew that she belonged.

A sense of continually returning to metaphorical home places was not as evident in Sage and Sandra's narrative accounts. Rather, for them, their connection to places seemed to be composed of relationships with people in their lives across different geographical places. The thread of belonging and their connection to places were noticeable in the annals we co-composed around belonging and in their stories to live by. Both Sage and Sandra expressed how they moved to many different schools and places in their lives, with their families. For Sage, who grew up in an urban setting, her sense of belonging was anchored to the memories and places where her mother and grandmother were. Sandra's sense of belonging was connected to the places she moved to with her mother, auntie, and grandpa. In this way, their connectedness to place appeared to be woven with their families, and the places in which they were situated together.

In their collage work, Sage and Sandra brought me to places, which conjured for them, experiences of belonging. Sage shared a story of a photograph in her collage where she was curled up on the bathroom floor. This was a place where she went when she felt she did not belong in school. Central to Sandra's belonging collage were images of her home with her family with whom she always belonged. Moving across time, place, and relationships (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) provoked me to reflect on how Sage, Sandra, and Bryann took

agency in co-composing places of belonging for themselves and for others. I return to Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern's (1990) notion of "a spirit of belonging" as I think about what shaped their connection to particular places.

> You belonged as a relative if you acted like you belonged. Treating others as kin forged powerful human bonds that drew everyone into a network of relationships based on mutual respect. (Brokenleg, 1998, p. 131)

These words remind me that "belonging as a relative" and "treating others as kin" requires one to stretch far beyond a definition of family and home in the traditional sense. Or as Brendtro et al. (1990) might say, in the spirit of belonging, "The ultimate test of kinship was behavior, not blood: you belonged as a relative if you acted like you belonged" (pp. 41-42).

hooks's (2008) study of belonging reminded me to dwell more deeply in place. I saw how resonating in each youth's life was her sense of family and home. In different worlds, Bryann, Sage, and Sandra "acted like [they] belonged" (Brendtro et al., 1990; Brokenleg, 1998) as they treated others, and others treated them, like they belonged. This reciprocity of belonging called to mind Morris's (1989) concept of understanding self in relation with others. He wrote,

> The interconnectedness of self to others is related to those with whom one is familiar; those with whom one is related, one grows up with or, more specifically, those with whom one engages in relations of mutuality. . .where notions of generalized reciprocity shape and form daily interactions. (p. 215)

Looking across their narrative accounts, I see how the youth were composing a place in the club where they felt mutually supported and a sense of social connectedness (Pym et al., 2011). Through our sustained relationship, I saw how each of them created and shaped a

belonging space for themselves and other youth, with a place they likened to home, that is, the club. The three youth did not view the club as a school place, rather it was its own distinct "world" (Lugones, 1987) for each of them. They shared stories of feeling welcomed, being comfortable, and how it was "their club" and "kind of like home." I saw how for Bryann, Sage, and Sandra, their sense of "home" was much more than the physical place where they lived, but perhaps as hooks (2008) suggested, "Home was the place where the me of me mattered." (p. 2008, p. 215). hooks's words make me think of how each youth taught me the importance of connectedness to place and the place of "home" in their identity making. Building on hooks's (2008) notion of home, I began to see how in these places which "felt like home" for these girls, not only "the me of me" mattered, but also "the you and me of me." I saw how in these places that gave them a feeling akin to home, they had a sense of belonging. A spirit of belonging (Brendtro et al., 1990) was co-composed in these places in relation with others.

I return to early memories of Sage in the club place where she shared pieces of who she is and wanted to be, or at least how she wanted others to know her. For instance, at first she brought her notebook as she wanted us to see her as a writer, but with time and trust in the relationships she forged with us, Sage allowed us to see her in other ways. The image of her own colourful beads, when the ones in the club did not represent her style, was an example of how she was actively creating a belonging place, for herself, and with us. It was a place where she acted like she belonged and others treated her like she belonged.

I think of the many ways Sandra taught me how to "world"-travel to different worlds, specifically places where she felt more at ease and, sometimes, places of tension where she felt more at dis/ease (Lugones, 1987). For Sandra, in particular, it was important for her to feel like the club was a place outside of school, as worlds within school were often places where she did

not feel she belonged. Over time and through sustained relationships, it was noticeable that Sandra began to feel like she could "be more herself" in the club. She often engaged in imaginary play in the club; playfully, in Lugones' (1987) sense, as she did not worry about her competence or others storying her in unfavourable ways. This playfulness and sense of ease was unlike the stories she told of feeling like her classmates and teachers perceived her as being "strange" or "weird."

Bryann also shaped the club into a belonging place for herself. The image of her walking around the club and confidently taking photographs of artifacts she and other youth created is vivid for me.. I recall memories of visits with Elders who shared teachings and work alongside the youth. The image of Bryann sitting in the circle and asking Elder Isabelle questions and feeling safe to share her wonders with the group stays with me. As she and I sat with Elder Francis Whiskeyjack working on rattles, Bryann felt comfortable to ask him if she could make a drum. She felt comfortable to ask if we could go on a field trip to visit him. It was as if, in this place, in this world, she embodied a sense of knowing and being. Bryann's willingness to share her interests, wonders, and passions helped shape the club place into one of her belonging places.

Threaded across these youths' accounts, I saw how for each of them, their sense of belonging in one "world," often reverberated or shaped other worlds they inhabited. I see how as each youth struggled for narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) in particular worlds, they often returned to stories threaded with a connectedness to place. What becomes visible is how important it was for them to have a sense of "from-ness" as a connection to place (hooks, 2008) in relation with others. Their lived and told stories help me to understand how important it is to

attend to place and the place of home. These youth and their families' experiences in places where they feel a sense of belonging are "educative" spaces (Dewey, 1938).

Threaded across the narrative accounts, I saw their connectedness to places in relation with others such as their families, with friends akin to family, with the youth and researchers in the club place—these were both sustaining places and stories that sustained (Carr, 1986) them. These were places they returned to as they knew they belonged. Or as hooks (2008) and Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern (1990) respectively might say, in these "home" places, Bryann, Sage, and Sandra's "spirits of belonging" were welcome and nurtured.

Thread 3: Intergenerational Reverberations

> Each generation finds meaning for their lives through the stories they tell and the meaning making it creates for them. Ultimately these stories become a source forging expressive creativity, for sharing identities, and making decisions about our lives. (Young et al., 2015, p. xv)

Young et al. (2015) remind me of the importance of attending to storied experiences across generations. Reflecting on the stories Sage, Sandra, and Bryann lived and told over our time together, important people lived alongside them and me. With Sage, as her mother and grandmother came alongside, I was given the gift of meeting and listening to the storied experiences across three generations of strong women. Sandra allowed me to come to know her mother, who taught me how to attend more deeply to the multiple worlds they lived in. Bringing me to her kinship care at the time, Bryann allowed me to understand more of the multiple plotlines, which shaped, and continue to shape, her experiences of belonging. And although I did not meet her grandpa or mother, the stories she told of, and with them, and the

stories that were passed down to Bryann, helped me understand the multiple layers of who she was and wanted to be.

As I metaphorically laid the narrative accounts of the youth and their families alongside one another, what became clear were the intergenerational reverberations shaping their experiences of belonging and identity making. In order to have a sense of the youth and their family's "circle" (Archibald, 2008; Brendtro, Brokenleg, &Van Bockern, 1990, 2005; Brokenleg, 1998), I held onto Okri's (1997) words about stories "planted early or "along the way." I began to see how each youth embodied, that is, carried in their bodies, particular intergenerational stories that reverberated inward and outward.

Bateson (2000) reminded me to attend closely to these intergenerational reverberations shaping the youth and their families' experiences of belonging as we have each "been shaped by [our] individual history and the history of our communities" (p. 227). Young et al. (2015) also called me to attend to the history of a place to have a deeper understanding of the contextual landscapes which shape who we are and are becoming. They reminded me that "the places where we live" are "the places where stories have already been lived and told" by previous generations (Young et al., 2015, p. 17). As I think about the stories lived and told of the youth and their families, there were reverberations of storied places as their lives were interwoven. Young's life work and experiences with residential schools continually informed my thinking as she called me to stay awake to "intergenerational narrative reverberations," the "stories we all carry in our bodies, in our memories, in our souls" (2005, p.162).

As part of this resonant thread, I pull forward some of the intergenerational narrative reverberations nestled within the youth's and their family's stories which have shaped and continue to shape their unfolding experiences of belonging and identity making. I also draw

forward the Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015a) to help me understand more of the impact and lingering reverberations of residential schooling and colonization which shape the present landscapes in which Bryann, Sage, Sandra, and their families live in school and familial worlds. Within this third thread, I also discern more of how, and why, particular institutional and familial narratives were passed on, and between, the youth and their families as they worked to make sense of belonging.

Institutional and Familial Narratives—"Stories of School" and "School Stories"

Being afforded the opportunity to sustain relationships with the youth and their families allowed me to understand the significance of familial stories embedded within larger narratives. A plotline that became visible across the youths' lives was connected to the reverberations of intergenerational "stories of school" and "school stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). Looking back to the stories told by the youth and their families, what became clear were some of the dominant "stories of school" that they lived, stories of what the place of school ought to be like. For example, they wanted school to be a safe and welcoming place for students, parents, and grandparents. They all wanted to experience success in school so they could pursue aspirations and eventually get jobs.

As part of Sage's story of school, I also learned she hoped for school to be a place where she could ask for help and feel like she fit in. Her mother and grandma's story of school was centred around wanting their family's experiences and ways of knowing to be valued and respected in school. Sandra, in her story of school, hoped school would be a place where she could be herself, and have teachers who wanted to know more about who she is and know more about her family. Meanwhile, her mother hoped for school to be a place where her daughter could be imaginative, feel safe, and have fun. Bryann hoped school would be a place where her

Aboriginal heritage would be recognized and accepted. These were some of the stories of school that the youth and their families shared. However, as I heard more of their experiences in schools, I saw how these dominant stories were interrupted by "conflicting," sometimes "competing" school stories. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) described "conflicting stories" as unable to coexist with the result that one story became the dominant one and, as a result, wrote over other stories erasing them. "Competing stories" are stories that differ from the dominant stories of school and can live in tension with the dominant stories. Clandinin et al. (2006) further note, these competing "stories live alongside one another in ways that allow for change and possibility" (p. 8).

To make visible the reverberations of conflicting and competing school stories that were being composed and lived out, I turn first to Sage, her mother, and grandmother's story of Sage being locked in a room when she was in grade 1. Following the aftermath of her daughter being locked in a room, Robin recalled what she said to the principal.

> *On your website and part of your School Board's mission statement it notes that parents are first teachers. OK I've taught my daughter things at home and expectations, they've followed her to school, so if I'm her first teacher, why am I not her first teacher here?* (Transcript, June 8, 2012)

I pull forward Robin's account of this story and lay it alongside the story of school and school stories that Sage and Grandma Joan told, as a way to help me understand the reverberations of school experiences, which shaped their family's sense of belonging and stories to live by. It was clear that Robin took to heart the story of school, which told her "parents are first teachers." Robin wanted to live in, and live out, a story where her knowledge and experience were valued, and where she was viewed as a partner in her child's education.

However, when Robin confronted the teacher and principal, she was escorted out of the school. Robin's experience "conflicted" with the story of school she held. In the school story she learned to tell, Robin spoke of how she felt disrespected and her knowledge as a parent was disregarded by Sage's grade 1 teacher and school principal. However, because Sage remained in the school until the end of the year, Robin allowed her storied experience to live as a kind of competing story within the dominant story of school.

As Robin told stories about this grade 1 event, which occurred so long ago, I saw how her sense of belonging as a mother was woven with her daughter's experiences of being accepted and of belonging. Robin continued to live out a competing story in school but, at the same time, she held onto a story of school where she imagined school to be a place where her daughter and family were safe and felt welcomed. Robin wanted Sage to experience success in education and to be able to choose her own path in life, just as she did, and just as her mother did. She did not want Sage or her family to be viewed as uneducated or less than. The reverberations of this school story were evident in Sage's life.

As I reflect on the storied moments for Sage and Robin, I move to the stories that Grandma Joan also shared with me. Shaped by her own experiences, both as a child who was forced to attend residential schooling and as a grandmother asked by her grandson's principal not to disrupt his class by visiting him during school hours, and also by the reverberations of her daughter Robin's experiences as a mother, Joan conjured painful memories. She recalled residential schooling, where she was "singled out and yelled at" and did not have friends. For the children who were taken from their homes and separated from their families, friends, and cultures, the "jail-like nature" of residential school was isolating (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015a, p. 96).

As I think about the grade 1 story and the stories Robin and Joan shared from their childhood experiences of school, I understand why it was important for this family to compose a different story of school. They created for themselves, a familial, intergenerational story threaded around the importance of being "educated" and successful at school. In attending to all three of their storied lives, I began to understand the layered importance of being viewed as an "educated" person and family. Joan, Robin, and now Sage learned that they had to be successful in school to gain respect from others, to have their family's knowledge and experience valued, and to take agency in their lives.

Thinking back to the stories Joan and Robin shared with me, they carried stories of loss stemming from the reverberations of residential schooling, but, as they noted, education was something no one could take away from them. Despite her painful experiences from residential schooling, Joan was determined to graduate from University to become a teacher. Robin, who experienced her own struggles to belong in school, was equally focused on graduating from university to obtain her degree in Native Studies. Now, even though Robin and Joan are both formally educated, as they live alongside their children and grandchildren in schools, they are still searching for a sense of belonging and reconciliation[47]. As Robin said,

> *Do I have to wear it [a degree] on my sleeve or my back or forehead for people to know I'm a university grad?" That I might know what I'm talking about and that's not even to say that people who don't know what they're talking about. There's experience.* (Transcript, June 8, 2011)

[47] It is acknowledged that there are a multiplicity of definitions and meanings of reconciliation for Aboriginal peoples. To the Commission, "reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015a, p. 7).

Robin's words stay with me as I think about how she continues to worry about being storied or categorized in particular ways by others as less knowledgeable, less educated, and less interested in her child's education.

As I look across the stories Sandra shared with me, I also saw interweavings with the stories her mother, Mary, lived and told. Mary carried a story of school where she believed that obtaining an education could lead to fulfilling her dreams and goals. Although she carried this story of school, it was marked by conflicting plotlines as she lived amidst uncertainties in her home life. For example, in recounting her experiences as a youth in school who was, at the same time, navigating problems at home, she remembers "floating around school" and "being lost in the cracks." Eventually Mary was forced to leave school early, but she continued to hold onto a story of school as the way to fulfill her goals. This story of school brought Mary back to complete high school when she was 21 and already a mother to Sandra. She attended a community college until this story was interrupted by tensions in her home life and a forced move. She left school once again. I see how despite experiences which conflicted with her story of school, Mary continues to hold on to this story, as she shared her dream to one day return to school to become a nurse. For her daughter, she dreamed of a different school experience, one where Sandra would be happy and cared for.

As I look across these youth and their families' storied experiences, what is visible are the intergenerational reverberations that linger. What was visible within these "stories of school" and "school stories" were the multiple plotlines that shaped each family's belonging. In the next part of thread 3, the intergenerational reverberations thread, I explore more of their interwoven experiences, where the youth and their families learned to live up to and learned to try on stories of belonging.

Living Up To and Learning to Try On Stories of Belonging

Resonating across these families' experiences were stories of belonging, from and between generations: stories that the youth and families learned to live up to; stories through which they lived out *how* to belong. What became visible as I looked across Sandra, Bryann, and Sage's experiences were narratives constructed around being a good girl, a good student, and a good child. In the midst, I could see how they struggled for narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) as their stories to live by bumped up against dominant narratives. As part of this thread, I speak more to familial and institutional narratives.

I saw how Sage, Robin, and Joan lived in and lived out familial narratives of belonging that were planted early and along the way. Both Robin and Grandma Joan said, "Education, nobody can take that away from you." Attending to dimensions of place, temporality, and sociality, I learned this story of education and of being educated was their family's way of making sense of *how* to belong. Sage's mother and grandmother were both women that experienced success in education and, as they proudly noted, obtained university degrees. For Robin and Joan, education and being educated was a way they could pursue their dreams and interests. Education was a way they could live differently in the world and make a difference in other people's lives. In my first meeting with Joan, she proudly shared her folder of professional accomplishments from over 25 years of her teaching career. As a young mother of 4 children, she completed her bachelor's degree in education. Joan shared stories of how she often fell asleep on top of her books as she studied late into the night.

What became visible in Joan's stories were reverberations that were planted early in her life by her mother. My thoughts return to my second conversation with Joan when I asked her to elaborate on some of the stories she shared in our first meeting. I sensed the weight that she

carried as she decided to speak more of her residential schooling experience. Even now, as a grandmother, and a successful retired teacher, she wondered why her mom insisted she remain in residential school even when Aboriginal children were no longer forced to go.[48]

I could see how the legacies of residential schools continued to reverberate into the youths' and their families' lives. As Young (2005a) said, "Legacies of the lingering narrative of colonization in the unfolding lives of Aboriginal people in Canada is the intergenerational narrative reverberation continuing to shape successive generations" (p. 49).

When I think of Joan, I see there were not only reverberations from her own experiences in residential school but also reverberations from her mother's experiences stretching forward. The Truth and Reconciliation Commissioners might say that there were reverberations of residential school where children were forced to assimilate and forbidden to speak any Aboriginal languages (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015a). There often were harsh disciplinary actions if a child spoke in their mother tongue. As the Commissioners noted,

> Some Survivors refused to teach their own children their Aboriginal languages and cultures because of the negative stigma that had come to be associated with them during their school years. This has contributed significantly to the fragile state of Aboriginal languages in Canada today. (p. 79).

Joan's mother went to a residential school. There she learned that she should not speak

[48] To help me better understand the changes in residential schools that further shaped Joan's experiences of belonging, I learned more of the historical shifts. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015a),"It was not until 1894 that the federal government put in place regulations relating to residential school attendance. Under the regulations adopted in that year, residential school attendance was voluntary." However, "the key piece of legislation used in regulating the residential school system was the *Indian Act*. This was a multi-purpose piece of legislation that defined and limited First Nations life in Canada. The Act contained no education-related provisions until 1884. There were no residential school–specific regulations until 1894. These dealt almost solely with attendance and truancy" (p. 70).

In this way, I came to understand residential school to be mandatory, as the Commissioners noted, "Canada denied the right to participate fully in Canadian political, economic, and social life to those Aboriginal people who refused to abandon their Aboriginal identity" (p. 7).

her Cree language. She passed this knowing onto Joan. When Joan became a mom, she learned from her experiences at residential school, and from her mother, to not speak Cree to Robin, as a child. Although Joan did not want to lose her language, she obeyed her mother and "dropped the Cree." As Joan told me this story I saw how this intergenerational reverberation of residential schooling impacted her as she shared her guilt in not being able to pass on their Cree language to Robin.

The lingering reverberations of colonization, which resulted in a loss of the Aboriginal language, was experienced by all three youth. As I look across the narratives of each youth and their families, what was pronounced were their desires to learn the Cree language and their hopes to one day communicate with their kokums and moosums in Plains Cree and to pass on their language on to their future children. All three youth expressed a desire to take the Cree course offered to grade 8 and 9 students at Willow Ridge.

My memory returns to the day Bryann, Sage, and Sandra and I sat in on a grade 8 Cree class during our trip to see Elder Francis Whiskeyjack. The girls were excited to learn Cree that day. Bryann's eyes lit up during the classroom instructions. Sandra, who did not always feel at ease within her different classroom school worlds, spoke of how her Cree class in Grade 8 was a "belonging place in school" (Field notes, March 17, 2012). Sandra won the Cree award in her grade 9 year, "recognizing [her] outstanding effort and achievement." In this particular classroom school world, where she felt like she belonged, her learning and academic achievement soared. For Sage, although she wanted to learn Cree, the reverberations of her grandmother's experiences continued to shape her, as she was afraid to take the class.

As I think about these reverberations that these three youth carried forward into the place of school, I turn back to the stories Joan lived and told of how she learned to belong and

survive in the residential school. As a child and teenager, she listened to her mother and learned to hide her culture and parts of her Aboriginal identity. Carrying her mother's story forward, Joan also learned to live out other ways to belong. For instance, for fear of being teased and bullied, she learned not to bring food such as "bannock burgers" to the "white school."

Joan puzzled about why she was forced to stay in residential school, while her siblings did not. She wondered why she was given so many responsibilities as a child when she had to take care of her siblings. As she revisited these stories, Joan wondered if her mother had kept her in residential school, not as punishment, but because she learned from her own experience there, that it was supposed to be a "better education." Brushing aside her tears at times, I knew it was still difficult for her to tell these stories. Yet, she wanted to share these stories, because, as she told me, "It's where I came from. They should know" (Transcript, June 30, 2011). Joan reminds me of the importance of returning to "what [we] know first" (MacLauchlan, 1998) and our "shapes of childhood" (Greene, 1995) in understanding our experiences of belonging. I believe hooks (2008) echoed these ideas as she wrote, "To fully belong anywhere one must understand the ground of one's being. And that understanding invariable returns one to childhood" (p. 220).

As I look back on the stories Joan shared with me, I am reminded of how important it is to care for these intergenerational stories (Basso, 1996) which are threaded around family and place(s). The painful resonances of residential schooling are not ones of celebration, but, as Joan said, they are important because they are a part of where she came from. These reverberations shaped her experiences of belonging and how she made sense of who she was and is, in this world. These stories do not just stay with her, but they reverberate onward to her daughter and grand daughter.

These families helped me understand more of the power of stories (King, 2003; Okri, 1997) as do Young et al. (2015), who reminded me that the sharing of our intergenerational stories is a gift because "it is through stories that we can connect with our ancestors" (p. 59). These intergenerational reverberations transcend time and place. These stories have the potential to be educative (Dewey, 1938) if we care for them (Basso, 1996) and for each other in loving and respectful ways.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015a), in their conversations with over 6,000 witnesses, most of whom survived the experiences of residential schooling, remind me, too, of the importance of attending to the lingering legacies of colonization as these reverberations shape youths' and families' experiences of belonging and identity making. The commissioners wrote,

> All young people need to know who they are and from where they come. Aboriginal children and youth, searching for their own identities and places of belonging, need to know and take pride in their Indigenous roots. They need to know the answers to some very basic questions. Who are my people? What is our history? How are we unique? Where do I belong? Where is my homeland? What is my language and how does it connect me to my nation's spiritual beliefs, cultural practices, and ways of being in the world? They also need to know why things are the way they are today. That requires an understanding of the history of colonization, including the residential school system and how it has affected their families, communities, their people, and themselves. (p. 185)[49]

[49] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015b) made 94 calls to action "in order to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation" (n. p.).

Reverberating across three generations, the familial stories Sage, Robin, and Joan each carried were lived out differently in each of their lives. The familial story of belonging reverberated into Sage's experiences in which she was trying to be more "educational" and athletic like her mom even though, she told me, "my mom, she was more educational and athletic and I'm not really that educational. I'm trying to be" (Transcript, June 21, 2012). Robin told that, for her, engaging in sports was a way for her to "fit in" and belong. Through hearing Robin's stories, I came to understand that schools were not always places of belonging for her, as she, and her sister experienced being bullied and having to move from school to school, both on and off reserves. As a youth, Robin began to take agency in creating a forward-looking school story for herself as she saw her mother did through gaining an education. She began to compose a place of belonging for herself at school through sports and being good at school.

Sage's life was deeply intertwined with her mother's experiences and the stories passed on from her mother. Sage admired her mother and saw her as being successful in school and society. Sage learned ways she, too, might find ways to belong. In Sage's belonging collage she spoke of her dreams of obtaining an athletic award and how she went to tryouts a couple of times in junior high to "get on the volleyball team." However, it was clear that sports were not really her passion or a story of belonging for her as they had been for her mother. It appeared as though Sage was trying on these stories of belonging that reverberated from her mother's experiences of learning how to "fit in" as a youth. These stories of belonging seemed to be passed down, as Robin, like her mother, continually emphasized the importance of education and other ways to belong. As Sage told stories of how she tried on different "physical ways" and "mental ways" to belong, I saw how she strove to live up to stories of *how* to belong; ways she learned from her mother and grandmother.

I saw how hard Sandra tried to live up to and live out a story of what she learned a "good" student does or does not do. "No more playing at school because I look kind of crazy," she told me. She wanted her teachers to see her as quiet and as a "good" student. Living up to and living out a story of being a good student became even more important as she experienced devastating interruptions to this story when she accidentally burned a classmate in Food Studies and later received a letter from the attendance board. Through her multiple representations in the "The Really Bad Burn," when her Food Studies teacher told Sandra how she could go to jail and get charged, reverberations from her mother's storied past vibrated into the classroom. As a child, Sandra's mother, Mary, had been temporarily taken away from her family and was placed in foster care. Sandra shared her worries of being taken away to a group home like her mother. She worried about getting charged and the consequences for her mother and grandpa. Adding to these worries, when she received the letter from the attendance board, she recalled hearing stories from her friends that she could be taken away by authorities.

I also see how Bryann had to live up to, and live out institutional, cultural, and familial narratives; some were created by others, some she created for herself as she found herself wanting to prove to others, that she belonged. It was frustrating for Bryann as people often assumed that she was white from her physical appearance. Because of this, she felt like she had to prove that she was Aboriginal. I recall how she badly wanted her treaty card to show her teacher and youth at school that she did belong to her Aboriginal culture and her visibly different looking family. Now as I read across Bryann's account and reflect on the reverberations nestled within, I return to early stories she carried such as the one when her mother dyed Bryann's hair black. This was a story that was told to Bryann, about her mother, although, from the way Bryann told it, it was as if she remembered living it. I recall the

photograph her Aunt Tracey showed me of Bryann as a child, during a visit to their home. This childhood photograph hung on the kitchen wall. The intergenerational reverberations of this familial and cultural narrative became more pronounced when I heard more of this layered story from her aunt. Bryann's mom was also born with blonde hair. Raised on the reserve, her physical appearance made her visibly stand out from children, and her family. I wondered if Bryann learned from her mother, that she, too, had to prove to others, and perhaps, to herself that she belonged.

Another threaded plotline that I saw Bryann had to live up to was the story of being a good child and good student. There were reverberations that she carried back and forth from home to school and school to home. She learned she had to be on her best behavior and be a good punctual student in order to remain in kinship care. For Bryann, being good meant being able to stay, to belong. For Bryann, the reverberations back and forth from home to school held potentially life-changing consequences. If she was late for class she would get a reprimanding phone call home. It was crucial for Bryann to live out, and live up to, familial and institutional narratives of a good girl, good student, and good child.

Looking Back and Stretching Forward

As I look across these three resonant threads, I see how their experiences of belonging were interwoven with their identity making. I see how Bryann, Sage, Sandra, and mothers, Robin, Mary, and Grandma Joan, struggled for narrative coherence as they bumped up against dominant familial, cultural, and institutional narratives (Clandinin et al., 2006). I see how their sense of belonging and identities were multiple, fluid and shifting (Greene, 1995; Rodgers & Scott, 2008) as they moved in and out of ease (Lugones, 1987) in the different worlds they occupied.

I see how their interwoven and often intergenerational stories of belonging connected to family, to place(s) and to places akin to home, sustained them as they composed their lives in the midst; these stories were often infused with their spirits of belonging. I see, too, how important it is to stay awake to the historical reverberations of colonization that shaped and continue to shape the experiences of belonging for the youth and their families in places in and out of school (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Young, 2005; Young et al., 2015). Perhaps, Basso (1996) might say, wisdom (and belonging) sits in these storied places. I will hold on these stories and work to care for them, long after this inquiry. Threaded across these resonant threads is the importance of opening safe inquiry spaces, where the youth playfully explored questions of who they were, who they wanted to be, and how they belonged. As I slide back across these lived and told stories, I continue to lovingly "world"-travel across the complex, diverse, and layered worlds that each of these youth and their families inhabit (Lugones, 1987). Clandinin and Huber (2002) reminded me:

> Identity is a storied life composition, a story to live by. Stories to live by are shaped in places and lived in places. They live in actions, in relationships with others, in languages, including silences, in gaps and vacancies, in continuities and discontinuities. (pp. 161–162)

Cajete (2001) wrote that "telling the story of one's journey is tracing one's steps through people, events and places that formed you" (p. 9). As I looked back in this chapter where I discerned these resonant threads, temporarily freezing Sage, Bryann, Sandra, Robin, Joan, and Mary's lives, their lives continue to be composed. Their experiences of belonging and identity making within their different worlds is not fixed, they are continually "in the making" (Greene, 1995). Now as I stretch forward and beyond this narrative inquiry, I

understand how important it is to stay awake (Greene, 1995) to these lives in motion. As I revisit the stories the youth and their families shared with me, I "pause at each special memory" (Cajete, 2001, p. 9) and ponder how I might think *with* their stories (Morris, 2002). Attending to youth and their families' experiences of belonging as interwoven with their identity making is teaching me how I might retell and relive how I wish to be.

Chapter 8: So What? Why Should We Care?

As I reflect on the "So what? Why should we care?" questions, I outline some of the personal, practical, theoretical and social justifications of this narrative inquiry alongside Sandra, Bryann, Sage, and their families. It is through our narrative inquiry that I came to deeper understandings of theirs, and my, experiences of belonging as interwoven with identity making. As I look back on the study and towards the future, I retell stories of belonging, which shifted my ways of living within multiple identities.

I began this narrative inquiry in 2010 and, since that time, I have experienced many changes in my personal and professional life. For example, I have worked as a teacher educator, married, resigned from my 14 year tenure with a public school board where I worked as a teacher and teacher leader, and gave birth to two daughters; during these times, our family moved twice (once to a different country). As I lived alongside the youth and their families, in the midst, my experiences of belonging and identity making were continually shifting and being composed over time. I, too, know that the experiences of the youth have continued to be shaped in new ways. I am reminded of how we are all in the midst of our lives, as Sage underscored in her belonging collage about how she "changed through the times since grade 7." In the living, telling, and retelling[50] of my experiences of belonging alongside the youth and their families, and of our co-composed understandings, I am reminded that

> storytelling is always quietly subversive… you think it faces only one way, but it also faces you. You think it cuts only in one direction, but it also cuts you.

[50] Clandinin and Connelly (1998) note that while "telling stories is a hard task, retelling stories is even more difficult. Retelling requires a vivid imagination as people try to rethink their stories in the context of the stories of others with who them interact" (p. 252). Retelling also requires "concurrent attention to tension" (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Murray Orr, 2010, p. 88).

> You think it applies to others only, when it applies mainly to you . . . it startles your complacency . . . stories are very patient things. . . . They drift about quietly in your soul. (Okri, 1997, p. 35)

Okri captured a sense of my experiences alongside the three Aboriginal youth and their families, that has, in a way, "startled [my] complacency" and "taken-for-grantedness" (Greene, 1995) in how I attended to theirs and my experiences of belonging and identity making. Engaging in this narrative inquiry shifted my earlier understanding of belonging as I learned from, and with, the youth and their families. I wonder about the multiple ways in which our work might also have disrupted or changed Sandra, Bryann, and Sage's understandings. At this point, I can most clearly articulate the changes that have happened for me. I awaken to how I began to shift my stories of experience as I learned to think *with* the youth and their families' stories (Clandinin, 2013). Morris' (2002) distinction between thinking about stories and thinking with stories helps sharpen my ontological commitment as a narrative inquirer. He wrote:

> The concept of thinking with stories is meant to oppose and modify (not replace) the institutionalized Western practice of thinking about stories. Thinking about stories conceives of narrative as an object. Thinking with stories is a process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative as . . . of allowing narrative to work on us. (p. 200)

The stories under study in a narrative inquiry are the experiences of both researcher and participants. Narrative inquiry is not a study of the other; it reflects the co-composed understandings of the researcher and participants of the phenomenon under study. These ontological commitments shape how I engaged in the narrative inquiry. Thinking *with* the

stories that I lived in the narrative inquiry changed me as these stories called me to live differently (Basso, 1996). In this final chapter, I think with the stories my participants and I have lived and told together. Our co-composed understandings have shifted my stories to live by, as a researcher, teacher, daughter, mother—as a human being. By "world"-travelling to Sandra, Bryann, Sage, and their families' experiences, I came to understand how the stories of belonging they brought me to were connected to their families, their kokums and moosum, and to places and the place of home. In these inquiry spaces, I learned how these experiences of belonging were infused with their spirits of belonging; these were stories that sustained them. These stories are working on me (Basso, 1996) as they taught me how critical it is to care for, and respect, familial and intergenerational stories, planted early, and along the way.

Personal and Practical Shifts: Thinking *with* Stories

As a Researcher

In Chapter 1, I shared part of my autobiographical narrative inquiry into my experiences of belonging and identity making. I also shared my passion for working alongside Aboriginal youth and their families in order to understand their experiences of belonging and identity making. Now, at the end of the study, I look back over my experiences within the inquiry and see how there were times I was trying to "plant" (Okri, 1997) my stories of belonging into and onto the experiences of the youth and their families. I see now how these three youth and their families were intentionally, and perhaps at time unintentionally, teaching me of the layered complexities within their experiences of belonging. I wonder if at times the participants saw this as a challenge. Over time, through our inquiry, I learned to see parts of their worlds, to see me through their eyes and for me to see them in their own worlds (Lugones, 1987). In this

"world"-travelling, I "construct[ed] meanings scarcely suspected [to me] before" (Greene, 2001, p. 187).

Looking back, I see how in my narrative beginnings, I told fragmented stories of belonging; stories I carried forward into schooling and into my life composing. My experiences of belonging were interwoven with my identity making as I learned to tell and live "cover stories" (Crites, 1971, p. 294) where I tried to "fit in" or hide, or change who I was, in order to belong. My stories were threaded around plotlines of belonging as fitting in, as sameness. As I learned to "world"-travel Lugones (1987), alongside the youth and their families, I awakened to how some of my experiences around belonging and identity making were mis-educative[51] rather than educative[52] in Dewey's (1938) sense. I see how when I began this narrative inquiry, I silenced certain stories around belonging and not belonging because I feared I would still be defined by the stories shaped in my early landscapes.

As I composed my life alongside Bryann, Sandra, Sage, and their families, I saw resonances in their experiences of belonging, which were similar to mine. The youth and their families told stories where they, too, wanted to fit in and change who they were in order to belong. I saw the great lengths that each of these youth went to, for a sense of belonging of (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Lee & Robbins, 1995). I think of how Sage tried to fit in through changing herself, in different ways, that is, through experimenting with hair colour, trying on different personalities, or hanging out with new people. Sandra tried to fit in at school by hiding

[51] I wrote of Dewey's conceptualization of experience in Chapter 2. Dewey distinguished educative and mis-educative experiences. Dewey (1938) noted, "Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are mis-educative. Any experience is mis-educative that has effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience. An experience may be as such to engender callousness; it may produce lack of sensitivity and of responsiveness. Then the possibilities of having richer experiences in the future are restricted" (p. 25).

[52] For experiences to be "educative" they must point to continuity whereby experiences "create conditions for further growth" and "opportunities for continuing growth in new directions" (Dewey, 1938, p. 36).

herself and tried to live up to stories of what a "normal" student should be. Bryann continually had to change who she was and was becoming as she moved from place to place, from situation to situation, if she wanted to "stay" and have a home. For each youth, it was difficult to focus on school subject matter, when they were struggling to belong. As I travelled to the worlds of Robin, Mary, and Joan, I saw how family members carried forward their stories of belonging that were similar to mine. For example, Grandma Joan learned, like me, to hide part of who she was, that is, someone who ate bannock as part of a cultural narrative, in order to belong. Her story of being afraid to bring bannock to school resonated with my story of learning not to bring Chinese food.

Over time, as we continued to compose our lives in the midst, I began to see that perhaps in part, I was looking at the surface and seeing resonances that echoed with mine. I wondered if I was yet "travelling" to their worlds in order to see their stories and how they saw themselves. At first I saw Sage trying to make sense of belonging as fitting in.

> *I just wanted to change something of myself and that turned into hair or wearing other things, now it's the bracelets and that wasn't enough for me so instead, I changed my personality. I was just getting sick of not getting to see different people and like seeing their view…like to be able to see how they view the world.* (Transcript, January 23, 2012)

At some points in the inquiry I wondered, was I yet seeing what experiences of belonging were within their stories to live by? I see now how travelling to the youth's and their families' worlds is so much more complex than just sharing an experience or inhabiting the

same physical place such as a school or simply visiting or attending a cultural event[53] (Gomez & White, 2010). It was only as I stayed in relation with Sandra, Bryann, and Sage over time and many months that I was able to "world"-travel to the multiple worlds they inhabited. As we tried to make sense of belonging, in the conversational spaces created by the research, we began to "playfully 'world'-travel" in the way Lugones (1987) meant. I began to travel to their worlds and they travelled to mine, and I began to hear *their* stories of belonging and identity making in more complex ways.

This shifting and deeper understanding of belonging brought me to pay attention to intergenerational stories. While I understood the importance of attending to intergenerational narrative reverberations in my master's research (Chung, 2008, 2009; Chung & Clandinin, 2010), I see now how my understanding was limited. I did not stay awake to the resonances of intergenerational reverberations stretched forward, not only from parents to their children, but also from kokums (grandmothers) and moosums (grandfathers). This narrative inquiry with the youth and their families taught me to stay present to intergenerational familial stories and the interconnectedness of our experiences of belonging and identity making. As I lived alongside these mothers and grandmother, I am learning to attend more closely to the intergenerational stories in my life that have shaped my experiences of belonging and who I am and am becoming.

Now as I think with the youth and their families' stories (Clandinin, 2013; Morris, 2002), I understand more about what Brendtro et al. (1990, 2002) and Brokenleg (1998) meant by having a "spirit of belonging." Looking back, I see how I smoothed over the "spirit of

[53] What comes to mind here when I refer to cultural events are events such as pow wows or sweat lodges that the youth and families spoke about.

belonging" that lives within my stories of belonging, which are threaded around my mother's and my sense of family. As I think about what this means to me, I was prompted to search for my mom's letter that I had tucked away.

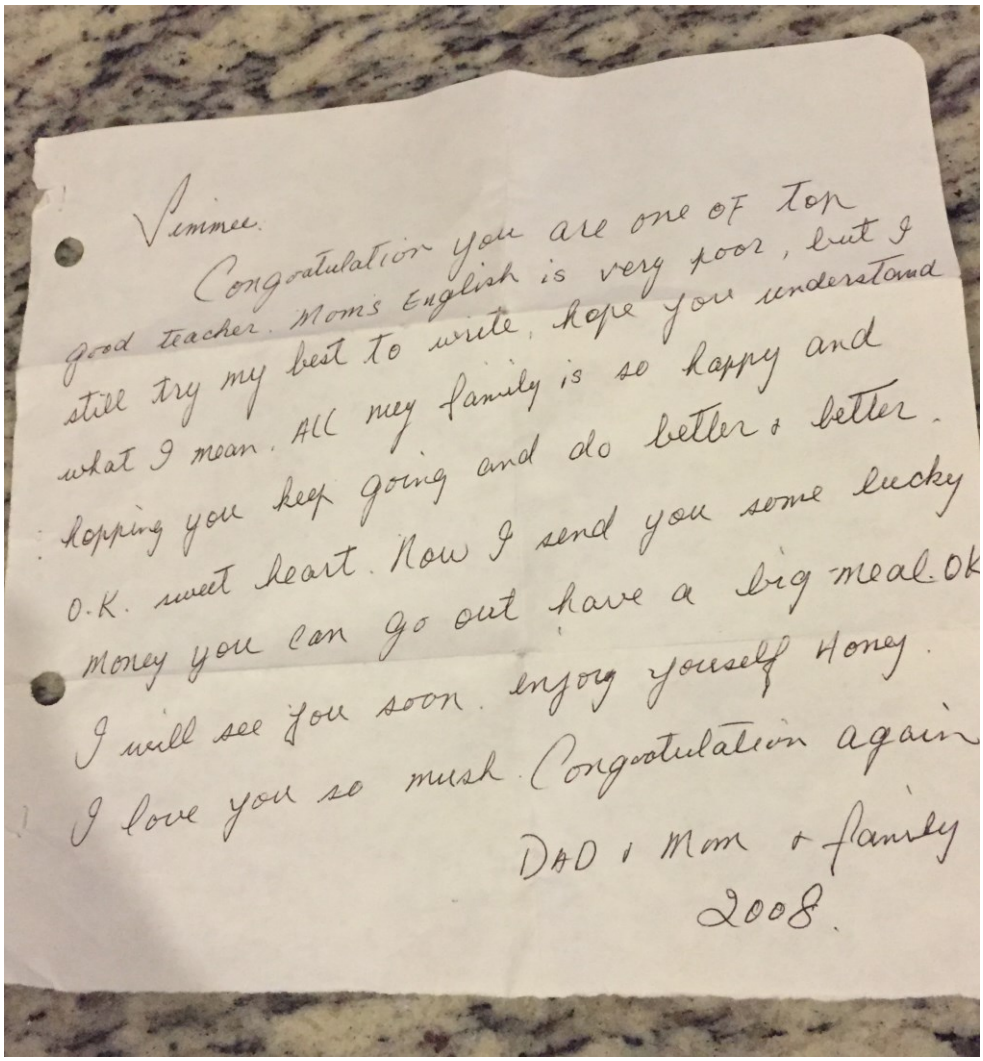

Figure 7-1. Revisiting the letter from my mother

Looking back, when I shared this letter with Sandra as part of our memory box items[54], I told a story of how this congratulatory letter was the first letter that my mom had ever written

[54] I discussed sharing this letter with Sandra in Chapter 6.

in English. I shared how it was unlike our family to be affectionate in this kind of way. I imagined that it was challenging for my mom to compose this letter on so many levels and spoke of her loving perception. Now as I think *with* the stories of the youth and families, I see another story dancing in between the words my mother composed. I saw how my mother and I were co-composing a "world" of belonging infused with a spirit of belonging. We were learning to inhabit a world together that was unfamiliar and strange, yet we knew we could be at ease and be "playful" in the way (Lugones, 1987) described, a world in which we could be open to surprise, to self-construction, and in which we let go of norms. It was a world in which we, as Brokenleg (1998) might say, acted like we belonged. Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (1990) spoke of the "spirit of belonging" and the importance of having a sense of connectedness to someone or something. I think about Bryann, Sage, and Sandra's experiences of belonging and identity making that were interwoven with stories of family which included moosums and kokums, place(s) and familial reverberations. I see now how these were their stories of belonging that were infused with the spirit of belonging. Thinking *with* the stories of the youth and their families, I am learning how important it is to not smooth over our experiences of belonging that are infused with a spirit of belonging, for it is the spirit of belonging that sustains me, and others, and carries us from day to day (Sewall, 1996).

Engaging in this narrative inquiry with Sandra, Sage, Bryann, and their families, and being able to travel to their worlds, has changed me as a researcher. Gomez and White (2010) remind me of how

> we require another's viewpoint to see that which is not apprehendable through our own eyes and from our own position… It is through gazing at one another

and exchanging points of view in a continual dialectic that we come to understand ourselves and those whom we see. (p. 1017)

Turning my gaze outward and inward, backward and forward, I am learning to think *with* the youth and their families' stories as I now retell and relive stories of my experiences of belonging and identity making in different ways. I see now how I can retell my stories of belonging as a youth, and as an adult. While I once tried to fit in by changing who I was, I now celebrate the spirit of connectedness to my family and to relationships with people. Rather, than focusing on "deficits" or "fractures" and silencing stories I learned to live by, I now begin from a conceptualization of experience as one in which belonging is interwoven with identity making.

As a Teacher

This narrative inquiry allowed me to retell my stories of who I am as a teacher.

When I walk into a classroom,

The first thing I look at is the

teacher's face to see how her

expression is.

If they [teachers] are mad, I freeze up

and I don't say anything

at all.

(Transcript, Sandra, May 6, 2011)

Sandra was speaking about another teacher in this conversation, but as I reread her words and turned my gaze inward, I recognize this teacher could have been me. Being a teacher for over 14 years, there are certain rhythms (Clandinin, 1989) and routines of school that I

embodied; these were ways of living as a teacher that I took for granted. For example, teachers often speak of having a "teacher look." I often used my "teacher look" to express disapproval. Now as I think more about Sandra's words, I wonder what story I tell of belonging through my "teacher look." I wonder now about the spirit of belonging the children and I co-composed as I taught. Did I pay attention to the spirit of belonging that lived within each student's storied experiences through playfulness, loving perception and "world"-travelling (Lugones, 1987)?

I have considered myself to be a teacher who strives to create an inclusive classroom for all children. Now, as I retell stories of belonging, I am not sure I was paying attention to their lives in ways that allowed me to attend closely to their stories to live by. I may not have attended to the children's spirits of belonging in my classroom. As a teacher, I thought I was cognizant of how my body, my looks, my actions, and the rhythms I carried out in my classroom, created places where children and their families could belong in my classroom. And yet, coming alongside the youth and their families, has caused me to think again, to begin the retelling of who I was and was becoming as a teacher.

These wonders bring forth memories of a field trip to visit Elder Francis Whiskeyjack's Cultural Arts class at a high school with the youth. I remember how he responded to a child's very late arrival to class. When I asked him if all the children were there, he said, "no but they are always welcome when they get here." Elder Francis Whiskeyjack's words made me think about how I often took the processes of mandatory attendance with its accompanying practices for granted as a teacher. I recall the many times I gave out attendance slips because it was part of the mandated curriculum in schools. Even as I welcomed students with a smile and explained that it was mandatory to make sure they were safely at school, I abided by the school rules. Inside I was always happy that the children came and told them so, but I lived out the

mandated story. I wonder how Elder Francis Whiskeyjack works with or around the mandated expectations for teachers. How did he shift his inward and outward attention to students' lives, rather than let policies guide his attention? My intention in retelling this story now is not to say that attendance is not important or that we should not follow attendance processes and policies. However, as a teacher, I also need to attend to students' lives and think about how these stories of school may shape their experiences of belonging and identity making. In coming alongside the three youth and their families, I was provoked to wonder more about attendance and attendance boards. I now wonder what it means to invoke institutional bodies such as attendance boards into children and families' life making.

As I researched the power of attendance boards, I was struck at the potential consequences[55] outlined by Alberta Education (Government of Alberta, 2016)[56], which noted that the Attendance Board has the same power as the Court of Queen's Bench in Alberta. Now as I retell my stories as a teacher, I am reminded of times when the girls and their families shared stories of not feeling welcomed at school or seeing schools as uninviting places. I think about the stories they lived in which their names were written on the whiteboard for being late or were sent warning letters from the Attendance Board. I remember standing outside of Bryann's classroom with her and waiting for a teacher to unlock the door for us –locked against students who came late. I think about Sandra, who became anxious near the end of the school year when her mother received a warning letter about her attendance.

[55] According to Alberta Education (Government of Alberta, 2016), the Attendance Board may direct "students to attend school or to take an education program or course; parent/guardian to send their child to school; and /or parent/guardian to pay up to $100/day fine to a maximum of $1000. It may give any other direction to the students, parents/guardian or school considered appropriate… not obeying the ruling may result in contempt of court charges being brought against the student or others." (para. 1-6)

[56] The source of the materials is Alberta Education (Government of Alberta, 2016). The use of these materials by Simmee Chung is done without any affiliation with or endorsement by the Government of Alberta; reliance upon this use of these materials is at the risk of the end user.

I see how lingering reverberations and legacies of colonization shaped stories of school around mandatory attendance; these stories stretching back, stretched forward now as they continued to shape the girls and their families' experiences of belonging and who they were in the place of school. These experiences shaped fears of being taken away by Children's Services[57] or fears of not living up to stories of school; these stories of school silenced the youth and their families. I return to Sandra's mother, Mary, who spoke of "floating around school" and to her words, "I remember in grade 4 feeling depressed but didn't want to tell anyone. I didn't want Children's Services to take us away" (Transcript, June 23, 2011). I think about the reverberations of Mary's fears as they vibrated onward and shaped her daughter's fears of being apprehended. As Sandra shared in her retelling of "The Really Bad Burn," she wondered, "Am I going to get taken away to a group home? I don't want to get charged because my mom and grandpa will have to pay for me to get out of jail" (Transcript, November 4, 2012).

All three youth, on one hand, wished teachers asked more about their experiences outside of school but they also did not want to tell their teachers anything. Sage said, she "didn't know what would happen" if she told teachers about her experiences outside of school.

[57] It is understood that the fear of being apprehended or placed in child welfare services, in particular for children who are Aboriginal, has deep-rooted connections to legacies and reverberations of colonialism (Blackstock et al., 2004; Johnston, 1983; Sinclair, 2007; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a). According to the TRC (2015a), "although in 1920, the Indian Act was amended to allow the government to compel any First Nations child to attend residential school" (p. 62), the practice of removing Aboriginal children from their families continued. From the 1960s onward, the residential school experience was followed by what has been called the "Sixties Scoop," or the wide scale apprehension of Aboriginal children by child welfare agencies across Canada (Hanson, 2009). Child welfare authorities removed thousands of Aboriginal children from their families and communities and placed them in non-Aboriginal homes (Blackstock et al., 2004; Johnston, 1983; Sinclair, 2007; Timpson, 1995; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015a).

The overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth continues today as it is estimated that 30–40% of all children in care in Canada are Aboriginal (Blackstock et al., 2004).

Bryann said answering questions about life outside of school was "too personal"; Sandra said, "she would freeze up" if asked.

These stories of belonging shaped by school attendance called me to reflect on the times I have been fixated on carrying out the curriculum-as-planned (Aoki, 1993, 2005) as outlined by policy guides and programs of study. In following out the plan am I overlooking the experiences of children and their families and not attending to their curriculum of lives[58] (Chung, 2008; Chung & Clandinin, 2011; Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011. I wonder if I keep interrupting the curriculum children and youth have for themselves (Paley, 2004). I wonder how I can work within the planned curriculum to attend to the experiences of all children and their families' living curriculum.[59] As I retell my stories to live by as teacher I need to learn to lovingly and playfully "world"-travel to the complex worlds youth and their families inhabit.

I retell my stories as a teacher with a deeper understanding of how the youth and their families tried to sustain their spirits of belonging, spirits that kept them returning to class, and school, even as they bumped up against stories of school. In the retelling of her stories, Sandra taught me more about a "world" (Lugones, 1987) where she felt her spirit of belonging was honoured.

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[58] Pointing to the centrality of lives in the negotiation of curriculum, Clandinin and Connelly (1992) wrote of how curriculum "might be viewed as an account of teachers' and children's lives together in schools and classrooms." They envisioned curriculum as being a "course of life" (p. 392). Seeing teachers' and children's identities, their stories to live by, as central to curriculum making, Clandinin et al. (2006) build on this notion of curriculum as being more than mandated subject matter: a course of life, or perhaps a "curriculum of lives" (p. 135).

In my master's study, I built on Clandinin et al.'s (2006) and Schwab's (1969, 1973) understanding of curriculum to view a "curriculum of lives" as a "curriculum co-composed in the meeting of children's, family members' and teachers' lives in a school milieu and through interactions with mandated subject matter" (Chung, 2008, p. 11).

[59] I draw on Aoki's notion of curriculum as two horizons: one is the mandated curriculum or the "curriculum as planned" and the other horizon is "curriculum-as-lived experience" with students (p. 161). The latter I understand to be the "living curriculum."

When I walked into the club,

The adults were all happy,

I was happy.

(Transcript, May 6, 2011)

I am reminded that what Sandra loved about the arts club was how it invoked, for her, a sense of belonging. This makes me wonder about her notions of happiness and how happiness and belonging might be intertwined for her. These experiences of being connected to, and belonging in, the club were echoed by Bryann and Sage. All three youth experienced the club as sustaining their spirits of belonging. Looking back, I understand more of the significance of play (Paley, 1997) and playfulness (Lugones, 1987) for all three youth, as part of their identity making and in how we learned to "world"-travel (Lugones, 1987) in more loving ways to each other's worlds. Through play and playfully travelling to each other's worlds, we began to co-compose spaces of belonging.

As a teacher, I wonder how I can create more inquiry spaces within the curriculum-as-planned for youth to express their rhythms and embodied ways of knowing and being. In *A Child's Work: The Importance of Fantasy Play*, Paley (2004) writes of her self-facing:

> My stories were not in rhythm with the children's themes. I rarely paused to listen to the narratives blooming everywhere in the garden of children in which I spent my days. I saw myself as the bestower of place and belonging, of custom and curriculum, too often ignoring the delicate web being constructed by the children in their constant exchange of ideas the moment I stopped talking and they resumed playing. (p. 19)

As Paley (2004) reminds me, examining children's [and youths'] play is to study their "curriculum in its natural form, much as they study one another through the medium of their

play" (p. 3). I return to Lugones (1987), who reminds me of the importance of having a playful attitude where I have an "openness to surprise, openness to being a fool, openness to construction or reconstruction of the 'worlds' that I, and my students, inhabit playfully" (p. 17). It is this attitude of playfulness "that carries us through the activity [and that] a playful attitude turns the activity into play" (Lugones, 1987, p. 180).

As a teacher, I will remind myself to hold open spaces where children may playfully (Lugones,1987) and imaginatively construct and inquire into their narratives, for themselves, and with others. Paley's (2004) notion of play as a child's work but also a teacher's work, reminds me of this importance, as "it is in the development of their themes and characters and plots that children explain their thinking and enable us to wonder who we might become as their teachers" (p. 8). Paley also reminds me of how working within the curriculum-as-planned to attend to children and youth's identity making is a starting point, for it is then that "life in the classroom really becomes interesting" (p. 110). She writes:

> We who value play must do more than complain of unwanted drills that steal away our time. We must find time for play and keep daily journals of what is said and done during play if we are to convince anyone of its importance. Our children will happily join us in the project by giving us their stories that so well explain their play when the stories are acted out. (Paley, 2004, p. 33)

I understand the challenges of working within the curriculum-as-planned to attend to youth and their families' living curriculum, particularly with increased high stakes testing and a heavy mandated curriculum to enact. However, if I want education to be educative (Dewey 1938), rather than mis-educative for youth and their families, I now am awake to how critical it is that I learn to lovingly "world"-travel and playfully (Lugones, 1987) come alongside to open

spaces where students can share and experience a spirit of belonging in the classrooms where I teach. I am reminded how important it is to respond to students in thoughtful and authentic ways (Lachuk & Gomez, 2011) so they may author their own lives.

Shifting What is Known About Youths' Experiences: Attending to the Social

> A wealth of evidence establishes Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity as foundations for positive life outcomes. Yet, belonging trumps them all. (Brendtro, Mitchell, & Jackson, 2014, p. 12)

"Belonging trumps them all"—the words of Brendtro, Mitchell, and Jackson (2014) stay with me as I turn my attention to what I learned from engaging in this narrative inquiry. Scholars seeking to understand more of the experiences of Aboriginal youth tell us that not belonging or exclusion "impedes intelligent thought (Mastery), self-control (Independence) and empathy and concern for others (Generosity)" (Brendtro et al., 2014, p. 12). Baumeister (2011) noted the importance of attending to youths' experiences of belonging as "the destructive response by those who feel excluded can cause significant costs to all" (p. 137). There is a wide consensus from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars that recognize experiences of belonging are critical for physical and emotional well-being as well as for mental health and stability; having a sense of belonging is critical for a successful life and contributes most to making life meaningful (Baumeister, 2011; Benson, 1997; Brendtro et al., 2014; Brokenleg, 2012; Fearn, 2006; Lambert et al., 2013; Maslow, 1943, 1970; Pitonyak, 2014). Educational theories point to the relationship between belonging and academic performance (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Pym et al., 2011; Soudien, 2008). There is also a growing body of research

that echoes Pym et al.'s (2011) sentiments: "If we want learners to be invested in their learning, they need to feel a sense of belonging and social connectedness" (p. 38).

I was intrigued by a study presented by The Canadian Council on Learning (2008) that identified school mobility as a contributing factor to low high-school completion rates among Aboriginal youth; the council recognized that current research on the impact of school mobility on youth is limited. These finding were reiterated in a recently released study by Statistics Canada (Turner & Thompson, 2015) on school mobility and educational outcomes of off-reserve First Nations[60] students, which presented data from the 2011 and 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey. These findings showed that school mobility can have a negative effect on children's academic success. The authors noted this study is particularly relevant for First Nations people given their comparatively high residential mobility and less favourable educational outcomes.

According to the earlier National Household Survey (NHS) (2011), 22% of off-reserve First Nations people lived at a different address from where they had lived five years earlier compared to 18% for non-Aboriginal people. Compared to 15% of the non-Aboriginal population aged 25–64, 31% of off-reserve First Nations people did not have a high school diploma (Morency et al., 2015). After the 2011 survey, Statistics Canada conducted a 2012 National Household Survey in an effort "to understand how changing schools for reasons other than regular progression is related to the academic outcome of off-reserve First Nation students" (Morency et al., 2015, p. 4). According to the survey:

[60] According to Morency et al. (2015), the Statistics Canada report they authored "pertains to First Nations people living off reserved who reported a single identity of 'First Nations'" (North American Indian) (p.4). Additionally, data are drawn "from the 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS), a national survey that covered First Nations people living off reserve, Metis, and Inuit aged 6 or older as of February 1, 2012." Moreover over, the sample is of approximately 50 000 respondents drawn from those who reported Aboriginal identity or ancestry on the 2011 NHS" (Morency et al., p. 5).

> Since starting preschool, 70% of off-reserve First Nations students in grades 1-6 had changed schools, as had 48% of students in grades 7 to 12 since they started grade 7. (p. 6)

With interviews conducted either by proxy, or mostly answered by parents/guardians, the reasons why students moved schools were situated into categories, characteristics, and selected school outcomes for off-reserve First Nations students in grades 1 to 12. While these statistical stories provide measurable trends and patterns that highlight the need to pay attention to the prevailing discrepancies for Aboriginal youth, I also recognize these data are from the perspective of a system. The data does not speak to the storied experiences of youth as they moved from school to school or why they may have left school early, or to the experiences of youth who stayed.

As I read these statistical stories, I was brought back to the stories Sage, Sandra, and Bryann shared during our time together as they told stories of why they wanted to move to different schools. For Sage and Sandra, the prospect of moving schools was a way they could each start over and compose new stories to live by. I learned that as Bryann moved from kinship care to foster care, she had no choice but to move schools. While I heard of these struggles, I also heard their experiences of belonging infused with a spirit of belonging; these were sustaining stories that made Sage, Sandra, Bryann, and their families return to school from day to day.

Keeping the youth and their families' lives at the forefront, I wonder how policies can think *with* the storied experiences of youth and families. I wonder how we can create educative, belonging spaces for youth as they experience multiple transitions in their lives. I wonder how we can better attend to their experiences and work with them as they compose lives where

sometimes they have to leave schools. Being a teacher and researcher, scholars, educational consultants, and educators have asked me if they should create or mandate an Aboriginal "program" in their schools or if there is a guide to creating a belonging project with children and youth. While I see their openness in wanting to become more attentive to Aboriginal youth and their families' lives, the intention of this narrative inquiry is not to offer a prescriptive or "how to" guide on addressing the needs of Aboriginal youth and families. What I want to make visible is that it is important that teachers think *with* and work *with* Aboriginal youth and their families' experiences to open conversational spaces and inquiry spaces where they can share their familial curriculum[61] making; spaces which lend an openness to "world"-travel to each other's worlds, for playfulness (Lugones, 1987) and play (Caine & Steeves, 2009; Paley, 1997, 2004, 2007, 2010). I echo Paley's (2015) sentiments as she wondered alongside other scholars and educators: "How can children engage in play, when there is so little time for play" (n.p.)? Paley suggests that how children and youth construct who they are, and are becoming, is the "liveliest part of the curriculum" (n.p.) As a researcher, teacher, teacher educator, and human being, it is important for me to resist seeing Aboriginal youths and their families as fixed beings. To be able to shift and narrate our own stories to live by, it is important to honour all lives with an understanding that we are all "in the midst of 'becoming'" (Greene, 1995, 2001).

[61] Whereas school curriculum making is focused on experiences in the context of subject matter nestled in the school milieu, "familial curriculum making is situated and composed in experiences outside of school, within family, and in community places" (Lessard, Caine, & Clandinin, 2015, p. 198). 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 curriculum process in which families, children/learners, subject matter, and home and community milieu are in dynamic interaction" (Huber et al., 2011, p. 8).

Moving Narrative Inquiry Forward

Do you want to know why we do a morning song and prayer?

Do you know why we drum?

Why we hug one another before school?

Education is Ceremony.

We acknowledge education and the creator.

This rock, this eagle, this feather, this tobacco

all these things are natural.

We are all connected. These are all our relations.

We are all living and human.

(Teachings of Elder Francis Whiskeyjack, March 11, 2011)

When I think about how this narrative inquiry may shape future narrative inquiries, I return to the day Bryann, Sandra, Sage, and I went to visit Elder Francis Whiskeyjack. I remember his teachings. His words stay with me as I think about what I am learning is at the heart of narrative inquiry, that is, a relational ontology. As I lived alongside the youth and their families to attend their storied experiences across three generations of lives, I saw how narrative inquiry offers the possibility of multi-perspectival inquiry into intergenerational experiences; it embodies potential for those who are open to come alongside, to create more meaningful and inclusive communities. I see the potential and possibilities in further research in attending to the narratives of experience across generations and in building and strengthening cross cultural understandings and relations.

As a beginning narrative inquirer, I hold Elder Francis Whiskeyjack's teachings close as I think about my ontological commitment to honour and care for the stories the youth and their families entrusted to me. I am learning how, as a narrative inquirer, I need to be responsible to all my relations and to keep building relations. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) reminded me of our connectedness as they wrote of the importance of a relational ontology as being "between a human being and her environment-her life, community world" (p. 39) with a relational view of experience (narrative composition). Drawing on Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) research, other narrative inquirers reminded me, "Narrative inquiry is not a method, but a methodology, more even more so, it is a way of composing a life, of living" (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p. 37). Clandinin and Connelly (1998) shaped my understanding that being in relation involves more than telling stories. They wrote,

> We see living an educated life as an ongoing process. People's lives are composed over time: biographies or life stories are lived and told, retold and relived. For us, education is interwoven with living and with the possibility of retelling our life stories. As we think more about our own lives and the lives of teachers and educators with whom we engage, we see possibilities for growth and change. As we learn to tell, to listen and to respond to teachers' and children's stories, we imagine significant educational consequences for children and teachers in schools and for faculty members in universities through more mutual relations between schools and universities. No one, and no institution would leave this imagined future unchanged. (pp. 246–247)

As I think about how this research with Aboriginal youth and their families will move narrative inquiry forward, I think about how they are teaching me how I might retell and relive

an experience so that it is "educative" (Dewey, 1938). They are teaching me about what it means to live an "educated life" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). I hope this narrative inquiry encourages us as human beings to reach beyond ourselves and to see more than "other." We are all relations (Wilson, 2008), and education is, or should be, ceremony (Personal communication, Francis Whiskeyjack, March 11, 2011). It is important to be open and willing to learn from youth and their families, and to think *with* them as we look towards possibilities for the future. In the words of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015a), "it will take many heads, hands, and hearts, working together" to establish and maintain respectful relationships (p. 8).

Returning to My Shifting Stories to Live By—As a Mother and a Human Being

"Miss Chung, do you want to have children of your own one day, or are we enough?"

It was over a decade ago when one my former grade 3 students asked me this question as we were holding hands and happily walking together during recess time. As a teacher, I often felt like I had multiple roles and identities—one of which was a mothering identity. Shifting back to when I began this narrative inquiry, I constructed alongside Sandra, an annal[62] where I shared how one of my forward looking stories was to have children of my own, that is, besides the children who taught me, and I taught, and loved—over many years. As I "world"-travelled with these mothers (Mary and Robin), and grandmother (Joan), I imagined who I might be as a mother as they shared stories of belonging and mothering in their complex and diverse worlds as they lived alongside their daughter. I listened to their worries as well as the hopes and dreams for their children to gain an education, to graduate from high school, to get a

[62] As described in Chapter 6, Sandra and I constructed and told stories of our annals.

job, to be happy. I think about Mary's "Mighty Heart" collage where she reminds me of what sustains her,

[Sandra]

She is my gift

Strong-mind, creative,

playful and cheeky.

I want her to be happy.

I want her to finish school.

(Transcript, June 23, 2011)

In this narrative inquiry, I dreamed, hoped, and cried alongside Mary, Robin, Joan, Sandra, Sage, and Bryann. When I became a wife, an expectant mother, and then a mother, they continued to live alongside me and my children, and, without hesitation, they loved and treated my children like they were family. As I think about what Bryann, Sage, Sandra, and their mothers and grandmother taught me, I think about the stories of belonging I am learning to compose as a mother, partly by revisiting the stories of belonging with which the youth and their families entrusted me. I am now learning to think *with* my daughters' stories in order to help me tell and retell this story below.

After another marathon day of writing

and juggling kids,

time to tackle this [household chores]!

I posted this message to my social media page, perhaps hoping for some empathic replies in the morning. Then I continued to write this final chapter well into the wee hours of the night. It was around 3:30 a.m. when I heard a soft cry coming from the girls' bedroom. "Oh darn, another interruption," I thought. I grudgingly left my work to console what sounded like my eldest daughter. When I came into their room, I saw it was Adeline who was sitting up seemingly awake. And while I went to her, she kept crying, saying, "I want to go home. I want to go home…" I wrapped her up in my arms to give her a hug and realized she was still asleep and just dreaming. I held her for a little while and then gently laid her on the bed. Then I checked on her baby sister laying beside her as I often do to make she's still breathing. (Personal notes, April 15, 2016)

As I return to writing, there is something drifting in my mind. Resting are my daughter's words, "I want to go home." My mind slides back to the stories the youth and their families shared of their experiences of belonging connected to their families, to places(s), stories of belonging where they felt "like home." These were the stories of belonging that reflected their spirits of belonging. These were the stories that I see now, as I retell and relive this story as a mother, even in her dreams, my daughter is living out a story of belonging that is being planted early.

I thought about how earlier in the day, I brought her to Chinese "play" class, which is not all that playful. It's run by a fairly strict Chinese teacher and there are a lot of rules that Adeline must follow. Here at her "Chinese school" as Adeline calls it, most of the other children speak fluently in the Cantonese dialect. Adeline speaks mainly English with bits and pieces of Chinese. When I think about my stories to live by, I often tell a story of how I want her to hold on to our Chinese culture and language. I want her to be able to speak and

communicate with her grandma (po po), grandpas (gong gong & ye ye). And so, holding on to this story, once a week I take Adeline to this class. Each week, Adeline and I hope together that she will make a new friend or find a friend to play with that day. Her experience of not having friends in "Chinese school" is a sharp contrast to the story of Adeline in "English school"/daycare, where, according to her teacher, Miss Tania, "Addie is everyone's buddy."

Gazing inward, I return to the words I posted on social media, "juggling." This word is causing me tension now as I see that what I first saw as an interruption to my work, is my daughter's living curriculum as she is learning to compose a story of belonging in the place of school and in our familial world. It is a story I am "planting" for her that she is learning to live in and live out.

As I think *with* the stories of the Aboriginal youth and their families, I understand there are more layers of complexities to these cultural and linguistic narratives that are shaping my daughter, and that are shaping me. Sliding back to the stories I heard of Sage, Bryann, and Sandra, Robin, Mary, and Grandma Joan, they, too, were all trying to hold on to parts of their cultural identities, which connected them to their families, Cree heritage, and place(s). I am reminded of how stories of belonging are shaped by relationships, time, place, and reverberate across generations (Clandinin et al., 2006; Young, 2003, 2005a; Young et al., 2010). I understand the sadness Grandma Joan felt when she had to "drop her Cree language" and was thus unable to pass on her language to her daughter, Robin. There were painful reverberations of colonization and residential school that reverberated from mother-to-mother-to mother-to-Sage.

In my own self-facing as a mother, I see how I am also trying to sustain my sense of belonging that is interwoven with my multiple identities, one being a person of Chinese

heritage. I see how my story is becoming a part of my daughters' stories. As Adeline tells me, "I am Chinese, Mommy. I have a language." Looking back to my childhood, I never learned to write in Chinese, but I always wanted to. I remember trying to learn on my own, but I saw how tired my mom was after she got home from work. Eventually I gave up on trying to be literate in Cantonese. Looking inward, I know that maintaining our Chinese language is my story of belonging interwoven with my identity making, but it will also become part of Adeline's and Amelia's stories, through me. I realize that as we co-compose this story of belonging, they are also composing their own stories of belonging.

Gazing outward, I wonder when Adeline and Amelia begin formal schooling what safe spaces will be co-composed where their spirits of belonging are nurtured and they can share who they are and are becoming. I wonder how, as the youth and families' lives continue to unfold, and as they navigate through high school, a new place, with new relationships—how will they sustain their stories of belonging and who they are and want to become. When policy drives the curriculum, I wonder, what will drive the youth. Will their spirits of belonging be able to sustain them? I think now about the spirit of belonging that I carry as a daughter and a mother that will shape who Adeline and her little sister are, and are becoming. These experiences of belonging infused with the spirit of belonging, help me stay awake to the stories to live by that I am composing alongside my children. The youth and their families have taught me to pay attention to these stories. Just as the daughter, teacher, and researcher in me also has to continually strive to co-compose safe inquiry spaces, I have to remember that I have to open spaces for my daughters to share their dreams, to shape and compose their own stories of belonging. I know that I have to travel to their worlds with a loving perception and compose "playfully" with them (Lugones, 1987).

Thinking with stories, I am learning how to care for stories of belonging the youth and their families shared with me as they call me to stay awake (Greene, 1977, 1993, 1995) as a mother and a human being. I am reminded that loving "world"-travelling requires spaces for play and playfulness, for it is "from these co-constructed story places, possibilities for continuing to compose new stories to live by are created" (Caine & Steeves, 2009, p. 2). Paley (1997) reminds me that "play is narrative continuity or another way of achieving narrative continuity" (p. 74). Speaking to the importance of "narrative imagination," Andrews (2007) noted, "if we wish to access the framework of meanings for others, we must be willing and able to imagine a world other than the one we know" (p. 489). It is in within these imaginative inquiry spaces that we can tell, retell, and relive stories of who we are and how we are connected. It is in these safe spaces where we can share our stories of belonging, infused with the spirit of belonging that sustains us.

As I look towards the future, I hold the understanding that this relational research with Aboriginal youth and their families was not just ours alone. I understand that possibilities to retell and shift my stories to live by have also been shaped by and made possible through the loving and welcoming communities I have come to know as my relations. I am grateful to have ongoing and sustained conversations where I wondered alongside Elders, my academic response community including friends at the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development, and with community organizations such as the Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society and the Ben Calf Robe Society. I am grateful to the school and administrators through which we gained entry and a physical place and time within school so that we could learn and live alongside youth. With the gentle guidance of all my relations, I had the space think more deeply about what the youth and their families were teaching me. As a human being, who lives

in relation with others in this world, I am learning how important it is to gaze outward and inward to see the I, as well as the we, as we collectively make sense of belonging, and who we are, and who we are not-yet (Greene, 1993, 1995, 2001).

Returning to Our Story: "The Spirit of Belonging"

Elder Francis Whiskeyjack once told me, "The mind is like the film of a camera—it holds memories. You will see a different sunset every day" (Personal communications, March 11, 2011). As I recall his words, I am brought back to the youths' grade 9 graduation ceremony where I held Adeline in my arms and waited eagerly with Sage's mother, Robin, in anticipation for Sage to walk across the stage. This story, and so many others, before and along the way, brings me back to an early conversation I had with Robin when we began to share stories. This narrative inquiry allowed me to "see a different sunset every day" living alongside Sage, Sandra, Bryann, and their families. I turn back to early emails between Robin and me when we were learning to travel to each other's worlds and we began to tell and retell our experiences of belonging infused with the spirit of belonging. I believe Baylor (1994) might say that our stories, infused with our spirits of belonging, are the "riches" in our lives and the heart of this inquiry.

To: Simmee

From: Robin

Subject: Thank you

It was a pleasure to sit with you and share our stories. Like I said to you that evening, you have been an inspiration to my daughter and for this, I will be forever indebted. Sage is a very special spirit, she came into my life when I was

ready and so very willing to be her mother. My girl is so valuable to me that sometimes I forget to share her with others.

I was always taught that people come to you for a reason. You have come into my life and my daughter's at this time to allow us to tell our story thus far. This is very exciting! (Email, May 13, 2011)

To: Robin

From: Simmee

Subject: "Riches" in our lives

Robin, thank you so much for your kind words…I got teary eyed when I read your email. Before I moved to the city to attend university, my mom wanted me to take over the family restaurant business. I think she wanted to keep me close…She always kept me close as she was a total worry wart. Actually, I think she passed on the worrying gene to me…

Growing up in the restaurant life, being a dishwasher at the age of 8 (or was it younger) I knew the life, but I had different hopes and dreams. Since I was in about grade 9, I dreamed of becoming a teacher. I grew up babysitting kids and trying to teach English to my mom's friends, who were little-to-no-English speakers.

I remember my dear grandmother who passed away in my grade 12 year, she only knew how to say hello and goodbye in English. My grandma was such a loving and strong woman. I think my mom still draws her strength from her mother…

It was hard for my mom to have me so far away, but once I did move to pursue my dreams, she was extremely supportive and proud of me. I think she is most proud of me not for my accolades, but for the relationships I've built with family and friends….so

when you spoke of your conversation with your [children] of what it means to be rich, it resonated with me. My family may not be rich financially, but I have always felt very lucky in terms of having such supportive and loving friends and family in my life. And I feel so much richer in meeting you and Sage. In this way, I think your family is very "rich" too, in character and in love.

So thank YOU and Sage for coming into my life. . . . I can only imagine how proud your mother is of you and her grandchildren.

Gratefully yours,

Simmee (Email, May 14, 2011)

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