

An Artful Narrative Inquiry into the Curriculum-Making Experiences of South Asian Girls,
Mothers, and Teachers in Canada

by

Sajani Jinny Menon

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Department of Elementary Education
University of Alberta

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Abstract

The demographic profile of South Asians residing in Canada has grown appreciably over the years. For instance, as of 2011, South Asians made up Canada's largest visible minority group (Statistics Canada, 2011) and was predicted to continue growing (Statistics Canada, 2012). More recently, Statistics Canada (2017) surmised, "In all the projection scenarios, South Asians would still be the main visible minority group in 2036" (Morency, Malenfant, & MacIsaac, p. 6). Significantly, Statistics Canada (2016) reported "the largest group of visible minority females is now South Asian" (Hudon, p. 4). Given the increasingly diverse composition of Canada's population, it is crucial to recognize South Asian female students may arrive in schools embodying complex notions of culture and identity (Ghosh, 2000; Kurien, 1999) which shape in profound ways *who they are* and *who they wish to be*. Yet far too little is understood about these experiences.

Moreover, teachers in Canada are often unaware, for such students, identity and culture are inherently multilayered, multi-dimensional considerations (Clandinin et al., 2006; Clandinin, et al., 2016) defying simple understandings (Handa, 2003; Ragoonaden, 2010; Rajiva, 2006). South Asian girls and their families live with, and amongst, interconnected, overlapping, and conflicting cultural, familial, intergenerational, and institutional narratives. Working within a narrative conception of knowledge, context, and identity, Clandinin et al. (2006) pointed to tensions that teachers, children, and families experience when co-composing curriculum within Canadian schools. Insofar as South Asian girls are concerned, it is vital to consider how embedded narratives shape their identity-making and additionally, what is taught and learned within the different curriculum-making worlds they live (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011; Lugones, 1987) and travel within and amongst (Lugones, 1987).

At the same time, there is a paucity of research with respect to how South Asian mothers support their daughters in their living and being. Seeking in part to trouble monolithic (and at times pejorative) constructions of South Asian girls and females, this multiperspectival narrative inquiry inquired into the storied experiences of two girls, their mothers and teacher over the span of several years. Shaping my research puzzles are the experiences I embody as a South Asian female born, raised, educated, and living in Canada. In the unfolding of this research, in ethical relationship with co-learners, we inquired into our experiences of identity-making and identity living as crafting an artistry of our lives.

Field texts included audio-recordings of conversations with co-participants, transcripts of conversations, researcher observations of activities and events, artful wonderings which I called, *heart-full musings* (Menon, 2019), and artifacts such as photographs, memory books, written work (poetry and stories), annals, and artful representations. Wakeful (Greene, 1995/2000) to the metaphorical three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly; 2000), attention was directed to place, sociality, and temporality. Four narrative accounts were created in close relationship with co-learners. Thinking alongside the stories and experiences of research friends, made visible experiences of tension and dis/ease. These bumping places (Clandinin et al, 2006), where different stories bumped up against one another provoked sites for deeper inquiry. By narratively inquiring into how teachers, South Asian girls, and their mothers experience curriculum making in home and school worlds, this study contributes to our knowledge of democratic pedagogy (Fernandez, 2006; Gay, 2002; Mosquera & Mosquera, 2005), and forwards an understanding of teacher and student practice *for* diversity and not merely about diversity (Clandinin et al. 2006; Clandinin et al; 2016; Eisner, 1982, 2005; Greene, 1993, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2012; Swartz, 2009).

Additionally, by shifting away from more traditional and taken-for-granted (Greene, 1995/2000) understandings of academic research, this study illuminates and honours different ways of knowing, being, and learning. Doing so, situates this research firmly within a narrative understanding of social justice (Caine et al., 2018), while magnifying the nuanced experiences of South Asian children and women, as creative, agentic, and artistic, architects of their own experiential worlds.

Key Words: artmaking, artistry of lives, children, curriculum-making, diversity, experience, girls, identity, imagination, Indian, learners, mothers, multiperspectival, narrative inquiry, schools, social justice, South Asian, teachers, worlds

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Sajani Jinny Menon. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “A Multiperspectival Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of South Asian Girls, Mothers, and Teachers in Curriculum Making In and Out of Schools within Canada”, No. MS5 Pro00057021, 09/15/2015.

Dedication

*For Maya, my dear niece,
may your shakti,
forever burn bright...*

For Anne, Katrina and Barb, and Deepika and Vam,
Thank you for inviting me into your lives (and into your stories) with such warmth.
Thank you for undertaking this learning journey with me.
You have taught me so much.
With love to each of you...

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Om shanti, shanti...

A Preamble: Narrative Beginnings Shaped by Memory, Metaphor, and Image

Clandinin (2013) highlights the ongoing reflective and reflexive nature of narrative inquiry as a methodology and points to the necessity of narrative inquirers “to continually inquire into their own experiences before, during, and after each inquiry” (p. 83) and cautions “without autobiographical narrative inquiry, our studies can lead to work that is too technical or too certain. Beginning with autobiographical narrative inquiry allows us to see that we, too, are under study in the inquiry” (p. 83). She further elaborates:

These initial inquiries into who I am, and am becoming in and through the narrative inquiry, allow us to come to the questions of justification: the personal, practical, social, and theoretical justifications that allow us to respond to the “so what?” and “who cares?” questions that all social science researchers must answer. Narrative inquirers must begin, then, with inquiring into our own stories of experience. (p. 82)

Thinking about the Nature of Memory

Memory bridges the stories I have lived and told and the ones I live and tell now. Memories, given meaning when they first are formed are shaped continuously so that when they are pulled forward, the experiences which comprise a memory shift. This shift is in dynamic interplay with time, place, and social considerations.¹ In this view, memory is not so much infallible, as it is fluid. I am drawn close to Bateson (1989) who suggests: “Even for the recent past and in situations where there would seem to be little motivation for distortion, memories are

¹For narrative inquirers, *the three dimensional space* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of time (past, present, and future), place (situating context), and sociality (the inherently personal and social relationships which comprise life) offer a compelling means of inquiring into people’s experiences.

modified and details supplied to fit cultural distortions” (p. 32). Speaking on and about memory, Kerby (1991) likewise recognizes, “What we must avoid here is the untenable position that such recollections are images which somehow duplicate original experiences, as though now we could relive them precisely as they once were” (p. 23). Kerby additionally elucidates, “Memorial experience (recollection) is not simply of the past; it is, as we have said, the past for me *now*, and this qualification makes a considerable difference” (p. 24). His words crystallize my hope that I have circumvented the rhetoric of *either this* or *either that* in this narrative inquiry. This rejection of a dualistic mindset has been shaped by the memories and experiences I have chosen to inquire into *and* as well, the other recollections, some more fleeting than their kindred, born from the process itself.

Thinking with the Metaphor of a Scrapbook

To render more visible the memories I have chosen² to inquire into, and as a means of thinking about my personal, practical, and social justifications³ which are layered throughout this narrative inquiry, I employ a metaphorical scrapbook to reflect upon my narrative beginnings. This scrapbook takes up the complex task of not simply recording and accounting for various memorabilia but as well, inviting narrations co-composed by the heart and the mind. Like Anzaldúa (1987/1999), “I see a “hybridization of metaphor, different species of ideas, popping up here, popping up there, full of variations and seeming contradictions . . . where all phenomena are interrelated and imbued with spirit” (p. 88). There is a genuine fear that I might be opening

² This is not to say that this process is finite. Rather inquiring into my experiences, shaped by home, school, and culture, continue to elicit other memories and permit me thinking spaces in which to linger.

³ In thinking about *the personal, practical, and theoretical justifications* of this dissertation I found that I was unable to conceive of these considerations separately. That is, while I choose to highlight certain aspects in different sections of this dissertation, I believe the personal, practical, and theoretical justifications of this proposed inquiry continuously inform and shape one another in constant and fluid interplay.

myself up to ridicule in writing in a manner, which seeks not to divorce emotion from reason but instead, attempts to offer up an alternative incarnation of what it means to critically think. Yet, genuflecting in obsequious manner to a tradition which more often than not situates researcher away from her phenomenon of study, *others* me. The quandary then is whether I wish to be complicit to this segregation of myself from *what* I wish to inquire into and moreover, *how* I wish to engage in my inquiry. What's more, the potency of the dilemma I find myself in becomes significantly concentrated when I consider why I, a South Asian⁴ female am attempting to do this kind of 'academic' work. Gupta (1999) counsels, "South Asian women researchers, whether academic or journalistic, are expected to understand and participate in the cultural nuances of the South Asian communities and to present their data in a way that does not embarrass their cultural peers" (p. 25). This notion of embarrassment or 'maintaining face' is not new to me and has been something that has been inculcated within me even as a young child. Gupta, also recognizes that South Asian women researchers can be

viewed by their communities as agents of change—either positive or negative—depending on . . . subject matter . . . analysis and presentation of . . . data and that moreover, this can be a difficult position and one which women researchers, especially those working within their own ethnic communities, constantly struggle to manage. (p. 25)

It is in the now that I struggle to situate my own experiences knowing that there might be elements of the stories shared which might disturb, offend, and repulse those in my community.

⁴I employ the terms: *Indian*, *Indo-Canadian*, *Asian Indian*, and *South Asian* interchangeably (Jain, 2011; Malhi, Boon, & Rogers, 2009; Superle, 2011) to refer to those who reside in Canada and who can trace part or all of their ancestry to South Asia or who self-identify as any or all of the above names. Refuting the tractability of a singular identity, I use these terms interchangeably throughout this document to remind myself that there is heterogeneity to be found in supposed constructs of homogeneity. Moreover, I do this purposely so to disrupt the notion that simply because I self-identify as South Asian, I am able to speak for others who may also self-identify as South Asian.

This struggle, I appreciate can never be neatly resolved but it can be eased. It is in part due to Minh-ha's (1989) words that I gain courage to speak in this fashion:

Achieve distance, they keep on saying, as much distance from your own voice as possible. Don't direct the reader's attention to yourself, don't fiddle with words....For a woman, such a distance easily takes on the face of Alienation. (p. 27)

To ameliorate such alienation, I adopt a methodological framework of narrative inquiry so to invite autobiographical, theoretical, and practical reflections even as I move towards a form of (re)presentation, which resonates for me. It is to those very personal artifacts of time, place, and sociality that I wish to inquire within. For instance, photos pressed into a book paired with odd bits of writing, lines of poetry, which serve to evoke and provoke, a tattered ticket from a recent flight to South Asia, and here and there painted sketches cavorting across stiff pages while other drawings remain still, clinging steadfastly to memory. These reminiscences, at times messy and at other periods crisply rendered, have been placed in a metaphorical scrapbook of various points in my life which I have chosen to purposely depict and ones which have arisen through the unfolding process of autobiographical inquiry. Layered and nuanced, these recollections cannot be arbitrarily reduced to simple narratives. Greene (1995) commenting on her tensions with and within academia writes:

I could not objectify nor separate my subjectivity from what I was perceiving. I could not separate my feeling, imagining, wondering consciousness from the cognitive work assigned for me to do. Nor could I bracket out my biography and my experiences of embeddedness in an untidy, intersubjective world. (p. 113)

Similar to Greene I find myself unable to make distinctions that serve to sever my

autobiographical experiences from this narrative research. To do so, would invariably call forth my own suspicions of being disingenuous, perhaps rendering parts of this narrative inquiry inauthentic and/or artificial. The scrapbook I continue to create alters in response to my varied experiences. Much like the canvas whose paint has thinned to the point where the painter's previously painted over images are discerned,⁵ I seek to better comprehend what was once important, what now is sacred, and what matters for me as a scholar who has come alongside research friends⁶ (co-participants) in this narrative inquiry. It also permits me to think of possible ways of representing experiences.



⁵ *Pentimento* refers to a change in a painting, where an image is painted over with another image. The painter is said to have changed her mind and have repented. This idea of seeing an image once and then once more within a new context helps me to consider shifts in my thinking across time, place, and in relation with others. I metaphorically and digitally play with this notion in the following image (source: <http://www.craftsvilla.com>) as I think about the overlapping stories I hold and the ways they may/may not intersect with co-participants' stories. I revisit this idea later in this dissertation.

⁶ I use the terms, co-participants, research friends, and co-learners interchangeably throughout this dissertation to refer to the girls, Katrina and Deepika and their mothers, Barb and Vam, and the girls' Grade Four teacher, Anne.

Anzuldúa (1990) expresses how

a woman of colour who writes poetry or paints or dances or makes movies knows there is no escape from race or gender when she is writing or painting. She can't take off her colour and sex and leave them at the door . . . nor can she leave behind her history. (p. xxiv)

Moreover, she contends, “For many of us the acts of writing, painting, performing, and filming are acts of deliberate and desperate determination to subvert the status quo” (p. xxiv). I find hope in Anzuldúa’s emphasis on creativity, “by sending our voices, visuals, and visions outward into this world, we alter the walls and make them a framework for new windows and doors” (p. xxv). Therefore, while this scrapbook *could* be viewed as a contrivance, I believe this iterative crafting of a living metaphor⁷ is much more than a simple artistic tool for it helps me to communicate new resonances (Bateson, 1989), new understandings, and perhaps new ways of knowing as I move between and within memories. I proffer this idea of a scrapbook while concurrently acknowledging “that no metaphor can ever be comprehended or even adequately represented independently of its experiential basis” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003, p. 19). Such a metaphor, I believe, holds the potentiality to open spaces to think with, imagine, live, and share stories.

In a comparable fashion, I am reminded of Reinharz (1992) who postulates for feminists “finding one’s voice is a crucial process of their research and their writing” (p.16). This I feel is only part of the challenge, the other lies in once having found her voice (possibly, a recursive process), a feminist researcher then must be able to find a space to share it. Such an immense

⁷ My colleague and friend, Andre Glaser provided me with this term as a means of describing what I meant to convey by moving beyond conceptualizing the scrapbook as merely a metaphorical device.

challenge recalls me once more to Anzaldúa (1987/1999) who reveals the great potential to be found in the sharing of stories: “The ability of story (prose and poetry) to transform the storyteller and the listener into something or someone else is shamanistic. The writer, as shape-changer, is a *nabua* a shaman” (p. 88).

Playing with this idea of a metaphorical scrapbook⁸, I autobiographically inquire into my narrative beginnings. Interspersed within this metaphorical and physical space are poems and images which have been collected and displayed. An *italicized* font is employed for my recollections as a young elementary student attending school in Canada. The same font is used to refer to my memories as an elementary school teacher in Canada. It is adopted as well, to convey the tug of more recent memories as a graduate student. While these reminiscences are story fragments broken off from other narratives, there is one moment which I share and represent within a stylized box to give a sense of the “rupture of some of the containers in which I had lived” (Greene, 1995, p. 116). Minh-ha (1989) elegantly picks up on the paradoxical nature of stories and notes, “Each story is at once a fragment and a whole; a whole within a whole. And the same story has always been changing, for things which do not shift and grow cannot continue to circulate” (p. 123). Bearing this in mind, I know that these stories may not necessarily hold the same meaning for me in the far future as they do now and what is more, that this incertitude is alright.

⁸ While I employ the metaphor of a scrapbook for my narrative beginnings, I make a shift to thinking with the metaphorical idea of collage when thinking alongside the stories of co-participants (who I also refer to as research friends and co-learners). Within this scrapbook and later collage, I move between additional metaphors as a means of expressing myself in different ways hoping for deeper reflexivity and multivocality.

Chapter One: An Autobiographical Turn to my Narrative Beginnings

Canadian Eh? Who's that Girl?

The scrapbook lays heavy in my lap. It is a tangible reminder to me of the different times in my life where my stories to live by⁹ (Clandinin et al. 2006), those complex narratives dealing with identity struck discordant tones in how I view(ed) myself. Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2011) carefully convey “stories to live by attend to the historical, the temporal, the contextual, and the relational. Stories to live by interconnect teachers’ personal practical knowledge¹⁰ with their professional knowledge contexts” (p. 347). In childhood as a student and then later in adulthood as a teacher, my understandings of my lived multiplicities had bumped up and/or came in tension with other people’s understandings of what it means to be a South Asian female living in Canada. This tension, I had lived (and continue to live) in my relationships with other South Asian females and consequently, was (is) not something novel. Some researchers note the gender specific roles Indian daughters are expected to uphold are in part because they are perceived as the keepers of Indian ethnic and cultural identity (Dasgupta, 1998a, 1998b, 2007; Guzder & Krishna, 1991; Handa, 2002; Javaid, Jabeen, & Omer, 2012; Raghuram, 2003). Dasgupta (1988a) contends, “Fears of cultural obliteration by "Americanization" and exogamy have played a large role in imposing such constructions on the female gender role” (p. 957). Substitute the term, ‘Americanization’ with the broader notion of ‘Westernization’ and there is even more

⁹ These are stories which Clandinin et al. (2006) suggest, “are multiple, fluid, and shifting, continuously composed and recomposed in the moment to moment living alongside children, families, administrators and others both on and off the school landscape” (p. 9).

¹⁰ Connelly and Clandinin (1988) suggest that personal practical knowledge stems from reconstructions of past experiences and future aims so to handle present events. This fluid construct is dependent on any given context.

research that provides weight to this contention (see: Ali, 2004; Ghuman, 2000; Handa, 2002; Mani, 2003; Pandurang, 2003; Rajiva, 2006). Handa (2002) observed, “Indian women became synonymous with the characteristics of innocence, spirituality, and purity and were also positioned as the moral guardians and keepers of a particular brand of Indian culture” (p. 38). Other researchers have remarked on the preferential treatment given by parents to their sons (Ghosh & Guzder, 2011; Gill & Mitra-Kahn, 2009; Mitra, 2014). However, the complexity of this issue cannot be impressed as a recipe of accepted cultural norms for ‘the’ South Asian. Purewal (2003) points to the fallacy in such thinking and asserts, “In the case of South Asian women’s reproductive rights, one cannot begin to address the complexities of women’s experiences without first moving beyond a narrow view of culture as the defining factor in their lives” (p. 138). Other researchers shed light on how South Asian females can be challenged within their families based on certain prescribed notions of gender roles (Brown, 2006; Kurien, 1999; Mehta, 2009; Purkayastha, 2005), sexuality (Badrudjoja, 2011; Khan, 1998), and outside of their homes, can be stereotypically viewed as being unable to construct lesbian or bisexual identities or lifestyles (Badrudjoja, 2011; Kawale, 2003).

Exacerbating the identity-making process, Ghuman (2000) indicates that while Western schools uphold (at least officially) the tenets of gender equality and equal opportunity, parents can perceive schools as “challeng[ing] the values of the home” (p. 306). A consequence of this he argues is that South Asian girls tend to be disproportionately identified as dealing with psychosomatic illnesses than their white peers. In one study, the value laden concept of honour was found to be a determining factor in whether parents would permit their daughters to acquire higher education (Dale, Shaheen, Kalra, & Fieldhouse, 2002). While other studies (Chanderbhan-Forde (2010); Maiter & George, 2003), indicate South Asian mothers hold strong

opinions about how education can assist their children. In this narrative inquiry, I learned that both mothers, Vam and Barb held affirmational plotlines of how education could help their children in the present and in the future. Alongside their daughters, Deepika and Katrina, both mothers co-shaped forward-looking stories in which they could work towards an enlivened sense of imagination (Sarbin, 2004).

Surveying the literature once more, from the perspective of those charged with educating students, troublingly, Connolly (2000) observed firsthand how some teachers can negatively perceive young South Asian girls. Ghosh and Guzder (2011) discuss tensions by Canadian South Asian students as they negotiate worlds¹¹ of home and school.

Although the majority of students indicate good relations with their parents, it is evident that they do not tell their parents much of what is going on either in school or in their lives. Children have imbibed the cultural concept of “saving face” and values of family and collectivism which make them careful about going up against their parents openly due to an increased sense of stigma. (p. 22)

The scholarly writings and other works¹² I encountered prior to coming alongside co-participants, Anne, Barb, Vam, Katrina, and Deepika, served to buttress my thinking that the experiences of South Asians, in particular, those of South Asian females, are multilayered, multifarious, infinitely intricate. Recognizing that South Asians are Canada’s largest visible

¹¹ Here, I am drawing upon Lugones’s (1987) understanding of worlds whereby:

A “world” in my sense may be an actual society given its dominant culture's description and construction of life, including a construction of the relationships of production, of gender, race, etc. But a “world” can also be such a society given a non-dominant construction, or it can be such a society or a society given an idiosyncratic construction. (p. 10).

¹² The physical document of a dissertation permits for a certain amount of space and therefore, throughout the document, I attempted to provide selected offerings (as within a scrapbook and later, a collage) of experiences of what I was learning, am learning, and am aspiring to learn alongside research friends (Anne, a teacher, Barb and Vam, two mothers, and Deepika and Katrina, the two girls who joined me in this inquiry).



Hello . . . My Name Is . . .

Longing for
it not to
happen.

ONE MORE TIME

And what's your name?

Wrinkled nose puzzled
eyes, I must repeat.

Spelling not helpful.

Nationality then requested

to excuse the
unintended butchery

Comparing my
identity to objects
and places for the
sake of memory.

Next, considered
interesting, different

and sometimes *pretty*.

Last name not
attempted.

Too difficult, not
necessary (Szepesi,
2001, p. 35)



minority group (Hudon, 2016; Morency, Malenfant & MacIsaac, 2017), and predicted to grow.

I began to truly understand that Indo- Canadian female students may arrive in schools

embodying complex notions of culture and identity (Ghosh, 2000; Kurien, 1999; Ragoonaden, 2010) that shape *who they are* and *who they wish to be*. South Asian girls and their families live in overlapping familial, cultural, and institutional narratives amidst others.

The Other Canadian

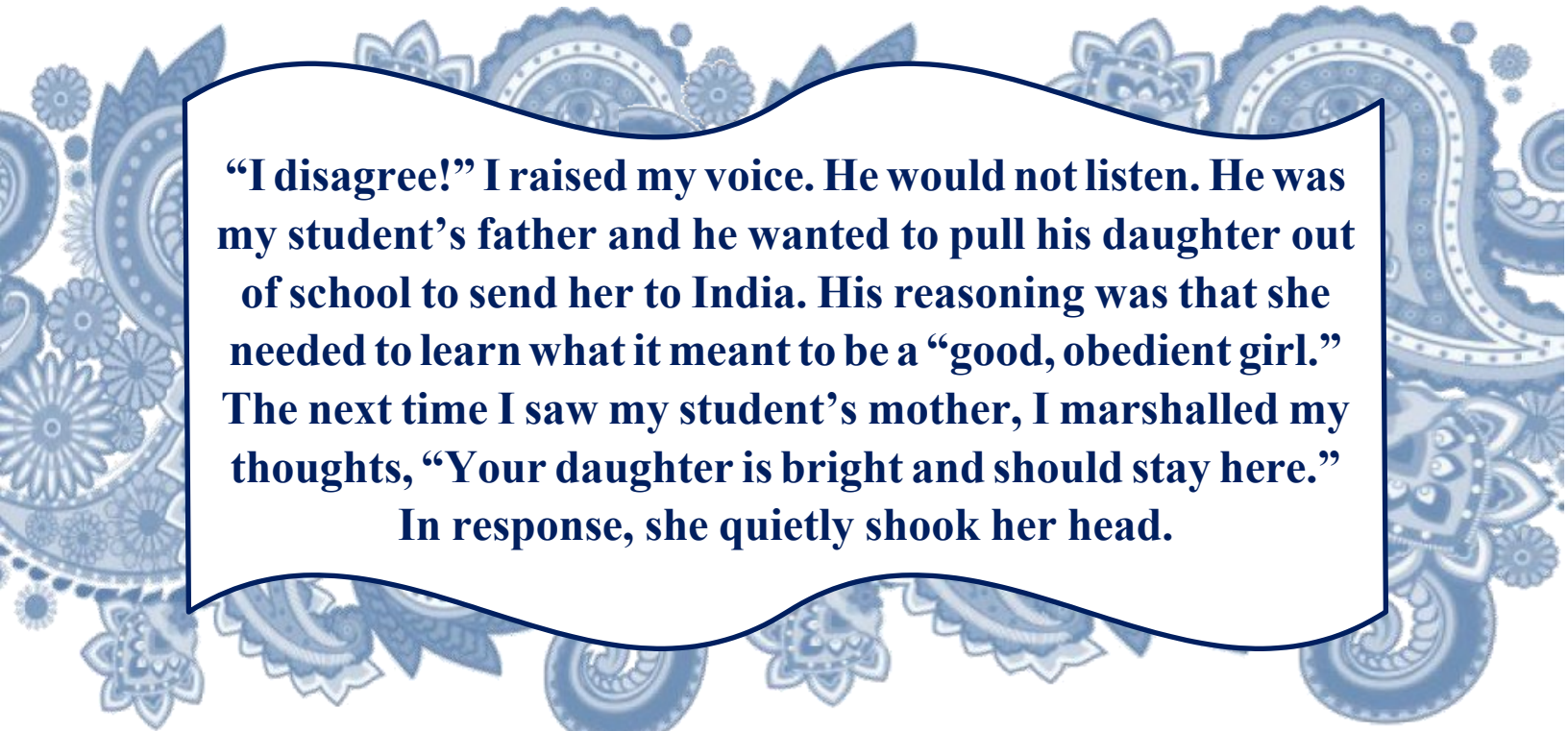
As a child and a youth, my name had been the albatross that hung heavy about my neck (Menon, 2015; Saleh, Menon, & Kubota, 2018). It weighed me down and added to the innate differentness of who I was in relation to my peers. It was an indelible reminder, if I needed one, of how I was perceived as *not* Canadian by some. A Canadian would not have such an odd name. Szepesi (2001) writes of her Canadian identity being subverted because of her name's Hungarian origins. Her poem permits me to express some of the dissonance that I felt in people hearing or attempting to say my name for the first time. Her words recall the feelings of uncertainty I continue to feel around my birth given name. Slightly sardonic tone aside, Szepesi's poetry scratches at a familiar itch, one, that continues to pester me even now. Many times, I have been asked THE QUESTION: "Where do you come from?" It is a query which simultaneously serves to dishearten me and dispute my identity as a Canadian. I am reminded of Shadd's (2001) description of how this type of scenario often plays out with the questioner, who unsatisfied with the response of "I'm Canadian" initiates an interrogation with the aim of uncovering *the truth* about one's genealogy. A self-identified, fifth generation Black Canadian, Shadd comments:

So you see why a seemingly innocent question like "Where are you really from?" evokes a very strong response in me. By asking it, you are unintentionally denying me what is rightfully mine—birthright, my heritage, and my long-standing place in the Canadian mosaic. (p. 15)

Cognizant of a need to move beyond a static characterization of identity, which did not honour the multiplicity to be found in the label of Canadian, I desired for a broader definition, one that shifted tolerance or mere acceptance to respect for the diversity we each represent. I searched, with very little success, for it first in the many books I read as a child, the TV shows and movies I watched as a youth, and then later as an adult, having not found what I looked for, I attempted to instill it in my teaching practices. And later still, when I undertook my first set of graduate courses at the master's level and then progressed into a doctoral program, the all-encompassing notion of identity I wished for continued to elude me. I found myself wondering if as an adult I was having extraordinary difficulties reconciling what I was seeing, hearing, and living in terms of what it means to be a Canadian, never mind a South Asian female Canadian (Malhi, Boon, & Rogers, 2009), how much more challenging had it been for some of the young students *to be* Canadian. Canadian researchers, Ghosh and Guzder (2011) underscore this concern: "In school, experiences of children of South Asian background being constructed as the Other greatly affects their identities as well as their affiliation to the host culture and has an impact on their mental well being" (p. 14). Guzder (2011) maintains that "dress codes, religious symbols, and forced marriage" (p. 112) are bicultural issues of concern for Quebec society. Shariff's (2008) work with South Asian youth highlights the tensions involved in identity-making within Canada. Others indicate the experiences and challenges of South Asians living within the country can differ substantially between generations whereby "accommodations achieved by one generation may well not serve the next generation" (Brown, 2006). Certainly, the Canadian mosaic I had heard so much about while growing up, had lost some of its glitter and charm under my jaundiced eye, whereas the chips and cracks it had garnered over the years, stood out rather glaringly.

Khayatt (2001) writes, “Rigid definitions of race and ethnicity, which do not account for the fluidity of the categories, are not useful . . . They fail to respect individual identities or to take into account lived experiences” (p. 84). Her words recall me to my days as an elementary teacher and the scrapbook I hold beckons me yet again to look, see, and learn anew. The cover is tattered and feels rough against my skin as I carefully flip through the stiff pages until I come to a fairly recent picture. I am standing in the midst of a group of Grade Six girls. I am their teacher and the girls surround me, the smiles playing about their lips are close to echoing the one I wear. We are happy in that moment, but as I stare with a mingling of nostalgia and uncertainty, it is another Grade Six class I taught which comes to mind . . .

Good Girls Do...Good Girls Don't



“I disagree!” I raised my voice. He would not listen. He was my student’s father and he wanted to pull his daughter out of school to send her to India. His reasoning was that she needed to learn what it meant to be a “good, obedient girl.” The next time I saw my student’s mother, I marshalled my thoughts, “Your daughter is bright and should stay here.” In response, she quietly shook her head.

Revisiting the past, I remember how during the first few months of that year, I found

myself drawn to one particular young girl in my class. Jyoti¹³ was not the Indian girl who was stereotypically portrayed on TV, in books or for that matter, within some of the educational worlds I had traversed. That is, she was neither subdued nor reticent...

Vivacious, Jyoti had a spark to her and when we talked, I appreciated her sharp wit and quick rejoinders. In this respect, she could be at times impudent, though she had the talent to pull off her special brand of cheekiness with the most charming of smiles. Small in stature, with light brown hair often twisted in a haphazard braid and bright brown inquisitive eyes, Jyoti was a joy to spend time with. The girl I knew in my Grade Six classroom was bright, articulate, and possessed a mischievous sense of humour. Within what I perceived was a safe space, I believed she felt comfortable enough to enact a plotline which cast her as a strong female student. Unlike some other students, Jyoti had no difficulty asserting her opinion when it differed from her peers. She¹⁴ was a natural leader, often taking charge when students worked in cooperative groups, vying for lead roles in the dramatic plays we put on, and volunteering to read aloud first whenever the occasion arose.

Jyoti related to me stories of her family and because I had taught her older sister a few years back, I discovered that I easily fell into the rhythms of her narrations. We had not been more than a few months into the school year, when Jyoti walked into class rather downcast and informed me that she would be leaving our class. I thought at first she was joking but another look at her face convinced me this was no joke. My disbelief was so great that I suggested to Jyoti that she had misunderstood her father's words and had proposed that he instead meant she

¹³ Jyoti is a pseudonym. Translated into English, the name means bright flame.

¹⁴ This particular story fragment drawn forth, has been shared in a different iteration in an earlier paper (Saleh, Menon, & Clandinin, 2014).

would be visiting India and not relocating there. To this day, I can still see her upturned face looking at me with such sad knowing eyes. It was as if the roles had been reversed and I was not the teacher but instead her student who did not seem to appreciate the gravity of the situation. Nonetheless, I was not prepared to take this decision as final and talked to the principal at my earliest opportunity. His comments were not helpful. He disclosed to me that, “This is the way it is Miss Menon. A father has a right to choose for his daughter.” I pondered his words, weighing them in my mind. I knew his views on education and mine diverged considerably in terms of our personal philosophies of education. I understood from previous discussions, he felt that teachers and students had distinct roles to uphold. Similar to Freire’s (1970/1993) scenario of teaching as banking, he believed that teachers were the experts in their respective subject matter. Stemming from this understanding was the idea that teachers had the duty of depositing knowledge into the minds of students.¹⁵ Ultimately, it was not our job to question the parents’ decision. Yet I couldn’t help but wonder what this principal meant when he said it was a father’s right to choose for his daughter. Was it the mandated curriculum in India, this particular father had chosen for his daughter that the principal was thinking of when he spoke to me? Perhaps but I thought not. Not voiced between us was the recognition that a cultural narrative¹⁶ which devalued Indian females and in the process implicated them as less intelligent than males was still a lived reality for many South Asians (For examples, see: Ali, 2004; Devi, 2003).

Richardson (1997) proposes:

¹⁵ This is an understanding of education which posits a unidirectional flow of information from teacher to students and maintains teachers as experts depositing knowledge into the minds of students. Following this restrictive view, no credence is afforded for reciprocity in knowledge making and knowledge sharing. This is the banking concept of education that Freire (1970/1993) eschewed.

¹⁶ Richardson (1997) drawing upon McClelland, warns that cultural stories “are not simply” stories but are narratives that have real consequences for the fates of individuals, communities, and nations” (p. 32).

cultural stories provide exemplars of lives, heroes, villains, and fools . . . embedded in larger cultural and social frameworks, as well as stories, about home, community, society, and humankind. Morality and cautionary tales instruct the young and control the adult. Stories of one's "people"—as chosen or enslaved, conquerors or victims—as well as stories about one's nation, social class, gender, race, or occupation affect morale, aspirations, and personal life chances. (p. 32)

Her words urge me to contemplate how cultural narratives weave themselves into the very fabric of our lives as students, teachers, and parents. I began to query how these threads steeped in culture, are stitched into the tapestry of the stories we live by. Now thinking about the different personal philosophies of education the principal and I each held, I can see other significant differences in our constructed understandings of curriculum. Early in my teaching career, I had been concerned with the mandated curriculum, in particular, assisting students to achieve the specific learning outcomes as outlined by the Alberta Program of Studies. For the most part, my undergraduate studies had been geared towards an understanding that success for students lay in delivering content material that they could readily digest and then regurgitate. Hands-on learning while advocated with a certain amount of zeal had also been tempered with the recognition that the teacher was ultimately responsible for student learning and success. As such, certain standards had to be in place, so that students could flourish in their roles as students. At the same time, I wanted to be a teacher who would be open to the voices of students and help them reach their fullest potentials. These differing values played out in different and complex ways in my early teaching practice.

Curriculum Making as Learning: The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) explicate that in understanding ourselves in terms of who we are, what we do, and where we are headed, we can imbue our curriculum with meaning.

The process of making sense and meaning of our curriculum, that is, of the narratives of our experience, is both difficult and rewarding. It, too, has a curriculum in that narratives of experience may be studied, reflected on, and articulated in written form. (p. 11)

Below is a piece of poetry¹⁷ I first encountered as an elementary student. The second time I rediscovered the poem was when I was as graduate student in a master's program. I came across it quite by chance when I was online. Reading it as an adult and from the view point of a teacher, I was struck by my younger self's black and white interpretation of the poem whereby I had characterized the teacher as the villain and cast the student as the underdog deserving of championing. With my adult eyes, I understood that I did not want to ever place students in such precarious positions whereby their emerging and creative explorations of their identities are flattened. I also recognized the disparate weights various curriculums can possess and how they can shape our responses to how, why, when, and what it is being taught, learned, and lived in terms of the subject matter evoked within diverse milieus (Schwab, 1973).¹⁸ For instance, the hidden curriculum¹⁹, the null curriculum (Eisner, 1994)²⁰ alongside the mandated curriculum cannot be isolated from one another. The poem captures the strain I felt as a teacher hoping to

¹⁷ Source: <http://commongroundconsulting.org/values/conformity.cfm>

¹⁸ Schwab (1973) elucidated curriculum is formed amongst all of the *interconnecting* commonplaces of learner, teacher, subject matter, and milieu/context, and therefore, it is not made independently of the knower (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

¹⁹ The *hidden curriculum* is a construct which is useful in defining what is not formally taught in schools but what is taken up by students through indirect messages conveyed in school.

²⁰ Eisner (1994) demarked the importance of exploring the *null curriculum*, what is not taught by schools. He further suggested that there are consequences of this kind of curriculum making, noting "what students cannot consider, what they don't process, they are unable to use, have consequences for the kinds of lives they lead" (p. 103).

provide students imaginative spaces to be who they need to be to learn and grow in healthy ways while trying to meet curriculum outcomes and being a 'good teacher' for children and families.

He always wanted to say things. But no one understood.

He always wanted to explain things. But no one cared. So he drew.

Sometimes he would draw and it wasn't anything. He wanted to carve it in stone, or write it in the sky.

He would lie out on the grass, and look up in the sky, and it would only be him, and the sky, and the things inside that needed saying.

And it was after that, that he drew the picture. It was a very beautiful picture. And when it was dark, and his eyes were closed, he could still see it.

And it was all of him, and he loved it.

When he started school, he brought it with him. Not to show anyone, just to have with him like a friend.

It was funny about school. He sat in a square, gray desk. Like all of the other square gray desks. And he thought it should be red.

And his room was a square, gray room. Like all of the other rooms. And it was tight, and close, and stiff.

He hated to hold the pencil and the chalk, with his arms stiff and his feet flat on the floor, stiff, with the teacher watching and watching.

And then he had to write the numbers. And they weren't anything.

They were worse than the letters that could be something when you put them all together. And the numbers were tight and square, and he hated the whole thing.

He said he didn't like them. She said it didn't matter. After that they drew.

And he drew all yellow, and it was the way he felt about morning, and it was beautiful.

The teacher came again and smiled down at him. What's this, she asked?

Why don't you draw something like your friend's drawing? Isn't that beautiful? It was all questions.

After that his mother bought him a tie.

And he always drew airplanes and rocket ships like everyone else.

And he threw the old picture away.

And when he lay out alone looking at the sky, it was big, and blue, and all of everything.

But he wasn't anymore. He was square inside, and gray, and his hands were stiff and he was like everyone else. And that thing inside

that needed saying, it didn't need saying anymore. It had stopped pushing. It was crushed. Stiff. Like everything else.

Ayer (2006) proposed:

Teachers might not change the world in dramatic fashion, but we certainly change the people who will change the world. This single spark could be that long-anticipated catalyst, that historic meeting of flint and stone that releases the flames of change. (p. 17)

The type of good teacher I wanted to be, the story of good teacher that I wished to live was one that could provide the setting—intellectually, emotionally, and practically—where such a fire could blaze. I did not wish to be the teacher who would stunt or ignore the needs of the students she worked alongside. Yet, I admit that I am uncertain as to how successful I was in maintaining that very fine balance between being the teacher who could negotiate the program of studies she was bound by while maintaining enough of a rapport with her class so that they would feel safe enough to learn, safe enough to be who they wished to be with one another and with themselves.

As I became more at ease in my role as a teacher, my experiences with students reinforced the importance of coming to know students as individuals leading diverse lives. Clandinin and Connelly's (1992) early work on curriculum pointed to the practical knowledge teachers possess. In doing so, they drew attention to a view of curriculum as a course of life: "as an account of teachers' and students' lives together in schools and classrooms" (p. 392). This understanding differs substantively from a straightforward conceptualization of a curriculum being a set body of knowledge that must be taught. Ascribing value to both teachers' practical knowledge and their roles as curriculum makers (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992), was not necessarily the conceptualization of curriculum that I would have articulated when I first embarked on my teaching career but over time, it became one which I lived as my pedagogical concerns were molded by the students I worked with and my growing understandings of education. I resonated with Eisner's (1982) contention, "Learning can diminish the mind as well as expand it" (p. 13).

Returning to the words spoken by the principal, “*This is the way it is Miss Menon. A father has a right to choose for his daughter,*” I wonder whether he felt that the curriculum that mattered the most was not so much a mandated one legitimized by formal legal constructs, but a curriculum of a different kind whose source of legitimacy stems from its deep cultural roots—the very same ones inked on the pages of a cultural narrative so old (Gill & Mitra-Khan, 2009; Guzder & Krishna, 1991) that its insidious qualities may go unnoticed (Dasgupta, 2007; Goel, 2005; Guzder, 2011; Kallivayalil, 2010; Sindhu, 2014). Clandinin et al. (2006), in engaging in narrative inquiry at Ravine Elementary School, speak of their conversations with the principal of the school, Jeanette. As these conversations unfolded over and across time, Jeanette shared story fragments about a South Asian female student named Amit. She told the research team that

she watched Amit struggle in the regular program . . . and how she arranged, with the parents’ consent, for Amit to be tested as a possible candidate for a special learning class placement. When Amit had been assessed as having difficulties with non-verbal learning, Jeanette arranged . . . for Amit to be placed in the Year 3/4 learning strategies classroom.

(p. 97)

During a celebration of learning event, the principal disclosed to the researchers how shocked she was to hear that the parents did not appreciate the progress that their daughter, Amit had made in the classroom. Jeanette further revealed the couple who was expecting a baby boy at the time, had made the decision to send Amit to India to live with her grandparents where upon she would marry at age 13. During this meeting, “the parents let Jeanette know they recognized Amit would always struggle with school” (Clandinin et al., 2006. p. 97). Likewise, Jyoti’s father wished for a different type of schooling experience for his daughter, one in which certain values upheld by North American cultural narratives (e.g. all students have the right to equal access to

education) took a back seat to a living curriculum which encompassed particular notions of what it means to be a good Indian girl. Similar to Jeanette, my story to live by, as a teacher “who tried to shape a place to support children in their learning, was interrupted” (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 110). Inquiring into this moment I can only speculate that the principal and I differed drastically on our thinking of curriculum making. My inclination lay in an altogether different direction whereby the lived curriculum and the mandated curriculum were not so diametrically opposed to one another. As a teacher, my stories of school did not include plotlines that effectively defined girls along definitive lines of obedience and intellect.

In the week leading up to Jyoti's move to India, I had several heated conversations with her father and one dismaying one with her mother. Jyoti's father wanted to remove his daughter from the Grade Six classroom community and send her to India to study. When I asked him why he was choosing to uproot his daughter and remove her from her two older sisters, her younger brother, and her mother, he informed me that Jyoti was disobedient. As I listened with growing consternation, I learned that his little vivacious girl wasn't learning what she needed to learn here in Canada. I asked what he meant by this and there wasn't any hesitation on his part when he replied, that Jyoti needed to learn what it meant to be a “Good Girl,” one who wouldn't talk back. It didn't matter that she would be leaving the only home she knew for a foreign land. It didn't matter that she would be placed in a boarding school where she knew nobody. Vehemently opposed to the idea, I argued strenuously against his decision but to no avail. I understood moving to a new school away from her homeland, her family, and friends would alter the spaces Jyoti found herself in, and I wondered how her lived and imagined selves would be shaped by the different worlds of home and school she would now occupy.

I hear a rhythmic rapping sound and glance down to see that my fingers have been nervously beating a tattoo on the opened page of the scrapbook and I am once more attuned to my surroundings even as the memory plays out in my head like a film of old, scratchy and not smooth. This is not the first time I have talked or written about this particular moment. In some respect, though it is a spectre of the past, it haunts me now in the present, nudging me to recognize that there is a need to deliberately attend to events in different ways so to foster different understandings. Greene (1995) makes the distinction between seeing small and seeing big. Within school contexts, seeing small is concerned with the process of reduction and statistics, thinking along lines of institutional narratives rather than viewing people as individuals living lives of complexity. Ideally, a complementary shift in perspective from big to small and small to big, with a focus on people as individuals, would enable one (me/you) to gain a deeper, richer experience of people and their lives, their stories to live by. Richardson (1997) echoes a similar sentiment, “Experiences are connected to other experiences and are evaluated in relation to the larger whole” (p. 30). Had I in effect, rendered myself Cyclops-eyed, constricting my field of vision to a dominant story of school which spoke of diverse classrooms as sites for equal opportunities? Perhaps, I had not re-focussed my gaze often enough so that I could see big as well...so that I could attend more fully to the multiplicity of stories being lived out in my classroom, school, and out of school places such as in students’ homes and communities (Clandinin et al., 2006). My self-identified perspective as a South Asian female raised and educated in Canada had not inoculated me from making problematic assumptions in how I conceptualized curriculum alongside students. I had been immersed in a common Canadian story of school which bespoke of equality and safety wherein students, irrespective of gender, were encouraged to treat one another with equality and with the expectation of being treated in a

similarly equal fashion. The dominant story of school (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) was that within the school, teachers were supposed to create safe spaces for *all* students. Caught in this encompassing story, I was not as wakeful as I could have been to how intensely certain cultural and familial narratives could work upon people. This point is highlighted by Ghuman (2000) who contends Western schools “encourage the development of personal autonomy, critical thinking and a generally questioning attitude to things, whereas South Asian homes try to harmonise the family’s interests with that of its individual members” (p. 306). He further speculates that second and third generation South Asians in the West encounter problems in identity formation (along personal and social dimensions) due to difficulties in the dual socialization processes of home and school.

Returning to the events surrounding Jyoti’s leaving, I am reminded of the unique perspectives I as a teacher held, and the ones held by the principal. The principal, through the unfolding of several conversations with me had revealed a different story of school. His story of school did not appear to connect to the one I had been introduced to when I was a young student and then later as an adult in her education classes. I held onto this dominant story of school little realizing the danger I was courting in not being as attentive to *other* stories (Adichie, 2009) being lived out by those around me. I began to question, what happens when only one voice is heard over others? What is the impact of such hegemonic handicapping? Adichie (2009) advises vigilance in how we think of people in relation to us, “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.”

Now as I uneasily ponder how I might have unintentionally silenced the stories some students and their families lived by and embodied, I find my fingers, surprisingly, flipping back

the pages of the scrapbook and rapidly closing in on the beginning of the bulky artifact. For myriad reasons, these are pages which I prefer to remain unread and the evidence of this disquiet is found in the fine layer of dust that coats them. Nonetheless this story fragment of me as a teacher tugs me further back in time to when I was a young elementary student . . .

“What did it feel like to live in the jungle with the elephants?”

This is a memory that I have revisited several times. When I was a child, this memory caused me personal distress. Later, as I gained distance from it, I felt a gathering sense of disquiet. And more recently, this memory acts as a reminder to me to be wary of making assumptions and imposing monolithic plotlines upon a person.

I looked down at my hands and bit back a sigh. Another wish down the drain. Nothing had changed. Brown skin, brown eyes and brown hair—I was still the lone South Asian girl in my class. A sinking sense of shame settled in the pit of my stomach. No matter how I wished it, I couldn't simply wash the brown off my skin. My teacher's bushy mustache twitched as he rambled on. I had trouble concentrating. Abruptly my head snapped up. He wanted us to discuss where we had been born. I watched and listened as one student after another spoke. It was no real surprise to discover that most of them had been born in Alberta. Then, suddenly, it was my turn! My lips parted only to close when my teacher unexpectedly interrupted my unspoken words. Perhaps I wouldn't have to speak after all. Secretly, I was overjoyed. I was a quiet kid and disliked being in the spotlight. However, my elation was short lived as his words registered. “What did it feel like to live in the jungle with the elephants?” A dark fog descended upon me, clouding my vision. Elephants? Jungle? My thoughts drifted back to a few years earlier. In Grade Two, I had travelled with my mother and younger brother to India. There in my mother's

hometown, we had attended a temple. It was a temple that we went to so that we could be blessed by Ganapathi. In the incense shrouded sacredness, I had watched with wonder as elephants every bit as majestic as I had been told, lazily ambled by. Maybe my teacher knew about Ganapathi? And, then I shook my head inwardly. There was no way he knew about Ganapathi. A buzzing tugged at the edges of my consciousness and abruptly, I recalled myself. Yes, I had even seen an elephant at the zoo here. However, I had never lived in a jungle near these ponderous pachyderms. I had been born in Scarborough, Ontario. What was my teacher talking about?

A Mango for an Elephant Deity

There's a story that my mother told me. It's of Ganapathi²¹, the Hindu deity who is beloved by many and perhaps, recognized best by most outside of the faith for his elephant head which rests upon his shoulders. So, the story goes something like this...

Ganapathy and his brother, Subramanyan were like many other siblings—they played, they fought, and sometimes they were friendly rivals. The two boys had pets who were their close companions. Ganapathi's pet was a tiny mouse (who still accompanies him to this day), and Subramanyan's pet was a large peacock (who still accompanies him to this day). As it happened, one fine morning, their father and mother brought the boys together to share that they had been gifted a mango by Lord Brahma. Now, this wasn't any ordinary mango. This mango, as anyone with eyes could see, and the boys had eyes, was a mango of magnificent caliber. Plump with red and orange shades this mango looked like a tantalizing morsel to eat. Gazes glued to the mango their mother, Parvathi carried, they listened eagerly as their father announced that the mango

²¹ Ganapathi (or Ganapathy or Ganesh) is a Hindu deity known amongst many other fine qualities, for being the remover of obstacles. He is the one to pray to when faced with challenges in one's life. More of Ganapathi will be shared in the narrative account entitled, *Coming to Know Vam Alongside Deepika*.

was a special one indeed, for anyone who possessed it would be gifted with knowledge. Unfortunately, for the boys, their father had decreed only one son would be permitted to have the mango. Shiva outlined a competition for the boys. Whichever son was able to circle the world three times the fastest would be given the mango. Now, Subramanyan cast a triumphant glance at his brother. Subramanyan was quick and light on his feet. He had his trusty peacock who too was quick and light on his feet and who also had a pair of wings. Ganapathi, recognizing the glance for what it was, became worried. He wanted to earn the prize of the mango. But how could he go about it? He was not as swift of foot as his sibling. Also, his mouse who took that moment to pop his head out of Ganapathi's pocket to give him a reassuring but perhaps, misdirected squeak, was small and would not be much help in the way of transport.

Both parents gave their children a nod and sent them on their way. Subramanyan not wasting anytime took off on his splendid peacock. He had this in the bag. Quick as well as divine with the help of his trusty peacock, Subramanyan circled the world, once and then twice. Seeing that his brother hadn't still moved, he gave a happy laugh. Soon, the delicious mango of knowledge would be his. He could almost taste it. Mouth-watering, he gave a jaunty wave to his sibling as he began his third circle around the world. Ganapathi smiled distractedly in return and went back to his parents. "What are you doing?" his mother, Parvathi asked with maternal concern. "Don't you want try to win this mango of knowledge? Goodness knows, both of you boys are in serious need of some wisdom." Shiva crossed his arms, a frown beginning to form on his lips. Ganapathi hastened to reply, "Please wait." Thus, saying so, he walked around his parents, once, then twice, and then thrice. "What matter of nonsense is this, son?" Shiva asked brusquely. Just then, with a grin so wide that it set the assemble of servants' hearts aflutter, Subramanyan dashed into the room astride his peacock. Jumping down from the preening fowl,

he sauntered over to where his parents and brother stood. "I have won this race and the mango is mine. My esteemed brother hasn't even bothered to try." Shiva, shooting a glowering glance at Ganapathi, nodded. "Yes, this is true." Stretching out his handsome trunk, (remember Ganapathi has the head of an elephant), he snatched the juicy mango from his mother's hands. "The impertinence!" Shiva thundered. "No, Father, you and my esteemed brother are mistaken. I have won the race for both you and Mother are everything to me. You are my world. That is why I circled you and Mother not once, not twice, but thrice!" Ganapathi explained a tad nervously as his father was known for his short temper. Seeing the dawning look of understanding on his brother's face and his mother beaming with pride, Ganapathy multitasked and trumpeted his joy at being the victor all the while judicially balancing the mango. Shiva's look of consternation gave away to a look of fatherly respect. Several adoring servants sidled up to Ganapathy, for he, too, was charming in an elephant-y and godly sort of way even as several others went over to his brother to comfort him.

The Elephant in the Room

The tale is not exactly as my mother told but the essence is, and I hope the sense of humour and familial ties that it evoked for me is present in this sharing as well. Following Ganapathi's lead, when I was younger, I would skip around my mother and she would understand why. It was a message that we could share quickly and without the need for any decoding. As I figuratively lay this memory of my teacher's question alongside my recollections of my mother's retelling of this particular story of Ganapathi and Subramanyan, I understand that my teacher had (un)consciously placed me in a category of *Other*. As a child, I had been impressionable, and his question had seared me. He did not know of my familial and faith-based stories around elephants. In asking his question, he used his power as an adult, a teacher figure to

mute my own. In this moment my familial world of home and my school world could not have been further apart. Handa (2003) reminisces with pain,

[the] years that sometimes still hover within me are about not being Canadian enough, not being Indian enough, not being white enough . . . not being. Not being the right kind of daughter, not the right clothes or hair or skin (p. 2).

Her words find an echoing ache within me. I feel clumsy as I revisit those early childhood landscapes of mine, moving uneasily within those in-between worlds where my lives of school and home collided. In her famous TED Talk, Adichie (2009) shared her experiences of how different stories held sway over her. She noted, “What this demonstrates, I think, is how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story, particularly as children.” She was speaking about the literature she had grown up with, the children’s literature which dwelled only within certain experiences of certain people and excluded others and by default, other experiences. Yet her words remind me that this childhood memory of mine really did shift my perceptions of my younger self and reverberated into my adulthood. Being excluded from answering the question of where I was born and instead prompted to speak about having lived alongside elephants in the jungle, silenced the many stories of myself I held and, instead conjured up and reinforced negative stories of my people and heritage. I wonder if I fell into a category of a recognizable form for my teacher. I wondered if in his mind, if being a brown person or as he chose to name me, “*an East Indian*” equated with a collection of immutable traits and/or qualities? Being East Indian, I must have lived in the jungle. Being East Indian, I must have lived close by to the elephants. Had my elementary teacher only been able to understand me in relation to a certain category of difference that he found acceptable?

I will never know for sure. All I knew then was that his question bubbled swiftly to his lips and there had been such an assurance to his spoken words.

(Re)Negotiating Different Worlds and (Re)Negotiating Identities

In my school world, a ‘Good Girl’ was one who was obedient and did as her teacher requested. Yet, I was in a predicament, not knowing how to collapse the stories my teacher had constructed of me even before I had given a response. Once more, I am drawn close to Khayatt (2001) who hints at the blurred outlines of identity when labels are employed to fix people to a certain state of being, a host of experiences and plethora of actions completed and in the process of becoming. She explicates, “The question becomes not who we are, but who we are perceived to be” (p. 79). Thinking on this memory, I can see how as a child I was confused about how to negotiate the demands placed on me by the two worlds. The animated constructions of my identity in one world did not seem to mesh well with the animated constructions of my identity in the other world I concurrently lived in. What’s more, as a child my resources to do so were limited as adults were the people I was most dependent on (e.g. my parents and my teachers) and I did not have the same sense of agency I now possess in adulthood nor the same kind of adult understandings which could have held me in good stead if I had them when I was a young child. Perhaps it was not surprising that my ability to bridge the two worlds (Lugones, 1987) of school and home had been severely tested.

My thoughts return to Jyoti. Had she also struggled with these differing notions of girlhood? How could she not have? She interacted with other children who shared similar cultural backgrounds. Jyoti had parents who immigrated to Canada from India. Additionally, Jyoti was exposed to television on a daily basis, read books which were typical fare of a Western canon,

and had a teacher who, though she identified herself as South Asian, upheld a different view of education²² than her parents. How had Joyti's familial world of the 'Good Girl' shaped her understanding of the 'Good Girl' in her school world? Was it markedly different from how I had constructed my two worlds of home and school when I was young? If this particular storyline of the good girl had been animated at home, how had she negotiated the space between these two distinct worlds? Unintentionally, had I as her teacher, made it even more challenging for Joyti to find a version of the 'Good Girl' which she could value, one of which she could safely live?

Dewey (1938/1997) helps me recollect that some experiences can be deemed as mis-educative and conversely, other experiences as educative. Speaking on the former, Dewey affirmed "any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience" (p. 25). Joyti's father did not seem to believe that an educative experience for his daughter encompassed a learning which positioned Joyti as a school leader. Yet, I understood too that there were many stories at work here. Joyti was a loved child, I had no doubt. However, the plotlines that her father appeared to uphold were not ones which I think Joyti was living and attempting to imagine in her school and classroom worlds.

As I shift within and between these worlds (Lugones, 1987) of school and family in my complimentary and at times, conflicting multiplicities of my identities as a student, as a teacher, and now as a doctoral student, I recognize how profoundly we are shaped by our experiences. Our experiences are undoubtedly personal as they are highly contextual. As a

²² Not only did I draw upon a specific understanding of *curriculum as lived* (Aoki, 1993) where caring is integral (Noddings, 2005), I also endeavoured to be a culturally competent teacher. A *culturally competent* educator (Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2012) has a disposition (Leonard & Leonard, 2006) that broadly, values diversity (Greene, 1993), recognizes the complexities of cultural relations between and within groups (Majzub, Hashim, & Johannes, 2011; Rogers-Sirin & Sirin, 2009; Sirin, Rogers-Sirin, & Collins, 2010; Yuen & Grossman, 2009), and effectively uses cultural knowledge to inform pedagogy (DeJaeghere & Zhang, 2008; Diller & Moule, 2005; Fernandez, 2006).

beginning I had learned from my classes that equality and respect are values that are lauded as an integral part of our democratic education system. This is what I was taught in my teacher education program and what I thought to enact in my classrooms as an elementary teacher. I recognized, these values shape to varying degrees the well-accepted stories of school in this part of the world. At the same time, as the number of years I accrued as an educator accumulated, I became increasingly aware of my fiduciary obligations to the students in my care.

The Alberta Teachers' Association (2014) defines this fiduciary relationship in terms of the principle of *in loco parentis*:

The concept that the teacher is acting *in loco parentis* has gradually evolved through legal precedent. This means that the teacher stands, in relation to the student, in the position of a caring parent, as an unofficial guardian. This concept not only allows the teacher some of the privileges of a parent but also brings with it added responsibilities for the protection of pupils. Thus, a teacher could be liable for damage caused to a pupil where the teacher's conduct falls below the standard of care commonly accepted as being reasonable in a parent-child relationship. A teacher may even have to meet a higher standard of care where special knowledge makes the teacher aware of dangers that the normal parent might not appreciate. ("The Principle of *in Loco Parentis*," para. 1)

These lines, especially the last one helps me better understand myself as a teacher who wished to be in ethical relationship with the children in her class and their families. I recognized that I had the weighty responsibility of trying to create spaces in which the children within my care could feel safe and in community with their teacher and their peers. I wanted to help co-shape spaces where children could thrive in ways which built their confidence in healthy ways.

While I grappled with my *dharma*²³ as an Indian female, the moral and ethical obligations I felt as a teacher were less ambiguous. This sense of responsibility was indelibly interwoven in my construct of myself as a South Asian educator. Yet, thinking upon these storied moments, I wonder what image of me was being understood by Jyoti's father, the principal of the school, and Jyoti, herself.

Desai (2001) relates how even amongst friends, "differentness" takes on new meanings. She elucidates:

I am a South Asian human being, but there appears to be some difficulty or reluctance on their part to accept me as such, to try and understand what being South Asian is to me and then to try and come to grips with that reality rather than attempting to make themselves comfortable with some sanitized image. (p. 242)

These words are powerful and remind me of overlapping memories such as my younger experiences as a child seeking safe, belonging spaces and then later how confused and distraught I had felt in that moment when Jyoti's father spoke with me. Now I understand that my feelings of frustration and anxiety for Jyoti might have stemmed in part from not being comfortable with what being a South Asian meant to Jyoti and her family. I had been vested in the 'common sense' stories of school that upheld democratic ideals of girls and boys proclaimed as equally deserving of respect. At the same time, I had wanted to distance myself from own girlhood experiences. Now I wonder, if I had been, as Desai (2001) suggested, comforting myself with sanitized images of Jyoti? As a South Asian teacher who lived a plotline of being culturally sensitive (Gay, 2002), one who was well-versed in cross-cultural relations, I was bumping up

²³ *Dharma*, in my situation, refers to the Hindu construct of duty and obligation that is simultaneously imposed and embodied by me as an Indian female borne of Hindu parents.

against familial and cultural narratives that I was familiar with and also, found disconcerting alongside some of my students.

Storying my Mother...

As I began to inquire into these autobiographical stories, I additionally pondered what happens when girls who have restrictive plotlines imposed upon them, grow-up to become women and may have children of their own. What are the intergenerational reverberations of embodying and living with monolithic stories? I had not attended to or been fully awake (Greene, 1995) to the extent to which this type of familial curriculum making²⁴ was shaping students' lives. At the same time, I understood that caution was needed so that I did not render other experiences silent. For instance, in research undertaken by Chanderbhan-Forde (2010) in the United States, she found Asian Indian mothers placed a high value on education for their children. Maiter and George (2003) ascertained that South Asian mothers in Canada desired their children to demonstrate: "respect for elders, modesty, humility, hardwork, persistence, perseverance, and having a disciplined life" (p. 420), and their parenting styles involved a deference to culture, religion, and personal experiences. Certainly, in the schools I taught, I met mothers and fathers, families of children who shaped positivity stories to live by alongside one another.

Reconstructing these curricular moments and ongoing wonders, invite me to think about my stories of my mother.²⁵ Adichie (2009) highlights the necessity to look beyond a single way

²⁴ I bumped up against unhealthy plotlines for South Asian girls more than once in my teaching career. At the same time, it is equally important for me to share that I also witnessed healthy stories being lived with South Asian daughters and their families.

²⁵ Coming alongside my mother as an adult, we now share many stories of experience that we had kept silent when I was much younger. My mother has helped me to think about her in her lived multiplicities and the struggles she faced as a young wife and then later as a single mother raising two children on her own.

of viewing a person so that the stereotype becomes less powerful and then credence and value are proffered to a more complex and authentic means of seeing individuals. Adichie would have us open our eyes and our hearts to the multiplicities of stories we each embody. Lugones (1989) makes the distinction of loving perception and arrogant perception.²⁶ In a similar fashion, Adichie's passionate plea for a new way of coming in relation with people captures me even as Lugone's differing notions of perception prompt me to contemplate to what extent I arrogantly perceived my mother. When I was an adolescent, I had not been able to see her in all her wondrous plurality.

I am reminded of Handa (2003) who found that attempts to categorize participants as being either modern or traditional met with dismal failure. Reflecting on this tension, she provided the example of her own mother.

As I begin to describe my mother, however, the cohesive and clear-cut notions of traditional and modern are unable to capture her complexities and contradictions. I have always known my mother to wear a sari²⁷. I have always known my mother to be in paid work, cook the meals, drive a car, clean the house, control her own finances, do the household repairs, and garden. In which category should I place her? (p. 24)

Like Handa, I recognized there was no definitive category where my mother could fit and understood that it was unnecessary for me to try and label her in this type of way. Instead, I think about how my mother made sense of the complexity of the worlds she travelled to and lived within (Lugones, 1987). By making the long journey to Canada to live, had she struggled with

²⁶ As Lugones (1989) conceives it: "Love is seen not as fusion and erasure of difference but as incompatible with them. Love reveals plurality" (p. 3).

²⁷ A *sari* is a South Asian female garment consisting of a bolt of material (ranging from plain to elaborate) that is draped and pleated in an intricate manner over the body. It is paired with a sari blouse.

her new identity as a married woman? By agreeing to her parents' edict to wed a man they had chosen for her, a man much older than her, did my mother feel compelled to keep her own wishes silent or did she feel that her hopes aligned with those of her parents? Was this story, my parents' marriage, a part of another story, a cultural narrative which hindered or flattened choice . . . choice in deciding who they wished to spend their lives with . . . choice in deciding which direction their lives *could* unfold? What happens when happiness is constrained by a lack of choice?

When years later, my father asked my mother for a divorce, my mother blamed herself for failing to be a good wife. She was not alone as members in her family and within the South Asian community did so also. With respect to some South Asian communities, Dasgupta (2007) insightfully asserts "a divorced woman and/or single mother is seen as having failed in the role of wife and mother, regardless of the conduct of her partner" (p. 16). By extension, the children are perceived by some as failing to be good sons and daughters.²⁸ Monolithic and static constructions of South Asian motherhood, as favoured by certain cultural narratives, can work to dehumanize women. It was not until much later my mother began to see that she had been constructed along impoverished plotlines which worked to overwrite her complexity and nuances as a person. Bumping against these narratives, she nevertheless, lived a counterstory (Lindemann Nelson, 1995) to how some individuals chose to story her. Instead of greeting community members' curiosity, accusations of blame, and general unpleasantness with acceptance, my mother chose to speak of her husband's poor decision making and share her experiences as a kind and caring person belying the pejorative labels which enlivened an image of a disrespectful

²⁸ hooks (2000) makes the oft forgotten consideration "that children are violated not only when they are the direct targets of patriarchal violence but as well when they are forced to witness violent acts" (p. 63).

wife.

Now when I metaphorically lay these stories alongside one another, the complexity and tensions my mom surely felt in attempting to bridge the spaces between her familial, cultural, and societal experiences become more visible. As I continue to sit with stories my mother has shared with me and the wonders I continue to hold and ponder, I am drawn to Minh-ha's (2016) interpretation of resonance.

Despite the constant urge to elucidate and illuminate, what unfolds itself in writing with the wounds of our time is, necessarily, the work of *resonance* [original emphasis]—the way different events, both natural and man-made, vibrate across times and places, tune in to one another, and deeply affect our life processes. Telling inflects what is being told... (p. 7)

As I “tune in” to my mother’s stories she has lived and the one’s she has told, I better appreciate how certain events “vibrate across times and places, tune in to one another, and deeply affect our life processes” (Minh-ha, 2016, p. 7).

*Masala*²⁹

Slipping back to these differing memories, bracketed within time and place, affords me a liminal space³⁰ (Heilbrun, 1999) to contemplate not only the differing worlds I encountered and lived as an elementary teacher attempting to meet the diverse needs of students, but additionally,

²⁹ *Masala* refers to a blending of spices to produce a combination of bold flavours—often savory to the palate. In this instance, I choose this term to indicate the tensions of being situated in more than one world, while challenging, can also be potentially liberating.

³⁰ *Liminal spaces*, according to Heilbrun (1999), is experience at the threshold. For Heilbrun, “The word ‘limen’ means ‘threshold,’ and to be in a state of liminality is to be poised upon uncertain ground, to be leaving one condition or country or self and entering upon another” (p. 3).

the worlds of the people who I knew in my life as an elementary student. In reconstructing the worlds of my younger self and the worlds of myself as a teacher—these moments re-visited, provide me with the insight that the different curriculum-making worlds of home and school had come in conflict with one another (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011). Ghosh and Guzder (2011) indicate “ignorance of South Asian religions and culture (especially in schools) in Western countries complicates and makes their [South Asians’] interaction in society more difficult” (p. 17). In attempting to negotiate these very different worlds (Lugones, 1987) I occupied as a student, I was trying to uphold an image of a ‘Good Girl’ at home and at school. An Indian good girl, and a good Indian student would not cause problems at home or school. In thinking of the first image, I am reminded of Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin’s (2011) discussion on familial curriculum making as intergenerational. My parents helped me to shape my stories to live by and these included what it meant to be a good daughter. Reaching back into time, I understood that my parents’ understandings of themselves and each other were also shaped by their parents’ notions of what it means to be a good Indian girl and a good Indian boy. Cultural stories of girlhood and boyhood provided another layer of storied images. These images overlapped and jarred against one another in complex ways. For, as Dasgupta (1998b) notably observed about the tendency to view South Asian women in terms of simple stereotypes, “Our lives go beyond images of the proverbial “good” daughter, the asexual, all-enduring mother who walks three steps behind the man” (p. 2). What was not readily visible to me when I was a child was that my school worlds and home worlds bumped against each other. I didn’t attempt to interrupt my teacher when he spoke about my time in the jungle. And later, when it occurred to speak a different story than the stories he wished to impose upon me, I could find no space to do

so. Ghosh and Guzder (2011), implicating school curriculum and school environment, cite the deleterious influence “experiences of racism/discrimination and exclusion based on ethnicity/culture/religion,” can have for South Asian students, emphasizing for these “children the clash of home and school cultures can cause conflict” (p. 14). Handa (2003) was surprised by “the continuous negotiation of identities, changing of roles, wearing of masks, and safeguarding of secrets” (p. 23) that emerged as threads in communication with young Canadian South Asian females.

The Contours³¹ of Storied Lives

Richardson (1997) speaking about the experiences of people within the context of “sociocultural and historical forces,” coined the term, “the collective story” (p. 14) as a way of accentuating the similarities between certain people. She expresses her intent for doing so “because such consciousness can break down isolation between people, empower them, and lead them to collective action on their behalf” (p. 14). While I am not too sure about the notion of a single collective story, I strongly gravitate to the idea that being able to link a set of experiences to another’s can lead to communication and strength. But more importantly, shaping contours among and within peoples’ experiences so to lessen loneliness calls to me in inexplicable ways.

Indian Diaspora³² Abroad and within the Canadian Context

As I think about the experiences which have given contour and form to this narrative

³¹ Richardson (1997) discusses the experiences of single women involved with married men and uses the word, *contours* to refer to the commonalities shared across their experiences. For this work, I use the same word to introduce the idea that the storied lives we lead are contoured by social/historical/cultural narratives.

³² I will employ Brown’s (2006) definition of *diaspora* where she uses it to

denote groups of people with a common ethnicity; who have left their original homeland for prolonged periods of time and often permanently, who retain a particular sense of cultural identity and often close kinship links with other scattered members of their group, thus acknowledging their shared physical and cultural origins; and who maintain links with that homeland and a sense of its role in their present identity” (p. 4).

inquiry, I recognize that there is considerable history behind the Indian diasporic settlements around the globe and within Canada. I cannot draw a false line in the sand and propose that these historical considerations are meaningless for myself as a second generation South Asian Canadian, a daughter of immigrants, nor can I say with any real authority (nor do I wish to) how these considerations shape the stories participants live by and live within. It is not necessarily my intent to frame this work within a post-colonial discourse, rather it is my hope to build and layer a richer storied context. As such, I attempt to create a brief timeline which helps me to better visualize and honour the experiences of South Asians. To imbue this dissertation with a deeper historical resonance, I wish to pause and give some give thought to some of the historical experiences of South Asians. Dasgupta (1998b) helps me to understand, “During as well as after colonial rule, Indians left their natal land and spread all over the globe in search of new homes” and concludes, “Thus, for us, the concept of home and the search for it have become more and more complex with time” (p. 3) It should be reiterated, that the following piece is not intended to be a thorough or deep analysis of the socio-political conditions leading to the settlement of South Asian diasporic communities. Instead it is a means of proffering a field of view, which by its very circumference can encase certain historical moments and not others. It is not my intent to suggest these events are events which all Canadians or even all South Asian Canadians would deem as significant, but they are ones which resonate for me. These are moments which permit me an opportunity to see big and to see small (Greene, 1995).

First Wave of Migration

Renowned historian of modern South Asian history, Brown (2006) illuminates a common misconception that Indians were averse to travelling abroad, voicing how “in the 1911 Census, the caste system and the dependence on agriculture were said to ‘account for the

reluctance of the native of India to leave his ancestral home” (p. 12). Yet, as Brown illustrates in her discussion, there was considerable movement within India and abroad prior to the nineteenth century. Gupta (1999) in her exploration of immigration of Asian-Indians after 1800 notes that these particular immigrants were identified as indentured or as freeman or passenger immigrants (so named for their ability to pay for their own passage unlike the indentured). She further expressed how locales making up the British Empire such as “Fiji, Guyana, Mauritius, Surinam” (Gupta, 1999, p. 14), and parts of Africa were sites for immigration. Constituting the first wave of migration (Gupta, 1999; Menon, 2009), indentured labourers in the 1830s were required “as a means of replacing former slave labour” (Menon, 2009). This need arose after the slave trade had been abolished in the British Empire. By far, men more than women, accounted for the population of indentured labourers (Brown, 2006).

Brown (2006) articulates how this system of indentured labourers was effectively “authorized and controlled by the governments of Britain, India and the colonies to which labourers went” (p. 31). McMahon (1995) outlines how these labourers worked in the colonies for designated amounts of time. In return for their labour, they were granted a paltry wage, room and board. For instance, in 1901, employment for the construction of the East African Railways was drawn from a mainly Indian pool of workers. Brown (2006) estimates the ratio of “coolies” or Indians³³ as being 20 000 to 2 500 to African employees (p. 35). She further alludes to the difficult conditions which the labourers endured:

Evidence from a wide variety of sources including official reports, court cases, and surviving memories, suggests the system was generally harsh, at times punitive, and so

³³ Brown (2006) notes that this pejorative term was used by *some* white people in South Africa for *all* Indians, citing the example of Mahatma Gandhi, who despite his educational training in London, England was considered to be a “coolie barrister” (p. 36).

tightly controlled the lives of the labourers that some historians argue that it was little more than a new system of slavery. (p. 32)

For women who had made the journey to their new destination, their lot was a difficult one. They tended to be sexually exploited by their male supervisors (Brown, 2006). Brown ascertained the indenture system lasted from 1830-1960 where “hundreds of thousands of Indians moved overseas” (p. 19). Gupta (1999) writes:

Under British law, Indian men and women were British subjects and therefore should have had the right to go anywhere within the Empire. Ideally, this privilege would have enabled Indians to immigrate to wherever the British flag flew, including Canada (a member of the Commonwealth). However, Asian-Indians around the world soon realized that, whereas they were expected to support the machinery of the British Empire, they could not reap the same benefits as their ‘white’ counterparts. (p. 14)

Within the period of 1904-1908, Indian men, mainly Sikhs, many who were former soldiers made their way to Canada to work in forestry and lumber, and railway construction (Brown, 2006). According to McMahon (1995), there were around 5000 South Asians residing in Canada in 1908. At around the same time, she contends,

the influx of foreigners triggered a hostile reaction from the white population. The Canadian government responded in 1908 by limiting immigration to people who came by continuous voyage from their native country. It was not possible at that time to come from South Asia directly to Canada and so the regulation effectively stopped South Asian immigration. (“Immigration to Canada,” para. 5)

This hostile reaction was manifested in different ways (Coward, 2000; Indra, 1979). For instance, Coward (2000) reports

the British Columbia legislature in 1908 . . . [denied] Hindus³⁴ and all South Asians municipal and federal voting rights . . . excluding them from serving as school trustees, on juries, in public service, holding jobs resulting from public work contracts, purchasing Crown timber, or practicing the professions of law and pharmacy. (p. 152)

Indra (1979) undertook an exploration of how the press in Vancouver portrayed South Asians during various points in time (in particular the period of 1905-1914) and found that South Asians, as a group, were stigmatized.

Without qualification, the press claimed that South Asians were fundamentally different from normal members of society. They were shown to be chaotic carriers of a dangerous and foreign culture who threatened the existence of Vancouver. (p. 168).

Even forewarned and therefore forearmed, I was shocked to see the headlines Indra unearthed:

- *Get Rid of Hindus at Whatever Cost!*
- *Starving Coolies Roam the Streets! Menace to Women and Children!*
- *Annual Report Declares Hindoos are Filthiest!*
- *Coquitlam has Hindoo Nuisance*
- *Want BC Lands Kept for White Settlers Only!*
- *Should not Let Hindoos Get a Foothold!*

³⁴ A variation of the moniker, Hindu, was the more deprecatory term, *Hindoos* which was applied to anyone suspected of Indian origin. Ironically, this term did not take into account religious affiliations.

These profoundly disturbing moments, storied fragments of Canada's history and echoing voices of the past, are embodied in print and *Re-represented*³⁵ here by me.



2-Fragments of Racism

Elaborating on the Canadian context, Mani (2012) highlights the 1914 incident of the *Komagata Maru*, a steam ship which carried a group of Sikhs to Vancouver, British Columbia from the Indian state of Punjab. The passengers of the *Komagata Maru* were docked in the

³⁵ Thinking metaphorically with narrative terms and imagery, I use them to help me create newspaper names. While the names of the newspaper are not employed, the dates, headings, and descriptions contained within these templates, were unearthed by Indra's (1979) efforts. More recently, Purkayastha (2005) noted in the aftermath of 9/11, the role of US media precipitated "males and females of Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, or other faiths" to become "aware of their surroundings and their vulnerability to attacks from anyone in any place" (p. 43). Working at one time at a predominately South Asian school, I too, noticed that greater vigilance was needed to keep students physically and emotionally safe.

Vancouver harbour for nearly two months (Brown, 2006). The Canadian immigration legislation in place was exclusionary and hostile to Indians hoping to make new lives in Canada. Mani (2012) makes intelligible how

the policy effectively barred migrants from the Indian subcontinent, even though Indians, like Canadians, were also British subjects. When the *Komagata Maru* was banned from anchoring in Vancouver and its passengers were refused entry into Canada, the ship's journey became testament to the unequal claims to citizenship embodied by imperial subjects. Upon its return to Calcutta, British police detained the *Komagata Maru* for fear of political violence . . . The *Komagata Maru* episode emphasizes how imperial discourses of racial difference intersect with race-based claims to citizenship. (p. 18)

What makes this incident particularly relevant is that at the time, Canada's immigration policy which stipulated that immigrants had to make a continuous journey from their country of origin (Coward, 2000; Mani, 2012), promulgated a hierarchical belief that only *certain* people could belong to a nation. Coward (2000) indicates that "although in the 1920s a few wives and children were allowed to join husbands" residing in Canada, the community of South Asians "remained basically static until the 1950s" (p. 152).

Second Wave of Migration

McMahon (1995) describes how legislation pertaining to immigration became more flexible in 1962.

Before 1962 most immigrants from South Asia were men from the Punjab. After 1962 the influx was more balanced between men and women. Besides Sikhs from the Punjab,

Hindus from Gujarat, Bombay and Delhi came to Canada, as well as Muslims from Pakistan and Bangladesh, Christians from Kerala, Parsis from Bombay, and Buddhists from Sri Lanka. In Canada, South Asians made up a significant proportion of total immigrants and as a result very [*sic*] the target of significant harassment. However, in the 1990's South Asians in Canada [were] a prosperous and well-educated minority and enjoy[ed] a much higher level of acceptance than in former decades. ("Immigration to Canada," para. 5).

Supporting this contention that South Asians were more readily accepted than in the past, Coward (2000) acknowledges somewhat condescendingly, "Despite the anxiety generated by the South Asian immigrants in Canada, by virtue of their distinctive dress, food, culture, and religion, they have become a very productive, high-profile, and permanent part of Canada's multicultural mosaic"³⁶ (p. 149). More broadly, Brown (2006) suggests by the end of the twentieth century, around nine million people of South Asian descent had left their homes in Bangladesh, India, or Pakistan to form diasporic communities in other parts of the world. More specifically, Gupta (1999) speaking on the experiences of Indian females who left their homelands, ascertains:

South Asian women who immigrated all have different experiences even with the context of being women immigrants from the same geographical area, for the areas they left and the country they came to were and are in a state of flux and change. (p. 24)

³⁶ The *model minority identity* is one which is often fixed to South Asians. However, as Ghosh and Guzder (2011) indicate, this label does not acknowledge the education and achievement of South Asian children is dependent in part on the social class and space their families occupy. For instance, they refer to research in the US and in Britain which demonstrate that South Asian children (whose parents are not professionals but are rather categorized as Working Class) may struggle academically. The model minority myth is explored more deeply in the narrative account entitled: *Coming to Know Barb Alongside Katrina*.

Coming Home or Go Back Home?

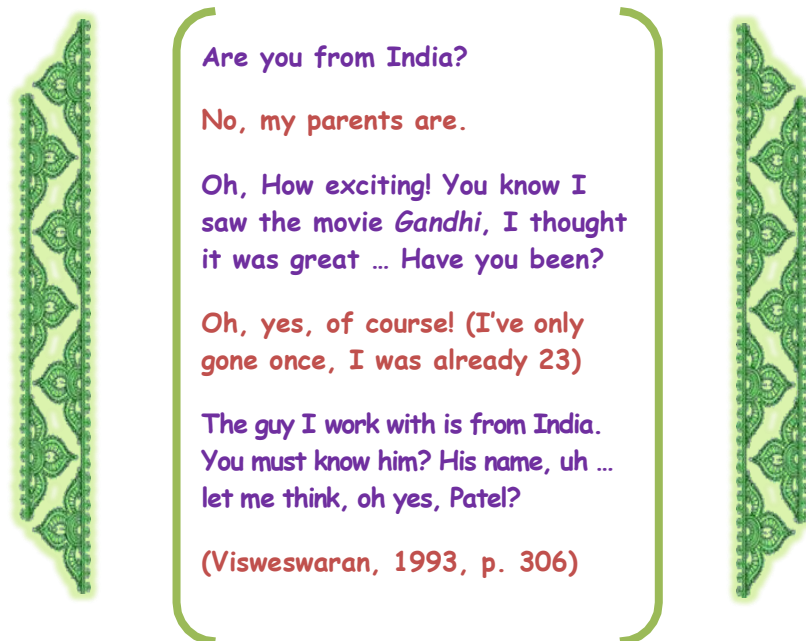
I purposefully shaped this heading with a focus on home with the intent of giving a sense of how multifaceted the notion of home is. What does it mean to say one is at home? What does it mean for people who find themselves in new countries shaping homes and communities? For home is a concept which I believe is intimately interconnected with identity and belonging. Home can be a physical space, a geographical region, a place of mental construction, and/or something even less tangible, an expression conveyed through heart and soul, body, and mind. Dasgupta (1998b) expresses the fluidity of home most insightfully. She complicates simple understandings of home which speak only of a person's birthplace. Instead, she proposes, "This tension is endemic in our communities . . . where the push and pull of going and staying, claiming, and rejecting, being and not being continuously sway our definitions of home" (p. 3).

Badruddoja (2013) shares how certain notions of home can legitimize exclusionary and racist tendencies. To pose the question "Where are you from?" can be problematic as the asking of it may leave the person being asked with feelings of not belonging and at the same time that another question (of when will you be leaving) is simultaneously being framed. Dasgupta (1998), drawing upon Martin and Mohanty, illuminates:

"When will you be going back?" This question, put to us in various ways and multiple times, makes us ask another: "Where is our home?" If the psychological feeling of "home" is created by an illusion of safety within boundaries and by erasing histories of oppression and resistance, then we South Asian women can claim no place as home" On the other hand, we can perhaps count the entire world as our home. To assume home in terms of fixed geography belies our experiences as physical as well as psychological

moment. Challenging any sense of constancy, our home has long been fluid and ever-changing owing to political, demographic, and economic traveling in and out of the physical space we now call South Asia. (p. 2)

Mani (2012) expresses geographical notions of home “fail to capture the affective experience of creating transnational communities across differences of generation, national origin, religion, and language” (p. 3) and suggests the more expansive and perhaps counterintuitive term, “locality” (p. 3) to take up this work. Home, at the same time, can be viewed as synonymous with differentness or “foreignness” (Badrudjoja, 2013). Vrudhula’s poem, *Do not belong to this or that, but I am here*, as cited by both Visweswaran (1993) and Badrudjoja (2013) reflects how this notion of home can be taken up by some South Asian females born and/or raised in diasporic communities.



Coming alongside research friends, Anne, Deepika and her mother, Vam, Katrina and her mother, Barb, I was reminded yet again of the unique ways in which we all think of home. For

Anne, I understood home for her was best shaped in close relationship with her husband, Guy. Home, for Katrina and I learned could be lived fully amongst close immediate family members and close friends. For Deepika, home seemed to be experienced most fully with her immediate family in Canada and her maternal grandparents who reside in India. Barb and Vam seemed to find home with their immediate family in Canada and family in India. I came to more deeply appreciate home is one of many stories that call to our hearts.

A Peace Exchange for a Different Piece of India

As I continue to autobiographically inquire into my stories, in particular, the stories which I feel help me to think with my narrative beginnings, I take another look back at my stories of India. I do this also as a way of ruminating alongside the stories of India co-participants shared with me and the ways in which India storied us. These are stories which continue to reverberate with me now.

An Invitation of the Unexpected Kind

My first inclination was to say a resounding no when I was asked whether I was interested in participating in a learning exchange on peace and human rights in India. And in fact, I did say no twice when the subject was brought up. Both times, I was taunted by unwelcome thoughts—recollections of previous trips to my mother’s homeland and these memories stirred in me a maelstrom of feelings. I had travelled to India several times in my lifetime, but it wasn’t the happy moments which my mind was choosing to revisit. In fact, with little hesitation, my mind conjured up a most evocative image, that of a sun-kissed plump mango I purchased once on a greedy whim from my community Safeway grocery store. Reaching home, my mouth had watered, and I had hungered to taste the sweet pulp of the tempting fruit. Eager, I

had used a knife to peel away the red skin and sliced into the too tender flesh of the mango only to find that the inside was sadly, mostly brown mush. This image of the deceiving promise of the fruit, my mind linked with memories of one of the visits I made to India when I was still in elementary school.

A Childhood Visit to the Motherland

My ears can hear, even now many years later the harsh tones of my mother's aunt as she admonished me for not being good. My mother, my brother, and I had made a trip to India. I was seven years old and I had taken an instant dislike to the gray haired lady. She was rude, overbearing, and despite being the obvious matriarch of the family, I was not ready to obey her. That is, even as I was yelling back at her, much to my mom's shame, I knew that this older lady frightened me with her loud querulous voice. My mom reminded me to be nice as she was an elder to be respected in our family. She told me to not worry when my great aunt mocked me for speaking Malayalamish, a mangled version of English and Malayalam. So it was unsurprising when I got up one day and did not see my little brother or my mother near me that I ignored my great aunt's disapproving presence. Instead, I raced, panicked searching for my mother and my brother on the main floor and then back up to the second floor. They were nowhere to be found in my mother's ancestral home. Bereft, I was overcome with the knowledge that they had left for home and I had been abandoned in India. Eventually, much to my great aunt's amusement, I made my way out to the courtyard, my face damp with tears. Amongst the rose bushes, I found my younger brother sitting high on a stool with a barber busily working on his mop of hair. Beside him, stood my mother.

A Visit to My Father's Homeland as an Adult

Unpleasant memories notwithstanding, between the second and the third time the question was asked again of me of whether I wanted to attend this learning exchange, I found unexpectedly, a burgeoning desire to return to India. And shockingly for me, I heard myself saying that I would go. My need to be a part of this exchange was surprising to myself. India marked a place in my mind which evoked many stories for me. My memories were stitched with threads woven in the homeland of my parents and embellished further, with my visits to this country throughout the course of my life. These threads meandered at times from each other and at other moments travelled alongside one another, intersecting in different areas with *those* other threads stitched in and woven from my place of birth, Canada. My last visit to India had taken place a few years back. Accompanied by my father's sister and my brother, we went to see my father. He was ill and when I laid my gaze on him after several years of not seeing him, it had been with the knowledge he was not the same man I once knew. This knowing was only reinforced when I heard him speak and listened to the words he used. There was a deep vein of regret that spilled forth from his lips, which coupled with the pain I could see etched in his face, stirred me.

I had happy memories of India as well...racing with my cousin to the house gate decadently covered with lush yellow and red hibiscus flowers...churning butter by hand...attending temple with my mom... Yet, at the time of this invite, I was having trouble reconciling some of these memories with the understandings I was gleaning from my readings, those composed of scholarly articles, newspaper editorials, online pieces, and books which bespoke of stories of girls and women being devalued. It seemed I was being inundated with only negative stories of India. The story of a young woman who had been brutally raped and murdered by a group of men while on a bus in Delhi, India had been discussed widely in the

media and continued to haunt me, coalescing around other personal stories I knew. Nirbhaya's³⁷ life had been cut short and all because she had been born a girl. I was becoming frightened that these darker stories of India and its people were the only ones that would live within me, that they would eclipse the uplifting images of India I also knew. The invite to present at and attend this peace symposium which focussed on the rights for education for girls had me thinking that I should accept. In those moments, I wondered whether the India that was being painted in my mind could be switched out for a new canvas, new paints, and employed with different skill so that India for me could once more be *more than* a place of subjugation and regret.

Welcome to India

My two companions and I entered the Delhi airport rather tiredly but soon enough our conversation gathered momentum. For the two men, an assistant principal and a seasoned youth case worker, there was much to discuss as this was their very first trip to India. Yet, I too was taken aback by what I was experiencing. In my enthusiasm, I rather bossily instructed them to take turns posing beneath the signage that read Welcome to India before having the same requested of me. And as I stood posing, I felt a profound sense of discomfort pass through me as I recognized the curiosity in the eyes of people passing by. In the air, it was easy to pretend that it was not significant that I was a lone Indian female travelling with two males who were not her family members. Passing through customs—always a worrisome endeavour for me³⁸—we soon

³⁷ This was a pseudonym that was given to this young woman, which means, “Fearless” in English. Repeatedly raped and brutalized, Nirbhaya still managed to bravely give a statement to the police about her attackers. She died soon after in a Singapore hospital where staff desperately tried to save her life. Her demise sparked protests in India and amongst diasporic Indians (women and men) for change in the treatment of girls and women (see: Hollingsworth, Gupta & Suri, 2020). In a BBC news interview conducted with one of the assailants, he commented, “A decent girl won't roam around at nine o'clock at night. A girl is far more responsible for rape than a boy” (Udwin, 2015)

³⁸ On almost every occasion I have travelled abroad and even within Canada as an adult, I have been stopped and given additional screening. Amongst several of my friends and family, this is a common and reoccurring experience.

enough gathered up our luggage and were met by one of the organizers of the event. She was accompanied by a driver and after quenching our thirst with a tasty mango beverage, we were on way to our temporary lodgings, an army base. Driving through the gates was only made possible after the armed guards had given us the okay. The night and the next day passed quite rapidly and once more we found ourselves airborne, this time to Lucknow, India. Then a little later, in vehicles journeying at such a slow pace that even the oxen we saw rambling beside us appeared swift, we traversed a bumpy road to a small rural village known as Shahjahanpur.



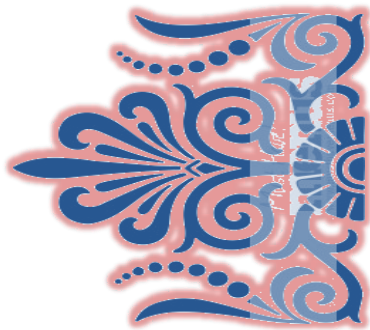
3-At the Airport³⁹

Straddling Borders

The first day of the learning exchange proved to be a bright albeit chilly day. It would be later that I would learn that the Himalayan mountains had been hit by a severe snowstorm and that we would be unfortunate enough to feel its frigid fingers reaching out to us throughout the

³⁹ This is one of the pictures I took when we landed in Delhi. The tints that I applied to the picture are reminiscent of the colours of the Indian flag.

days to come. While the ashram itself was full of beautiful wide-open vistas, inside the building where the symposium was occurring was a dark space surrounded by concrete walls housing a long row of tables encircled by chairs. Attending to this particular space, I was reminded by how similar conference rooms looked even across different geographical locals. As I sat down in a chair, I was acutely conscious that to the Indian men and women who congregated there in that room, despite my cultural roots, I was not an Indian to them. In that moment lived, I was attuned to how my connections to my parents did not hold the same value as they did when I travelled and visited in south India where the knowledge I possessed of my parents' first language held me in good stead. I was at the very least able to get the gist of what was being communicated. My inability to speak Hindi in this North Indian locale further proclaimed my differentness. I was a Canadian who was simultaneously a foreigner to them. Here English marked me as an outsider and the thought flitted through my mind, that I was probably considered to be more of a Westerner than I was in my own country.



4-Making Local Headlines⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Our Canadian presence (foreign presence), in this instance, helped to direct positive attention to the stories being shared at this human rights' symposium, directing attention to the grassroots organizational efforts to shape change.

In Canada, many times had I been subjected to the incredulous words, “You’re Canadian? No really . . . where do you come from?” and simultaneously, been labelled as a “Fresh off the Boat (FOB) and subsequently, not a Canadian by naturalization. I wondered how my companions regarded me in this moment? Was I the stereotypical Desi⁴¹ female who was to be judged wanting? Where did I belong?

Anzaldúa (1987/1999) speaks of the new mestiza, whereby the woman “learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality . . . nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned” and offers hope for “not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else” (p. 101). Could I mould this painful uncertainty into something constructive? Wasn’t this feeling part of why I had accepted my second teaching position to work with a primarily South Asian student population? Hadn’t I hoped to help make education “presented as relevant to their being in the world” (Greene, 1993, p. 212). This was important to me as I understood “education in order to accomplish its end both for the individual learner and for society must be based on experience—which is always the experience of some individual” (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 113)

Rekindling my Hope: Visiting Girl Schools

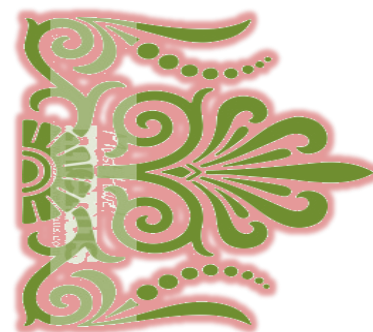
The differing presentations were wonderful to hear especially as grassroots organizations spoke of their efforts to shape change for girl children. However, I wanted to see these initiatives being lived and so, it was with genuine pleasure that I finally had my wish fulfilled. A tour was arranged to have us taken to some local schools. We ducked inside the first

⁴¹*Desi*, is a term which refers to members making up the South Asian diaspora. The acronym *ABCD* stands for American Born Confused Desi, an idiomatic term employed by South Asians to connote second and third born generation Americans who are believed to live in a state of marginality in their birth country. Some Indo-Canadians use this term in reference to themselves in recognition of this storied tension between homelands and cultures.

school and made our way inside the dark room which comprised the classroom made specifically for young girls ranging in age from two years to early adolescence. Quiet, obviously frightened and simultaneously excited, the children waited for us. Once we were seated cross-legged on the hardpacked earth, the teacher welcomed us with a nervous smile and quickly proceeded to call her young charges up to the front to sing some English nursery rhymes. It was obvious how much love and care there was between the teacher and the students. We felt the teacher's pride as the children beautifully sang. Not too long after, a travelling science van braked outside with a noisy honk that had all of us tumbling outside to watch as two male teachers conducted a simple science experiment before our appreciative eyes. Too soon it seemed we once more were travelling in a small vehicle over bumpy dirt roads surrounded by rice paddies tended to by young females.

The next school was slightly larger but still consisting of one room. Similar too, there were pictures of student work, an assortment of hand-made posters, and colourful decorations adorning the walls. Here we were regaled with students showing us their math skills and their writing skills. The biggest difference was that the mothers of the girls had come to visit us at this school. They beamed with pride and some of them (through translators) shared with us how proud they were to have their daughters attending school. The days of sitting in the conference room merged with these wonderful outside expeditions, and I felt my entire being suffuse with hope. These were curriculum-making moments that seemed to be informed by familial worlds. Discussion had been frank around the ideas that not all parents were favourably inclined about their daughters receiving an education. There was talk of child marriage and dowry, but change was occurring. Families alongside schools were resisting these constraining plotlines.

I wondered with fresh hope about the experiences of young Indo-Canadian girls in schools in Canada. In this moment I also wondered, how the mothers of these girls were assisting their daughters to negotiate the different worlds of curriculum making they were engaging in (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011; Lugones, 1987). I wondered also about the teachers. Were they like me attempting to embody a sense of cultural competence alongside their diverse students but coming in tension with other ways of knowing?



5-Posters Displayed at One School⁴²

⁴² Pictures of posters were taken with the permission of the teacher who also provided her kind assurances they could be shared.

Chapter Two: Theoretical and Conceptual Considerations

To better situate this narrative inquiry and invite for different kinds of readings amongst diverse peoples, I drew upon many people's work. The writers you encounter in this work are a selected few and as much as I have chosen them, they metaphorically have also chosen me. However, within this chapter, I foreground those scholars' whose work helped me to theorize as I engaged in narrative inquiry and afterwards, when a collage of experiences and stories began to emerge and assume the form of a dissertation.

Familial and School Curriculum Making, and the Power of Images

Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2011) write of how experiences alongside a kindergarten-aged girl named Loyla, Loyla's mother (Orie), Loyla's father (Bergier), and Loyla's grandmother (Ruth) altered their understandings of curriculum making as occurring predominately on school landscapes. They thoughtfully observed, "As we lived in this multiperspectival midst, we began to see, and to tentatively name "familial curriculum making" as the process negotiated between Loyla and her extended family members as they interacted on their home and community landscapes" (p. 7). The researchers began to query if curriculum making could be viewed as ever-changing processes by which the lives of parents, families, and children interwove with one another, in places other than the school milieu, places such as homes and community contexts. They wondered whether familial curriculum making could be ascribed equal importance to "in-classroom, in-school curriculum making" (p. 8). The researchers offered an understanding that the participants in the inquiry were very much learners and teachers who were involved in the taking up and living of rich subject matter within the curriculum-making places of home, family, and community.

Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin's (2011) pivotal work foregrounds the significance of appreciating stories which represent a wide range and depth of curriculum-making experiences, emerging and shaped within the familial and school curriculum-making worlds of children and youth. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) speak about the significance images hold in "our language of practice" (p. 60) such as an individual's image of home or image of a person, and how these images can hold sway over how we think and act. They impart, "Images are part of our past, called forth by situations in which we act in the present, and are guides to our future. Images as they are embodied in us entail emotion, morality, and aesthetics" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 60). I think about the image I held of home when I was young. I did not regard home as a safe place. Neither did I regard school as a safe place. While my mother may have known how I felt about home while I was a child, I don't think she knew about the image I held of school. However, a sustaining story for me as a young student was my love of books, which was, and remains even now, a space of safety. As an elementary school teacher, I tried to create a classroom place of safety for students. This was part of creating the school curriculum-making worlds for me and the children to inhabit. As part of my personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) expressed in my school curriculum making, I lived stories that bespoke of me as a teacher who possessed intercultural competence. The image I held was an educator well-versed in the language of cultural sensitivity (Gay, 2002), having moved beyond simple constructs (Yuen & Grossman, 2009) to a working competence (DeJaeghere & Zhang, 2008; Diller, & Moule, 2005), where one who was not simply relying on a well-intended checklist or affixing a politically correct bandage to how she taught. I believed I was appreciative of how students could differ in how they viewed the world and that the classroom could be a dwelling of

safety.⁴³ I felt that I had moved beyond mere tolerance and that this was feeling was imbedded in my in-school curriculum making. In upholding this image, I was dismayed to discover I was not as well-informed about my students' curriculum-making selves at home (as presented vis-à-vis the memories inquired into earlier in this dissertation) as I could have been.

In a like manner, I am reminded of the administrator, Jeanette, who Clandinin et al. (2006) shared conversations with. Jeanette disclosed how becoming a mother caused her to be more attentive to the experiences of children and what children deemed was important in school. As I read the poetic word image of Jeanette (Clandinin et al., 2006), which showcased a plotline of cultural competence, integral to school curriculum making in Canada, and her subsequent narrative account, I found myself in a space of tension. I was sincerely moved by Jeanette's advocacy for a student under her care. Jeanette hoped to keep a South Asian student, Amit in her Canadian elementary school, despite Amit's parents not wishing the same outcome. Feelings of tension arose as I came to learn that Jeanette identified Amit and her parents as *East Indians*, a term that has pejorative overtones that Jeanette may have been unaware of. How did this language shape Jeanette's image of this particular family of South Asian? I contemplated what it meant for Jeanette's image of educator when she "was upset with Amit's parents' decision to send Amit to India to become a wife and mother instead of finishing school" (p. 106). I think about how my images of daughter, mother, and teacher co-learners have shifted, remained the same, and re-shifted in response to storylines experienced and shared throughout the unfolding of this narrative inquiry. Over the years of this narrative inquiry, I have come to better understand that "familial curriculum making [is] shaped by the dynamic interaction of multiple people,

⁴³ I have recently learned that in the field of nursing, the construct of cultural safety (originating in New Zealand) "requires that nurses care for people "regardful" of those things which make them unique" (Papps & Ramsden, 1996), such as life experiences and world views. This too, is how I felt I was being with the students I worked, played, and learned alongside.

places, and things was complexly interwoven by the stories to live by of many people” (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011, p. 37). My deepening relationships with co-participants have also illuminated that “this curriculum making was multifaceted given the topics it focused upon and the understandings it attended to” and moreover, “the curriculum making was also contextual as it was continuously shaped by shifting places, people, situations, and interactions” (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, p. 37).

Constructions, Moral Agency, and World Travelling Shape Identity-making

In Chapter One of this dissertation, I made reference to Lugones (1987) and her notion of worlds and attempted to understand some of the possible ways familial worlds and school worlds can influence curriculum making by turning inward and outward through explorations of my experiences as a student and as a teacher. Lugones contends,

A “world” need not be a construction of a whole society. It may be a construction of a tiny portion of a particular society. It may be inhabited by just a few people. Some “worlds” are bigger than others. A “world” may be incomplete in that things in it may not be altogether constructed or some things may be constructed negatively (they are not what ‘they’ are in some other “world.” (p. 10)

Identity-making, then, can be viewed as part of being an inhabitant of a world or worlds, what Lugones refers to as animated constructions. She proposes the multiplicity of our lives are shaped and informed by such constructions. For instance, in one world Lugones describes herself as playful and is described as such by her friends. In other worlds, she is not ascribed such an identity. According to Lugones, one can be constructed in certain ways in one world and in different ways in other worlds. Some constructions of identity can impose stories that knowingly

or unknowingly denigrate a person's sense of worth and value. In these situations, categories can be created which box a person in and permit unfavourable conclusions and representations to be drawn.

Lugones also speaks about word travelling in relation to how certain constructions of ourselves can become animated. She helps me to understand “as outsiders to the mainstream, women of colour . . . practice “world”-travelling, mostly out of necessity” (p. 3). She explicates:

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)

Each of my research friends showed me in some way how they make unique sense of their worlds and how they negotiate the travel between and amongst their worlds of experience. Some of their travels were easier than others. Some of their travels required assistance. Concurrently, I also came to better understand the ways in which certain constructions of their multiplicities—their identities—were animated.⁴⁴

Lindemann Nelson (2001) conceives of personal identities as “a connective tissue of narratives—some constant, others shifting over time—which we weave around the features of ourselves and our lives that matter most to us” (p. 72). Meticulously, she continues

The (backward-looking) stories of my connection to these things over time are explanatory: they explain to me who I am and it's this that is my own contribution to my

⁴⁴ See individual narrative accounts for more details.

personal identity. But my identity is also constituted by the stories other people construct around the things about me that seem most important to *them*. From neither the first- nor the third-person perspective are the stories that constitute an identity entirely original; many contain stock plots and character types that are borrowed from narratives that circulate widely in the culture. (p. 72)

Lindemann Nelson uses the word, “culture” (p. 72) but I believe the sense she gives to it may be similar to Lugones’ (1987) understanding of worlds. Building on this view of identity, I turn to Lindemann Nelson’s (2001) view of agency. She contends, “freedom of agency requires not only certain capacities, competencies, and intentions that lie within the individual, but also recognition on the part of others of who one is morally speaking” (p. 24). Over time as we came to know each other in deeper relational ways, we were able to avoid conversation that “forecloses the possibility of any discussion” (p. 24). We were able to do so because we could travel to one another’s worlds (Lugones, 1987) with care and respect.

Liminal and Borderland Spaces

Heilbrun (1999) invites me to think about how engaging this narrative research has opened up spaces of liminality for each of us as co-learners and co-participants. She suggests:

Such women recognize their betwixt-and-betweenness, gaze steadily upon their failure to have achieved or chosen to remain in a conventional destiny and welcoming their liminality, use it . . . to explore another way of female life. They invent, in that liminality, freedom, as a woman to be or to become herself. (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 28)

Heilbrun (1999) employs these words to describe a space of liminality for women who have left the well trod upon path, to take what Frost (1916) beautifully captures as “the one less travelled

by” in his famous poem, *The Road Not Taken*. In a similar vein, Anzuldúa (1999) visualizes liminality as space of borderlands wherein there is promise for both struggle and potential. Together their words beckon me to a way of understanding myself as a narrative inquirer in ethical relation with my research friends. In being able to live and share experiences alongside one another over the shape and odyssey of this research, we contended with different borders in our lives (Menon & Saleh, 2018). In some instances, we were able to border-cross. In some situations, we were not able to do so. Some borderlands invited us to dwell and linger (un)easily.

Shaping Feminist Thought within Colour

As I progressed through my course work in both my master’s and doctoral programs, it seemed to me as if there was an inclination to preclude certain voices from even entering into dialogue on issues of education and curriculum matters (Kubota, Saleh, & Menon, 2020; Menon, 2019). Further, this proclivity appeared to privilege certain other voices as being more important, as being more worthy of listening to, and by way of ‘natural’ extension, full of expertise. Reinharz (1992) brings these concerns to the forefront when she attempts to make sense of what constitutes feminine knowledge.

At the core of feminist ideas is the crucial insight that there is no one truth, no one authority, no one objective method which leads to the production of pure knowledge . . . Feminist knowledge is based on the premise that the experience of all human beings is valid and must not be excluded from our understandings, whereas patriarchal knowledge is based on the premise that the experience of only half the human population needs to be taken into account and the resulting version can be imposed on the other hand. (p. 7)

Minh-ha (1989) goes further and expounds on what is meant by an understanding of knowledge which is *solely* credited to males:

What I resent most, however, is not his inheritance of a power he so often disclaims, disengaging him from a system he carries with him, but his ear, eye, and pen which record in his language while pretending to speak through mine, on my behalf. (p. 48)

Research conversations between myself and co-learners were decidedly feminist. However, learning of this epistemological and ontological propensity in academia to privilege male research and male knowledge as being sacred, I also awakened (Greene, 1977) to a silence in the voices of women of colour in academic literature. Concurrently, I came to understand women of colour in academia operate from the margins. Speaking to the latter, Ladson-Billings (2005) articulates:

However, much of the literature on diversity and teacher education is silent on the cultural homogeneity of the teacher education faculty. Teacher educators are overwhelmingly White . . . and their positions as college-and university-level faculty place them much further away from the realities of urban classrooms and communities serving students and families of colour. Despite verbal pronouncements about commitments to equity and diversity, many teacher educators never have to seriously act on these commitments because they are rarely in situations that make such a demand on them. (p. 230)

I, too, have struggled “to determine my own feminist politics” (Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 1993, p. 129) in the face of people prescribing what this should look like and mean for me as a Indo-Canadian female scholar. Dasgupta and Dasgupta (1993) co-authored a piece on South

Asian feminism and wrote from their perspectives as mothers and daughters respectively. Questioning what it means to be South Asian feminists in America, they explored new ways of defining feminism⁴⁵. The mother writes:

I continuously define and refine my concepts of feminism in the context of my community. No longer is this community limited to the immigrant one that I clearly belong to, but the one that is spread all across the globe. (p. 128)

The daughter writes, “As opposed to South Asian immigrants who spent their childhoods as members of the ‘majority’ group in their more racially homogeneous homelands, I was always the ‘other’” (p. 129). While both impart, “Our experiences as feminist activists have strongly embedded in us a belief that there is no one monolithic ‘Woman’s Movement.’ Similarly, there can be no one vision of South Asian feminist activism” (p. 130). As a daughter of a mother who is an immigrant, as a female who even now knows the form and expression of being identified as *Other*, and who too, regrettably, has engaged in *Othering*, I embraced this idea of a plurality of South Asian feminism (Jain, 2011). Doing so allowed me to keep myself open to different ways of knowing and representing knowledge and I believe, further, helped me to *not* “unwittingly colonize, overgeneralize, or distort” (Richardson, 1997, p. 18) my research friends’ voices.⁴⁶

The Importance of Experience

Dewey (1903) observed:

⁴⁵ My inclination to lay claim to a type of feminism is also a resistance to what some may consider the evils of feminism and/or bad feminists (hooks, 2000, vii).

⁴⁶ Similar to Puwar and Raghuram (2003) who noted “the structural marginality of South Asian women in academia, [I am not] intending rather predictably to utilize the race-gender-class mantra . . . to invest women of colour with a moral and political superiority that positions them as victims or innocent subjects” (p. 3).

If any scheme could be devised which would draw to the calling of teaching persons of force of character, of sympathy with children, and consequent interest in the problems of teaching and scholarship, no one need be troubled for a moment about other educational reforms, or the solution of other educational problems. (p. 198)

I resonated with Dewey's passion. I had become a teacher because I enjoyed being with children and felt that I could contribute in healthy ways to their education. Dewey had other words which also called to me. He gave shape to my wondering how those responsible for the care and education of children could "select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences" (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 28).

Eisner (2005) also spoke about experience, postulating:

If, however, education is viewed as a form of experience that has something to do with the quality of an individual's life, if it involves helping him [*sic*] learn to make authentic choices, choices that are a result of his [*sic*] own reflection and which depend upon the exercise of free will, then the problem of educational objectives takes a different turn. (p. 29)

The significance of experience cannot be underestimated. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) take up this Deweyian (1938/1997) notion of experience, which epitomizes knowledge for living in the *now* as well as preparation for the future. It is a view of education which permits for multiple experiences to be privileged and encompasses an understanding that curriculum making is not a singular endeavour. Adopting this particular perspective allowed me to appreciate a more comprehensive way of looking at curriculum making. Moreover, Schwab (1973) reminds me curriculum is shaped amongst all of the *interconnecting* commonplaces of learner, teacher,

subject matter, and milieu/context. Each commonplace works in vibrant interaction with one another. From this viewpoint, curriculum making is not made independently of the knower (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). For this multi-perspectival narrative inquiry, I draw upon a specific understanding of curriculum as lived (Aoki, 1993) where caring is integral (Noddings, 2005). Defining curriculum as a course of life rather than simply as a course of study, Clandinin et al., (2006) illuminated belonging spaces for students and their families can open up when teachers attend to a “curriculum of lives” (p. 135). In this manner, curriculum making is relational where “children negotiate and navigate their unfolding understandings of themselves in their homes, communities, and schools” (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011, p. 2).

The Metaphorical Three-Dimensional Inquiry Space in Narrative Inquiry

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) revealingly observe, “What starts to become apparent as we work within our three-dimensional space is that as narrative inquirers we are not alone in this space. This space enfolds us and those with whom we work” (p. 60). Their comment takes me back to differing times spent with research friends over the years. I am grateful for their bravery and their desire to be a part of this research. Thinking with their stories of experience, I am reminded of Richardson (1997) who articulates:

The story of a life is also more than the life, the contours and meanings allegorically extending to others, others seeing themselves, knowing themselves through another’s life story, re-visioning their own, arriving where they started and knowing “the place for the first time”. (p. 6)

Such knowing requires a commitment to pay attention to situation, continuity, and interaction. Narrative inquiry employs a metaphorical three-dimensional space of context (attending to

place), temporality (attending to time as a fluid construct), and sociality (attending to personal and social dimensions). Coming alongside co-participants in this narrative inquiry, permitted me to better understand the significance of the metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. For, as Clandinin (2013) suggests, place is “the specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries of place or sequences of places where the inquiry and events take place” (p. 41). She further clarifies, “Attending in temporal ways points inquirers toward the past, present, and future of people, places, things, and events under study” (p. 39). Clandinin explicates, “As narrative inquirers attend to temporality, we attend to the temporality of our own and participants’ lives” (p. 40). Attending to social conditions means thinking about “the milieu, the conditions under which people’s experiences and events are unfolding. These social conditions are understood, in part, in terms of cultural, social, institutional, familial, and linguistic narratives” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 40).

Aesthetic and Artful Considerations

Eisner (2005) illustrates how aesthetic and artful ways of knowing have intense merit:

Artistic approaches to research are less concerned with the discovery of truth than with the creation of meaning. What art seeks is not the discovery of the laws of nature about which true statements or explanations can be given, but rather the creation of images that people will find meaningful and from which their fallible and tentative views of the world can be altered, rejected, or made more secure. Truth implies singularity and monopoly. Meaning implies relativism and diversity. Truth is more closely wedded to consistency and logic, meaning to diverse interpretation and coherence. (p. 74)

At the same time, he rightly affords legitimacy to other ways of knowing keenly reflecting:

Each approach to the study of educational situations has its own unique perspective to provide. Each sheds its own unique light on the situations that humans seek to understand. The field of education in particular needs to avoid methodological monism. Our problems need to be addressed in as many ways as will bear fruit. (p. 74)

I turn to Greene (1999/2000) who helps to illuminate an equally profound consideration:

We ought to reach out to establish ateliers, studios, and other places where music can be composed and rehearsed, where poems and stories can be read, where drawings and paintings and sculptures can be made. There might be new collaborations among questioners, as teachers and students both engage in perceptual journeys, grasp works and words as events in contexts of meaning, and undertake common searches for their own places and significance in history to which they too belong and which they invent and interpret as they lives. (p. 150)

These considerations lived in me as I came alongside co-learners. They shaped my epistemic and ontological concerns of expressing our pluralities in ways which we felt honoured the artistry of our lives.

An Emerging Research Puzzle

Instead of “a research question with a precise definition or expectation of an answer” narrative inquirers compose a research puzzle with the expectation of “continual reformulation” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 42). Working within a narrative conception of knowledge, context, and identity, Clandinin et al. (2006) pointed to conflicts teachers, children, and families experience

when co-composing curriculum. Moving away from a traditional conceptualization of curriculum as primarily school-based, and expanding the understanding of curriculum to include familial constructions of curriculum, there is a need to consider how these different conceptualizations intersect and/or conflict with one another (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011). On one hand, schools are premised as sites for equal opportunities and on the other, entrenched familial and cultural narratives can foster and/or impede student self-esteem and student success. As such, every classroom and “every family has a curriculum, which it teaches quite deliberately and systematically over time” (Cremin, cited in Jackson, 1992, p. 8). Given the growing numbers of South Asians in Canadian classrooms and the desirability of inclusion for culturally diverse students, it is necessary to inquire into how teachers, Indian girls and their mothers are making sense of these different “worlds” (Lugones, 1987) of curriculum making. How are identity and belonging shaped? This wonder and inquiry into it, frames my research puzzle: *What can we learn from inquiring narratively into the curriculum-making experiences of South Asian girls, their mothers, and teachers?*

Chapter Three: Narrative Inquiry, My Chosen Methodology

Dreaming Awake, Awakening to Dream

I dreamt of venturing, traversing new worlds,
Of travelling far yonder— from here to there,
Of eager feet encased in rubber and cloth And
footsteps that bespoke of love and care.

I dreamt of beginnings, *Once upon a time*,
And even of those others— *Far and away*,
Painted by words shaped by a writer's hand,
Upon a composed canvas they wished to stay.

I dreamt of shiny, clear glass windows,
Lands of beauty and vistas of splendor,
Drapes flung back wide so to reveal
Whispered dreams of exotic adventure.

I dreamt of stylized frames— lovely reflections.
Be these shards of silver and glints of gold, I
hungered and hoped for an image or two
To be found on mirrored panes, truth be told.

But...

Beguiled, I woke from my deep slumber.
My mind aflutter, my thoughts a-whirl,
Limbs weak, I pause to catch my breath and
Gather the wisdom born of lustrous pearls.

Bemused, I woke from my deep slumber.
The pages turned— how worn they look!
The stories that have been shared— Those
precious words that gave and took.

Bewildered, I woke from my deep slumber.
New knowings emerged like glittering threads

Across worlds, within worlds, we did live.
Those soul stories, sustenance to keep us fed.

Bittersweet, I woke from my deep slumber.
Alongside you, alongside me, we cautiously came.
Betwixt there and here, then and now— a journey.
Our connection— stories, some we did so name.

And...

We listened, we spoke, we waited, and heard
The knock, knock of experiences at the door.
The breath between us shaped spaces of our truths
Not always easy, not always hard, sometimes more.

Good-bye, we bravely cried to our former fantasies,
Those single stories couched in the pyres of fiction.
Farewell, we waved to those sweet rose-tinted dreams,
Wearied yet carefree, we sloughed off that affliction.

In seeking to inquire, to learn, respect and honour,
We awoke to our dream, in the stories we told,
Our eyes and ears opened wide, rendering us asunder
Only to recognize hope in the stories we hold.

We fed our fires, cradling that special warmth in our souls,
Banishing lingering shadows of monolithic truths and lies.
For whilst the flames burn bright, the plumed phoenix sings...
Allowing our hearts to quicken— and soar amidst lightening skies.

This poem, in its first iteration, was shaped during an earlier period in my doctoral journey. I was undertaking a number of graduate level courses concurrently, including one on understanding narrative and story within research and curriculum studies. In this course, Jean Clandinin, my doctoral supervisor and friend, encouraged us to respond to various literature and

concepts introduced in class and within our readings, in ways which we felt comfortable working within and from. This poem, emerged as I continued to think more deeply about engaging in narrative inquiry. In the first iteration of the poem, I spoke about narrative inquiry, foregrounding my growing appreciation that it is a relational methodology and also a means by which to narratively understand experience. That is, what might a narrative inquiry entail, how might it unfold, how might it be lived and/or told, and perhaps most importantly for me and those who would inquire with me, the hopes of what might transpire from engaging in such work. For as Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) powerfully make clear, narrative inquiry embodies specific ontological and epistemological commitments.

Beginning with a respect for ordinary lived experience, the focus of narrative inquiry is not only a valorizing of individuals' experience but also an exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted—but in a way that begins and ends that inquiry in the storied lives of the people involved. Narrative inquirers study an individual's experience in the world and, through the study, seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others. (p. 9)

The iteration of the poem I include within this space, has been relived and retold by me now as a person who has come alongside girls, mothers, and teacher, for over four years in an unfolding of a multiperspectival narrative inquiry into our learning experiences as shaped in and outside of school spaces (Menon, 2015). It is an iteration which proffers a glimpse into the hopes I held before embarking on this research and serves too, as a view to the insights carefully acquired as the inquiry shifted over time and in relation to people and places. The first four stanzas illuminate my very early understandings and dreams of engaging in narrative inquiry. The next

four stanzas shift attention to the actual inquiry whilst the last four stanzas explore the juxtaposition of temporality, place embedded in (in)visible meaning making and knowing through relationships. It is the latter half of the poem which hints at the deeper complexities of engaging in this narrative inquiry.

Lorde's (1984/2007) oft quoted words leap to mind, grounding me and illuminating that poetry is both a refuge as well as way to think forward:

Poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity for our existence. It forms the quality of light from which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. (p. 37)

At the same time, Greene's (2014) concept of wakefulness is playfully carried throughout the poem as a means of thinking with(in) metaphors of sleeping, dreaming, awaking. For me, the multiplicity of stories that were shaped in different relational spaces also called forth a type of wakefulness within me and co-participants. Greene suggested:

“Wide-awakeness” can lead to the development of openness toward difference and a proper sense of humility. It counters one of the worst dangers, and that's indifference and distancing. The opposite, if there is an opposite of wideawakeness, is indifference — just not looking, not giving a damn. (p. 124)

Following Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003), I also believe “that no metaphor can ever be comprehended or even adequately represented independently of its experiential basis” (p. 19). Thus, this poem is one manner of framing (my) wonders, hopes, and beliefs before and during this research process of whose details I share more traditionally below.

Engaging in a Multiperspectival Narrative Inquiry

As the above poem gives a sense of some of my beginning stories of engaging in a narrative inquiry and some of the ensuing understandings which gradually became visible as my research journey progressed, I also found myself (re)visiting conceptualizations of narrative inquiry. These conceptualizations, which focused on slightly different nuances of narrative inquiry, while resonating in different ways for me, heightened my appreciation for narrative inquiry as both methodology and phenomenon.

Highlighting narrative inquiry as a way of understanding the experiential through being always in relation to people, places, and across and within time, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explicated:

It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. (p. 20)

In other work, Connelly and Clandinin (2006) illuminated:

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 his or her experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomena studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of

the phenomena. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomena under study. (p. 477)

I was drawn to narrative inquiry in large part, because of its emphasis on the relational. I understood early on in my doctoral program, that narrative inquiry would be the best choice for me as a person who was concerned with shaping a reciprocity of trust between myself and those individuals who would be willing to embark on this research adventure with me. As Clandinin (2013) elucidated:

In narrative inquiry we intentionally come into relation with participants, and we, as inquirers, think narratively about our experiences, about our participants' experiences, and about those experiences that become visible as we live alongside, telling our own stories, hearing an other's stories, moving in and acting in the places—the contexts—in which our lives meet. We intentionally put out lives alongside an other's life. (p. 23)

Moving Away from a Traditional Conceptualization of a Research Question

In lieu of “a research question with a precise definition or expectation of an answer” narrative inquirers compose a research puzzle with the expectation of “continual reformulation” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 42). In this manner, narrative inquirers compose their inquiries with a certain wonder in mind. A wonder in the narrative sense is a way of thinking about a phenomenon or experiences without closing off possibilities. A wonder, instead, opens vistas, permitting a narrative inquirer to attend to a whole range of ideas, understandings, and questions without having to concern him/herself with the restrictive dualistic construct of *one* question with *one* definitive answer. In this way, narrative inquiry is markedly different from other methodologies as narrative inquirers frame a research puzzle that “carries more of a sense of a

search, a “re-search,” a searching again”, that suggests “a sense of continual reformulation of an inquiry than it does a problem definition and solution” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124). Moreover, the narrative puzzle is often framed by narrative beginnings, an autobiographical inquiry which permits narrative researchers to inquire into their earlier experiences, through the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space while simultaneously, coming to understand personal, practical, and theoretical justifications of one’s research puzzle (Clandinin, 2013).

*Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry*⁴⁷

Clandinin (2013) helps me to understand “narrative inquirers begin with inquiring into their stories of experience” (p. 55). Unlike other methodological stances which argue for an artificial separation between researcher and participants, narrative inquiry takes a divergent view, honouring the experiences of *all people* involved in the inquiry. Clandinin (2013), additionally advises, “because narrative inquiry is an ongoing reflexive and reflective methodology, narrative inquirers need to continually inquire into their experiences before, during, and after each inquiry” (p. 55). At first glance, this may seem an individualistic endeavour, but it is not (see: Saleh, Menon, & Clandinin, 2014). Instead, as a recursive and fluid process, engaging in autobiographical inquiry has provided me and continues to provide me, different spaces in which to practice wakefulness (Greene, 1995; 2014) individually and within community. Accordingly, being able to engage in autobiographical narrative inquiry throughout different moments in the research (Clandinin, Caine, & Lessard, 2018; Menon, Redlich-Amirav, Saleh, & Kubota, 2015) has become a powerful heuristic in how I negotiate the worlds (Lugones, 1987) I live alongside

⁴⁷ *Autobiographical narrative inquiry*, for a narrative inquirer, can render her personal justifications more visible, “justifying the inquiry in the context of their own life experiences, tensions, and personal inquiry puzzles” (Clandinin, 2013). While my personal, practical, and theoretical justifications are threaded throughout the unfolding of this inquiry, I will speak in more detail about these considerations later in this dissertation.

others and furthermore, the ones I (wish to and/or have to out of necessity) travel to in everyday life. In Chapter One, I inquire into several reverberating curriculum-making experiences within the context of narrative beginnings. I also engage in ongoing autobiographical narrative inquiry in each narrative account (Chapters Four, Five, Six, and Seven) and also, in Chapter Eight when inquiring into some of the differing bumping places that research friends and I experienced.

Acquiring Ethics Approval from the University

Slipping into what Minh-ha (2011) evocatively names as “the texture of memory” (p. 103), I can vividly recall the sensation of time’s currents carrying me rather too swiftly along. With the help of Jean, I shaped my candidacy proposal into an actual written document when not too much later—April 23, 2015—I had to provide a public departmental presentation of the proposal. The candidacy exam was scheduled for April 27, 2015, to determine whether I was ready to embark on research in the field. Becoming a PhD candidate was a culmination of steps of various strides backwards, forwards, and even pauses in mid-step. I share these earlier moments within this space, to give a sense of the complexity of the emotion and work leading up to the formal application process of applying for ethics approval for the proposed research.

Making the transition from graduate student to PhD candidate, my priorities underwent another shift. In conversation with Jean, I recognized I needed to begin the actual research. But before I could do that, I had to meet some conditions. From May 3, 2015, to July 29, 2015 I worked on an application for gaining ethics approval from the university’s research ethics board through the online platform, Research Ethics and Management Online (REMO). There were a great many sections that needed to be completed before I could submit. For identification purposes, I was required to identify the study and which Research Ethics Board (REB) I would

be submitting my application to. I had to determine whether there would be any conflicts of interest in engaging in this research. Another section dealt with research location(s). A larger section was devoted to study objectives and design. Looking back, I would say this took much of my time and energy. I was made aware that I would need to make myself understood to those who did not know me nor what narrative inquirers do, nor the research puzzle that I was anticipating inquiring into alongside others. A required risk assessment and a benefit analysis had me pondering issues of ethics yet again. I wondered in silence and aloud amidst friends and colleagues. Could I be the ethically caring narrative inquirer I was hoping to be? What issues would be challenging for me to negotiate? As well, thinking about future participants within the confines of inclusionary criteria felt awkward. While I recognized the necessity of shaping some boundaries as to potential research friends I could invite, I experienced tensions in doing so. The section asking as to how I would recruit potential participants had me wondering what would happen if there were no participants! Courted at equal turns by uncertainty and excitement, I tried to imagine a forward-looking story of this research, as unfolding in the field. As I completed the sections on research methods and procedures in conjunction with data collection, I composed informational documents, consent and assent forms, intended for different people. It was in these moments, I was reminded that “relational ethics live at the very heart, perhaps are the very heart, of our work as narrative inquirers” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 30).

As I worked on the highly detailed parts of the online form, I found myself drawing closer to doing something, which up until that point, had been a hope for me. While I had been fortunate enough to be a part of different research projects alongside amazing people, this would be the first time, I would be embarking on a study that resonated for me on so many levels. That is, I would be engaging in a narrative inquiry around a research puzzle close to my heart. On

September 15, 2015, I received official notification of approval from the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board I. And, I wondered if other graduate students also felt a wondrous sense of awe followed almost immediately by the weight of moral responsibility when they saw their names listed for the very first time as Principal Investigator.

Seeking Approval for Proposed Research: The Cooperative Activities Program (CAP)

Uncertain as to the formalities of applying to conduct research within public schools, I attended an information session on that very subject held by the Faculty of Education. More informed, I was nevertheless apprehensive. On November 4, 2015, I submitted a research application form that had first had to be approved by the Faculty of Education before being sent onto the school boards that I wished to engage research within. As noted in the Cooperative Activities Program (CAP) Guidelines and Procedures (2017), "The CAP application form is used for research projects involving participation of human subjects initiated by or in collaboration with University of Alberta personnel seeking the involvement of individuals within" several school districts (University of Alberta, Faculty of Education, p. 3). The form (University of Alberta, Faculty of Education, 2015) itself asked for different kinds of information. I was required to provide a brief description of my research project. Thankfully, I was able to refer back to the work I had done online for REMO. The information there provided me with a framework if not the same words to use in this application. The request as to how my research would be of value and/or benefit to the school(s) or district(s) was a little trickier, for I was made to revisit not merely my personal justifications for wishing to engage in this research but my practical ones as well. After some thought, I recognized that because this narrative inquiry was intended to be multiperspectival, I very much needed to speak to these elements while

simultaneously attempting to meet the parameters of the form. I first wrote in relation to teachers:

This research is an opportunity to engage in the sharing of different stories relating to the teachers' experiences as educators in addition to the personal, cultural, school, and familial experiences which have informed their lives. Please think of this research as an opportunity for elementary teachers to reflect on their personal and practical knowledge as an educator teaching diverse students, in particular, South Asian females. (p. 3)

With respect to mothers, I divulged:

It is contemporaneously a chance to learn of the curriculum-making experiences of mothers who help their daughters negotiate school and home. For instance, what might they see as challenges or barriers to their daughters' education? What do they see as fostering their daughters' growth and success as citizens of the world? (p. 3)

Contemplating the young girls who would be part of this research, I explained:

The multiperspectival nature of this research invites first-hand accounts from Grades Four, Five, or Six South Asian girls about their identity-making experiences. In this unfolding research process, the girls' voices will serve to inform what they see as being significant in their lives as students learning in Canada.

And by way of summary, I shared:

In brief, this research will help us to better understand the experiences of South Asian females learning within Canada alongside their mothers and their teachers. As a South

Asian female and teacher, I am excited about this chance to work alongside with teachers, students, and parents. (p. 3)

The latter part of the CAP form asked for information about the personnel who would be part of the study. Would principals be involved? Would consultants be involved? Would teachers be part of the study? Would students be part of the study? Would parents be part of this study? These questions seemed fairly straight-forward to address. No, consultants would not be part of this research. Yes, principals would be initially involved, as a point of contact. Yes, teachers, parents, and students would be involved in the research. In addition to this, a possible timeline for the research project was requested. As I went through each question, I realized anew there would be times I would need to think more pragmatically.⁴⁸ This appeared to be one of those times. Thinking pragmatically, allowed me to revisit my justifications for wanting to engage in this research. I was likewise reminded of Clandinin's (2013) cautionary comments:

We all need to be able to answer the questions of “So What?” and “Who Cares?” about our studies. These questions are particularly important for narrative inquirers. I say this because funding agencies, government, and other policy makers frequently see the work of narrative inquirers as a simplistic process of going out, asking a few people to tell stories, and then writing the stories down. This simplistic view frequently causes narrative inquiries to be dismissed as merely anecdotal or personal. (p. 35)

⁴⁸ Throughout my PhD program, in my attempt to secure funding for this educational journey, I have applied for various scholarships—a few which I have been fortunate to meet with success, and many others I have not. However, my point here is that I did not know until I went through these processes of applying that more often than not, there was a predilection towards the shaping of what constituted a strong application. This understanding brought me close to Greene's (1995) conceptualization of seeing big and small. Clandinin, Caine, Lessard, and Huber (2016) clarify, “Greene writes of seeing small as helping us to discern the patterns, trends, and movements of phenomenon over time and seeing big as helping us to see the person in their particularity, in their wholeness” (p. 28).

Even though at this time, I was not applying for funding, I was very much cognizant that what I was applying for was essentially a chance to engage in research within certain school districts. Wishing to, shifted to, needing to share my conviction if not my passion for why this research could be meaningfully taken up. I did not want my proposed research “to be dismissed as merely anecdotal or personal” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 35).

It was on December 7, 2015 that I received an email from the District Information Coordinator of Borderlands Public Schools,⁴⁹ informing me that the Research Proposal Review Team had completed their review of my submission for research, which was at this time named: *A Multiperspectival Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of South Asian Girls, Mothers, and Teachers Engaging in Curriculum Making In and Out of Schools within Canada*. In this same email, I was requested to submit a Police Information Check. Further, I was asked to confirm whether I would be using a phone for recording purposes and if so, to confirm as well, that my phone was password protected. I was additionally requested to identify the length of time I would keep the recordings on my phone if that was the device I would use to record conversations. And lastly, I learned that I needed to have an information letter on hand for *all* students in the classrooms where participants attended. I thought about Clandinin, Caine, Lessard, and Huber’s (2016) insight, “Although ethical approval is required, the institutions also have review processes to determine whether the research fits with the institutions’ mandates. Nowhere is this more evident than when research with children and youth is being proposed” (p. 72). At the time though, I did not begrudge this extra layer of care. The well-being of the young children who I hoped to inquire alongside were very important considerations for me. Likewise, I did not wish to harm the adults who would wish to be a part of this inquiry. Part of this research

⁴⁹ Borderlands Public Schools is a pseudonym.

dream was to illuminate stories that had not been shared in certain spaces and to invite people (myself included) to open their senses to other ways of being and living through ways which were respectful. Above all, I did not wish to cause harm and be involved in any kind of unethical research.

In that moment of receiving the email, worry came knocking on my door. Worry has, (un)fortunately, been—ever since I could recognize and name it—a faithful companion of mine. Yet, this particular worry was not cloaked in amorphous ambiguity but instead stemmed from the very real concern that this proposed research would be delayed or even halted before it could get started. Conversations with other graduate students who too, had decided to work with schools, replayed themselves in my mind. The recurring refrain—approval was subject to many factors not within our control and whereas time was one of these factors, so too were the rules, regulations, and individuals who comprised the gatekeepers of the places and people—we, emerging researchers, hoped to come alongside. I knew that I could comply with these requests readily enough, but I could not quell the worry. The previously optimistically perceived phrase that popped in my mind: “The stories we hear and the stories we tell shape the meaning and texture of our lives at every stage and juncture” (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 1) abruptly took on ominous tones. It therefore was a pleasant surprise to me when upon sharing these requests with Jean, she replied with a cheery note, “Thanks for letting me know what you have to do ... really all three are quite minor!” (D. J. Clandinin, personal communications, December 8, 2015). Jean’s comments had me reassessing the situation and I felt some of that worry slide away.

Several emails back and forth with the District Information Coordinator also served to mitigate my worry. She too, was kind. I continued to work on the information letter in order to convey a sense of friendliness and reassurance even as I shared more formal aspects of the

research. For instance, how anonymity of participants was embedded in the inquiry. Moreover, I especially did not want parents to feel as if I were an intrusive person interrupting their children's everyday lives. On December 14th of 2015, I emailed a copy of my "clear" police check that I had obtained earlier in May of 2015, to the District Information Coordinator of Borderlands Schools permitting me to work with vulnerable subjects. In this case, the well-being of children was of foremost concern. Additionally, I included the carefully prepared information letter with the email. On the same day, I received word that my approval letter was in the process of being completed. Through a document which made explicit the conditions under which I was subject to as a researcher, I was granted approval to conduct research from Borderlands Schools on December 17, 2015.⁵⁰ An accompanying email which had a personal note wishing me good luck, had me breathing a sigh of relief. It appeared that this part of the research process had been successfully navigated.

Negotiating Entry: Inviting Co-Participants and Co-Learners as Research Friends

Recognizing that I would soon be embarking on this research journey that I had most actively imagined with Jean and my response community friends, Muna and Hiroko (see: Kubota, Menon, Redlich-Amirav, & Saleh, 2015), I knew that beginning involved more than preparation of documentation and ethics. I had to also find a way to invite research co-participants (co-learners and research friends).⁵¹ To that end, I called upon friends to spread the

⁵⁰ As I will make clear later, I was a teacher classroom volunteer in the school research site prior to December 17, 2015.

⁵¹ I use the terms: *co-participants*, *co-learners*, and *research friends* to refer primarily to the individuals *who chose* to inquire into their curriculum-making experiences alongside me. *Co-participants* has a two-fold meaning in this narrative inquiry. On one hand, I employ the term to give a sense of the inter-activeness involved in inquiring into our storied lives, and on the other hand, it refers to the agency involved in being part of this study. *Co-learner* is a way of describing the unfolding of the research. In this narrative inquiry, I am also very much a co-participant and co-learner who too, is learning in relation with research friends.

word that I would like to engage in research conversations with teachers of South Asian girls and as well, several girls and their mothers. Earlier, Jean and I decided it would make most sense in this inquiry, for me to make contact with teachers first and afterward with girls and their families. Since one of my hopes for this narrative inquiry was to understand curriculum-making experiences within school worlds and home and community worlds, this decision seemed prudent. Our thinking went something like this. A teacher may feel more comfortable having a researcher broach him/her directly instead of indirectly about participation in the research. A parent broached by a researcher, while pleased to participate with her daughter, may not feel comfortable in acting as a go-between for the researcher to invite her daughter's teacher. Further in this scenario, the teacher, who might be broached by the researcher who has already relationships with the girl students and families, may feel uncomfortable. Following this thinking, even though I knew of families that would be willing to learn alongside me—reaching out to these families—did not seem the way to be inclusive towards all possible co-participants. We ventured to think, the girls might feel comfortable and even proud, knowing that their teacher was a person of contact for the researcher. Seeking research participants necessitated trust and reciprocity between us and it seemed that the best way to move forward was slowly and with care.

Several of my teaching friends expressed interest but did not meet the other requirement for this inquiry—that is, being a teacher of girls of South Asian heritage. Grateful for their support, I was very pleased when another teacher friend who wished to join me in this research journey and did teach South Asian girls, suggested I come to her school to visit. Shortly before I was to do this, my friend learned that one of the two students (and families) she thought might be interested in participating in the study were transferring out of the school and the other girl she

had in mind for possible participation, was leaving for India shortly. Feeling a trifle anxious at this point, I figuratively kept my fingers crossed. Not much later, Jean too, offered to check amongst her many friends to see if anyone might wish to be a part of this inquiry.

It was around this time that I received a message from a former colleague reassuring me that she would love to learn alongside me and that she continued to be a teacher of students of South Asian heritage. Further reassurances came in the form of a happy acceptance, “The more hands, the better!” of my hesitant query to be a volunteer in her classroom. We had met earlier in the hot months of summer of 2015 and over the course of a meal, caught up with what was happening in one another’s lives, since we last had seen each other. Anne⁵² and I had worked together as teachers at a school some years ago and we had continued to get together once we both left that school. More recently, the get togethers were less frequent as happens in the busyness of our lives. We both enjoyed reconnecting. That afternoon, amidst the hustle and bustle of the staff, and chatter of other restaurant patrons, Anne noted being a part of this research would be a great learning opportunity for her as well. She further shared she would gladly act as an initial point of contact between the girls and mothers I wished to come alongside. In this moment, I was reminded of Anne’s caring and helpful nature.

Over the next several weeks, Anne and her class welcomed me into their lives. It was easy to forget that the primary reason for my presence in the classroom was not to be that of another teacher or an educational assistant. The classroom rhythms were achingly familiar and tempting to get caught in. The desire to be useful and helpful has been a powerful plotline I have lived and continue to live. After some time spent settling in and allowing time for the children to

⁵² As mentioned earlier, Anne is a pseudonym for the female teacher who joined me as a co-participant in this research journey.

become accustomed to my presence and with Anne's assistance, several girls indicated their interest in being part of the study.⁵³ Letters of information (see: Appendix A) had been sent out earlier and, at this point, letters of interest were sent out with these particular girls. Initially, it seemed there would be several girls and families, but through further conversations with the children and Anne, I learned while the children wished to journey alongside me, not all the parents had the time to do so.

Clandinin (2013) conveys the messy intricacy of what it means for narrative inquirers to enter in the midst of participants' lives:

Narrative inquirers always enter into research relationships in the midst Our participants are also always in the midst of their lives. When our lives come together in an inquiry relationship, we are in the midst. Their lives and ours are also shaped by attending to past, present, and future unfolding social, cultural, institutional, linguistic, and familial narratives. (p. 43)

I tried to metaphorically place myself in parents' shoes and understood that it would be challenging for a parent to meet with a stranger. Thinking this, made me wonder what would have happened if I had met the parents face-to-face as by way of introduction within the classroom. I wondered if speaking in person in this setting (the girls' classroom) would have made for a different conversational space from which to shape this inquiry.

⁵³ Anne revealed to me that many of the children had wanted to be part of the research and had been bewildered that they could not join because of the parameters of this narrative inquiry. I had genuinely not anticipated this reaction and was upset that I might have caused hurt feelings. When several students came up to me during their recess and lunch breaks to see if I would change my mind, as gently as I could I shared that in this study, at this time, I was hoping to learn alongside South Asian girls, their mothers, and teacher. I reminded them that thanks to their amazing teacher, I would still be working with them. Thankfully, this response did seem to help mitigate our unhappiness.

Eventually two girls and their mothers became active co-participants in this multiperspectival inquiry. Contact information in hand, I called the mothers of the girls (Deepika⁵⁴ and Katrina⁵⁵) and made arrangements to meet with them. I met each separately. One mother came with her daughter and the other did not. In both situations, the mothers conveyed their acceptance of the research invitation and signed the necessary consent forms (see: Appendix B) and the girls later signed assent forms (see: Appendix B). I will share more in detail about the beginning meetings with Anne, Vam⁵⁶ and Barb⁵⁷ in the narrative accounts.

The Field as an Ongoing Relational Inquiry Space

As this multiperspectival inquiry unfolded, the inquiry field assumed an amorphous shape, expanding and contracting to encompass one particular school, several homes, different restaurants, and a range of community places. Clandinin (2013) revealed, “In narrative inquiry, we negotiate with participants an ongoing relational inquiry space, a relational space we call the *field*” (original emphasis, p. 45). Within and across inquiry fields, in the shaping of this narrative inquiry, relational inquiry spaces were contoured whereby we, research friends, could share stories of experience with one another. In recounting their time at Bay Street School, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) observed “within the inquiry field, we lived out stories, told stories of those experiences, and modified them by retelling them and reliving them” (p. 71). As time passed, and our relationships deepened, I alongside my research friends, shared this interconnectedness.

For this multiperspectival narrative inquiry, the starting point emerged in the living alongside the two girls, Deepika and Katrina and their teacher, Anne, in their Grade Four

⁵⁴ Deepika is a pseudonym chosen by one of the young girls who chose to be a co-learner in this research journey.

⁵⁵ Katrina is a pseudonym chosen by one of the young girls who chose to be a co-learner in this research journey.

⁵⁶ Vam is a pseudonym for one of the mothers who chose to be a co-learner in this research journey.

⁵⁷ Barb is a pseudonym for one of the mothers who chose to be a co-learner in this research journey.

classroom community. I also came to live alongside the two mothers in this narrative inquiry. Clandinin (2013) suggests that it is “in the living alongside participants, we enter places that are important to participants. The places and relationships we become part of when we begin with living alongside participants call forth stories we, and they, tell” (p.45). I met family members and friends of co-participants in their worlds of home, school, and community. At the same time, co-participants came to know my friends and family members as well. This kind of physical travelling to and from our worlds, I believe, also opened up metaphorical borderland spaces (Menon & Saleh, 2018) whereby we could inquire more deeply together into our experiences. In these spaces, we could live and tell our stories knowing that each of us was listening with a kind heart (Menon, 2018). Similar to Caine, Estefan, and Clandinin (2013), I understood,

The narrative nature of experience, viewed from within narrative inquiry, necessitates considerations of relational being and knowing, attention to the artistry of and within experience, and sensitivity to the nested and overlapping stories that bring people together in research relationships. (p. 584)

Within each inquiry space, I was further reminded, “What we do, how we interact, how we live with one another is indelibly woven into, and with, who we each are and who we are each becoming” (Clandinin, Caine, & Huber, 2016, p. 428).

Shifting from the Field into Field Texts

Earlier Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described the role of the narrative inquirer working within the field and in doing so, articulated some of the richness, complexity, and multilayered terrain that is negotiated by the narrative inquirer.

When narrative inquirers are in the field, they are never there as disembodied recorders of someone else's experience. They too are having an experience, the experience of the inquiry that entails the experience they set out to explore... The narrative researcher's experience is always a dual one, always the inquirer experiencing the experience and also being part of the experience itself. (p 81)

Their words invite me backwards in time and place to the early moments of this study. I was not the cool, detached researcher coming into the classroom to record and observe phenomena with a goal of accumulating data. While my motivations for this research continues to be shaped by research friends—my personal, practical, and theoretical justifications have been also been enfolded, embedded, and at times even emboldened throughout this journey. In a similar fashion, the field texts composed throughout this narrative inquiry reflect these considerations.

Clandinin (2013) emphasizes the ethical necessity of employing a wide range of field texts as “multiple ways to tell and live experiences” and likewise, insightfully acknowledges, “Field texts allow us ways to see how others make meaning from experience and may also point us to possibilities of diverse final research texts—that is, the diverse ways we represent the retold stories” (p. 46). Possibly invariably then, field texts, in this narrative inquiry assumed a multiplicity of forms such as: field notes (recorded observations and insights), what I deem as *heart-full* research notes (sketches paired with deeply personal reflections), conversational transcripts, written work, art work, annals⁵⁸ and various artifacts such as photos which emboldened participants' metaphorical and physical memory boxes. In this manner, the field texts for this research, captured, and refracted the gradations within the spectrum of the living,

⁵⁸ Clandinin and Connelly (2000) defined, “We think of annals as a list of dates of memories, events, stories, and the like” (p. 112).

telling, retelling, and reliving (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013) embodied in this narrative inquiry.

For this inquiry, I sought to honour the different ways in which we could share our stories. To better deepen the conversation between us, to better invite ethical and relational spaces for hearing, inquiring, and responding to the storied experiences of our lives; Deepika, Katrina, and I found ourselves gravitating to art making⁵⁹ as ways to think and learn alongside one another. Stepping into the storied worlds of children's literature and entering into book conversations (see: Murray Orr, 2005; Paley, 1997) were other paths we traversed. The girls, inquiring into their lived stories, those curriculum-making experiences within and beyond school worlds, additionally, crafted pages for individual memory books. Availing themselves to pictures they took (see: Caine, 2010 for an example of how children used photographs in their curriculum-making endeavours) and other images they drew, coloured, and wrote, the girls narrated their lives in ways which resonated for them. Recognizing "artful portrayals mediate understanding, our own and that of others" (Butler-Kisber, 2002, p. 238), I will share more of these identity-living⁶⁰ endeavours in the narrative accounts.

Anne and I also engaged in art making during this inquiry. Painting emerged as a safe and relational space between us. As well, Anne shared with me lesson plans that she was currently using in her practice and ones that called forth stories of her early years as a teacher. I was made privy to her teaching portfolio which narrated at times, in explicit and nuanced ways,

⁵⁹ Greidanus (2005) provides a poignant narrative inquiry, informed by artwork, into the experiences of young children coping with the loss of loved ones in their lives. More recently, narrative inquirers working alongside indigenous youth and families shaped an arts' club space with co-participants, as they inquired into their educational experiences (Caine et al., 2012).

⁶⁰ For instance, Katrina and Deepika did not view their memory books as static constructions. Their pages (and what they contained) were often re-arranged, removed, or added to over time. They reflected their ongoing interests and inclinations.

Anne's personal teaching philosophy. Drawings gifted to her by current and former students alongside pictures taken with a camera of friends and family also made their way into our conversations. Vam and Barb, the two mothers who participated in this study, also shared pictures with me of family members, friends, and places. These mementos reminded me yet again that world travelling (Lugones, 1987) can also take place in the memories echoed by the heart. I was very happy as well, to receive pictures sent by text messaging. In the kaleidoscope of moments shaped by this narrative inquiry, I was being extended a warm hand to join these research friends as they journeyed through an experience of memories.

As I compose these sentences now, I am reminded anew of the depth of my wish to privilege diverse means of meaning-making and knowing through provoking sites of imagination and presentation. These are ways in which to communicate that I have experienced (at different points in my life) as not being (made) available to me and they are ways which research friends have experienced as well. With a view to "reaching back and forward" (Greene, 1995, p. 84), I revisit the words I used in composing my research proposal to give a sense of how I was feeling at the time of that writing and how I now feel as I think and imagine forward. I wrote:

I wish to permit opportunities for a broad range of representations amongst all participants. Arguably, the consideration of such a broad palate of field texts could render this inquiry as being much too arts based or even messy by some in that it is far removed from the more scientific qualitative research designs. (Menon, 2015, p. 88).

Thus, it was quite intentionally that I suggested to these research friends that we could be open to different types of thinking alongside one another, and hopefully, by extension, those

around us. In the narrative accounts that follow this chapter, I will attempt to render visible some of the tensions and possibilities that emerged in taking up this invocation.

I believe it is also important to note that in engaging in this narrative inquiry, my considerations with representation were too, contoured by artwork. I found myself enveloped within a wondrous creative thinking space. It turned out artmaking was spilling over into the ways in which I was lingering with and within the stories shared and lived amongst my research friends and myself. These intense moments of wonder(ings), resonances, and dissonances made their way into my research notes—notes that I decided made most sense to call as *heart-full*. *Heart-full* because what emerged seemed to be speaking to the qualities often thought as springing from the heart (heartfelt) and because of the rich complexity involved. I had not anticipated this—little knowing that by inviting artmaking in certain spaces of this research, these penchants would spread and pool to other spaces, playing havoc with my preconceived ideas of what this narrative inquiry might entail. It was not until I became more deeply engrossed within this research, that I recollected that even in my childhood I experienced an affinity to art and art- making endeavours.

It seemed intuitive for me to pick up a pencil and sketch and write and then do more—thoughts flowing onto the hitherto blank space. As I hadn't been afforded time to think *through* artistic mediums with such depth previous to engaging in this research, I was ill-prepared for the degree to which I would value these opportunities to (re)visit conversations and to reflect in less-guarded⁶¹ ways—ways in which would afford me differentially aesthetic ways of coming

⁶¹ By less-guarded I mean to convey that communicating verbally and/or through written word for me can be at times, a much more regulated practice and in some instances, a censoring one as well. Communicating through images—pictorial and word—moved me away from the limits of writing and speech and propelled me towards expression that might otherwise have been impossible.

alongside research friends and myself. Eisner's (2002) words give a sense of how I was feeling. He wrote: "Images emerge and, like the subtle changes of the setting sun, may be altered irrevocably with a blink of the eye. Representation stabilizes the idea or image in a material and makes possible a dialogue with it" (p. 6) And so it was with a hopeful heart, that I gradually gave myself permission to fully embrace these sense-making proclivities whereby impressions emerged as palates infused with words and images.

Transitioning from Field Texts to Interim Research Texts

Clandinin (2013) draws attention to the significance of ethical relationships in the unfolding of a narrative inquiry:

Field texts are always embedded within research relationships. Working carefully within the relational three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, we—alone or with participants—begin to shape field texts into interim research texts. As we move from composing field texts to composing interim research texts, the time is marked with tension and uncertainty. (p. 47)

Her words remind me that even as I made slow turns towards composing interim texts, this movement did not have to mean that I was *simultaneously* making a slow turn away from co-participants. Instead, tension-filled though I was, "yearn[ing] to write about the complexities of them and us so they and we would be able to recognize who they were and were becoming in the interim research texts we composed," (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2009), I recognized the iterative nature of this process. That is, I appreciated that my research friends and I could continue to take time to honour one another in respectful and thoughtful ways. We had several conversations over time speaking about what the research means for us. Conversations helped to

shape interim texts and gave rise to different considerations. This was an iterative and ongoing interpretive process.

A conversation that took place in May of 2018 comes to mind that gives a sense of this meaning-making endeavour. I was visiting Vam and her daughter, Deepika at their home after a considerably long time. Sitting in their comfy couch in the living room, while Deepika's younger brother played *Zelda*⁶² on the TV with quiet enthusiasm, I nervously revealed that I would be attending a conference in a few months. Seeing the curiosity on their faces, I elaborated, letting them know I would be sharing some of my experiences coming alongside them, focusing in this instance on one of Deepika and Katrina's visits with me to a paint-your-own ceramic studio⁶³. I further shared that this would be the first time that I would be speaking about our narrative inquiry in a very public and formal venue.⁶⁴ Deepika thought it was "cool" and Vam, recognizing my hesitance, encouraged me, noting that it could turn out to be a very good learning experience for not only me but others attending. I was reminded of Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) query, "What do we do as we begin to think about writing up our work, presenting at conferences, writing for journals, presenting in classes, and writing theses and books?" (p. 120). I found myself resonating with their response: "As we make this transition [from field texts to research texts], we ask questions of meaning, social significance, and purpose" (p. 120). Contemplating the: *Why? So what?* and *Who cares?* justification questions that narrative inquirers hold close to throughout their inquiries, helped me with presenting this interim text in a public and academic venue I was still uncomfortable with.

Moving from Interim Research Texts to Research Texts

⁶² *Zelda* is a popular Nintendo action-adventure video game.

⁶³ I will speak more about this story in the narrative accounts.

⁶⁴ I presented at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) ARTS conference in May of 2018.

Though this section is entitled *Moving from Interim Research Texts to Research Texts*, I do not wish to give the impression that each design consideration was necessarily discrete or separate from one another. That is, there was some overlap involved for me as a narrative inquirer. Minh-ha's (1989) observation, "Despite all our desperate, eternal attempts to separate, contain and mend, categories always leak" (p. 94) is helpful here. Unlike positivistic methodologies that typically endorse strict labeling and/or assignment of processes, I discovered that being wakeful to the three-dimensional inquiry space made for a fluid and non-prescriptive engagement of the design considerations. For instance, I discovered that in (re)listening to and also transcribing conversations, I would continue to jot notes and sketch ideas out for this research. It was not unusual for me to be thinking about and (re)conceptualizing pieces for the narrative accounts that were negotiated in different ways throughout the inquiry and would eventually be shared with my research friends during this concentrated time of (re)listening, transcribing, wondering, and thinking about the relational threads woven within and throughout the different stories. The girls' artwork—such as their individual memory books—also provided spaces for provocation and reflection. As well, the *heart*-full notes (the notes with illustrations and musings) I had composed earlier permitted me windows with which to peer backward in time and afforded me views of possibilities for future research. As such, they occupied a unique space in this narrative inquiry in that some of them could be ostensibly construed as field, interim, and research texts synchronously.

Clandinin (2013) illuminates, "As we compose interim and final research texts, we continue to live within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space" (p. 49). Through this iterative process, "multiple meanings of experiences" (Clandinin, 2013, p. 50) can be made visible and inquired into as "we see the disruptions, interruptions, silences, gaps, and

incoherences in participants’ and our shared experiences” (p. 50). As a means of deeper inquiry, I sought to think about the bumping places which reverberated temporally throughout each of the narrative accounts. Clandinin et al. (2006) elucidate this complex and nuanced process of deeper narrative analysis.

As we began to compose interim research texts we realized our attention was drawn to identifying moments of tension, moments and places where children’s and family’s stories to live by bumped against stories of school, where teachers’ stories to live by bumped against children’s, researchers’, and others’ stories to live by, and so on. We also began to see how our own stories as researchers, as teachers, and as teacher educators were being interrupted and shifted. We often identified these “bumps” as marked by tensions...Attending to a multiplicity of lives and experiences helped us understand the experiences in deeper and more complex ways. (p. 35)

Rendering visible these bumping places within and across narrative accounts, I came to understand how different iterations of arrogant perception (Lugones, 1987) bring form to dominant or master narratives. Attending to the different bumps against these dominant narratives opened spaces for inquiry and reflection. Reverberating backwards and forwards along these bumping places, research friends and I negotiate our stories to live by in ways which replicate, resist, and interrupt dominant plotlines.

Engaging in Narrative Inquiry is a Relational Endeavour

As mentioned elsewhere and throughout this dissertation, attending to the relational is an ongoing endeavour for a narrative inquirer. Narrative inquirers are especially concerned with how to be in relation and alongside co-participants. Clandinin (2013) observes,

Entering the field begins with negotiation of relationships and the research puzzles to be explored. Negotiations of purpose, transitions, intentions, and texts are ongoing processes throughout the inquiry. (p. 51)

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) make clear that relationships are at the heart of narrative inquiry:

Though highly variable from person to person and place to place narrative inquiries do end, at least in a formal sense. Reports are written, dissertations written, people move, funding stops. Negotiating this final transition is also part of what a narrative inquirer does in the field relationship. It is critical to the trust and integrity of the work that researchers do not simply walk away when “their time has come.” (p. 74)

Throughout this narrative inquiry, attention was paid to ensuring the anonymity of research friends and for the two girls, Deepika and Katrina, and their teacher in Grade Four, the name of the school was not given. Additionally, research friends were made aware that they were free to withdraw from the inquiry should they choose to do so at any point of the narrative inquiry. Striving to co-shape spaces to come alongside in safe, careful, and creative ways were important considerations throughout the unfolding of this research. As well, in many of the headings of the narrative accounts, the voices of research friends were foregrounded through the use of their own words as indicated by quotation marks and italicized words. Each co-learner was consulted about their respective narrative accounts and the stories and experiences shared. In this manner, we were able to negotiate narrative accounts together and over time.

Sharing the final narrative accounts is never easy as this is not necessarily a smooth process. I understood some of the stories and experiences we shared and that were represented in the dissertation were not necessarily easy ones to think about. However, the challenges of an

ongoing world-wide pandemic (the spread of the disease COVID-19) complicated the situation. I had imagined sharing the final narrative accounts together in person with Anne, with Katrina and Barb, and with Deepika and Vam. The pandemic did not allow for this. On the phone and online exchanges helped to lessen the physical distance. Early August of 2020, Anne texted me: *I love it! Don't change a single thing! Brought back so many of the emotions we shared...teared up a bit! Thanks for including me in your journey! [Heart emoji] (personal communication, August 5, 2020)*. In the middle of August of 2020, Vam, Deepika's mother let me know: *"I did go through the writing. It is indeed, a very good writing. I truly appreciate your efforts and time taken to pen down our stories so beautifully!"* (personal communication, August 19, 2020). Barb, Katrina's mother related to me in early of August of 2020 when we negotiated her final narrative account:

Jinny, I am feeling very emotional. It seems like I lived part of my life again. In India people still treat girls differently than boys, I always felt this practice was wrong, even back then I thought if I ever have kids in my life, gender does not matter. It is so painful how girl children can be unwanted in India and other parts of the world. I am so grateful that I have two girls. Thank you for letting us be a part of this research. (personal communication, August 8, 2020)

Katrina and Deepika, now teenagers, also shared their thoughts with me as well (see final pages of Chapter 9 for some of their reflections in thinking with their stories). Relieved and gladdened that everyone felt they were being represented in good ways, I tried to also express how honoured I was that they joined me on this research journey. At the same time, I was overcome with emotion for I understood that what they had shared with me had been made possible only because they (en)trusted me with their experiences and stories and this was no small thing.

Being Wakeful to the Positioning of this Narrative Inquiry

Clandinin (2013) suggests:

Because narrative inquiries attend to individual lives as they are composed over time in relation with people and situations in a particular place or places, the focus remains on lives as lived and told throughout the inquiry. (p. 52)

In this manner, thinking within the storylines of possibility and imagination helped me to come alongside research friends in deep, relational ways which honoured their lived diversities within and across multiple worlds (Lugones, 1987) of experience. Adopting an attitude of hopefulness allowed me to contemplate and wonder within spaces of ambiguity and uncertainty while simultaneously thinking about, and imagining, forward-looking stories for research friends and myself.

Chapter Four: Coming Alongside Anne

A Preamble: Preparing the Canvas of Anne's Narrative Account

In what follows, I share a narrative account of Anne. I had met Anne several years ago where we had been colleagues at one elementary school. We had become friends and spent time together outside of school. As I have mentioned elsewhere in this dissertation, though our career paths had diverged, and I hadn't seen Anne for some time, Anne's name readily came to mind when I began to think about engaging in this multiperspectival narrative inquiry. Anne was one of the people, I had instinctively reached out to and asked if she would be interested in joining me in this research adventure. I was elated when she had quickly agreed. I began this inquiry with research friends' living of stories.⁶⁵ Anne welcomed me warmly into her Grade Four classroom community in the fall of 2015. She introduced me to students as her friend who she had worked with at another school and also, as a new friend to their classroom community who would be helping out throughout the year. Anne also shared with the children that I, too, was a student like them and wanted to learn about the experiences of children in schools. This gentle way of introducing me invited the children in the class to gain a sense of who I could be in their stories of school. Much like Chan (2010), whose narrative inquiry was shaped by teacher and student interactions within a classroom, I believed, the students

grew to see me as an additional teacher in the classroom who was able to help them with assignments, act as an adult supervisor during in-school activities or field trips, and as a listening ear when they had disagreements with friends or with teachers. (p. 119)

⁶⁵ Throughout this inquiry, we also told stories to one another. Clandinin and Huber (2010) highlight this consideration, noting, "Some narrative inquiries also begin with participants' living stories although telling or told stories also take their place within such studies" (p. 437).

As a teacher volunteer, I came to gradually know the students in the class and Anne, as their much beloved teacher. Coming alongside Anne in this manner allowed me to know Anne in different ways than I already knew Anne.⁶⁶ Similar to Clandinin, who voiced her hope for her doctoral work as: “I knew I wanted to go to schools, to live alongside teachers, to understand what it meant to say that teachers held experiential knowledge, shaped by their lives, that found expression in classroom practices” (Estefan, Caine, & Clandinin, p. 20), I too, wanted to live alongside Anne and learn about her “experiential knowledge” (Estefan, Caine, & Clandinin, 2016). Anne shared autobiographical stories, stories related to her early childhood, and other multilayered stories which were reflective of her personal practical knowledge⁶⁷ (Clandinin, 1986; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) which were steeped in recollections and thoughts about her ongoing journey as an elementary teacher.

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind me, “Narrative inquiry in the field is a form of living, a way of life” (p. 78). In this form of living, Anne and I had conversations within her school and additionally, in other community areas. We met in restaurants, coffee shops, art gathering places, and homes. Throughout the enfolding and unfolding of this multiperspectival narrative inquiry, we lived, told, retold and relived stories, and many conversations were shared. Akin to Witherell and Noddings (1991), I also believe, “Stories invite us to come to know the world and our place in it. Whether narratives of history or the imagination, stories call us to consider what we know, and whom we care about” (p. 13). This is both an epistemic, as well as, an ontological consideration. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) elucidate this consideration for me:

⁶⁶ I began to see Anne in her other lived multiplicities. I resonate with Clandinin’s (1986) understanding of image “as the source of inspiration, ideas, insight, and meaning,” (p. 17) and my affinity for imagery as a way of representation in diverse forms. The image I had of Anne was of someone kind and who loved being alongside children. The imagery of Anne I was shaping of her in the midst of the inquiry, was deepening and becoming more rich—allowing me opportunities to see her artistry as a teacher and her other ways of being.

⁶⁷ Connelly & Clandinin (1988) suggest, “Personal practical knowledge is a moral, affective, and aesthetic way of knowing life’s educational situations” (p. 59).

“These lived and told stories and the talk about the stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another’s assistance in building lives and communities” (p. 35). Yet, for the purposes of this dissertation, there was a need for selectivity in determining which research conversations and/or accompanying stories could be brought to the foreground and which by unfortunate, technical reasons, had to be shifted to the background.

Attempting to live within this uneasy reality, I have found myself rereading Bateson’s (1989) words:

The process of improvisation that goes into composing a life is compounded in the process of remembering a life., like a patchwork quilt in a watercolour painting, rumpled and evocative. Yet, it is this second process, composing a life through memory as well as through day-to-day choices, that seems to me most essential to creating living. The past empowers the present, the groping footsteps leading to this present mark the pathways to the future. (p. 34)

The composing of lives⁶⁸ crafted within this narrative account shares qualities similar to “a patchwork quilt in a watercolour painting” (Bateson, 1989, p. 34.). Some of the patches are painted with attention to depth and clarity. Others are rendered in ways which situate these storied patches as less easy to focus upon. They are blurry, painted with blended smudges. Collaged⁶⁹ (dis)jointly, they reach to the past, hold-fast to the present, and stretch towards a

⁶⁸ Here, I am thinking of Anne’s life alongside the lives of the children, friends, and family that helped to shape her worlds of curriculum making within homes, schools, and elsewhere (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011; Lugones, 1987). I am also thinking of myself as a researcher friend to Anne who invited me into her worlds of experience.

⁶⁹ I use the artform of collage as a means of metaphorically representing this narrative account because the storied experiences shared, and the differing images inquired into were messy, complex, and overlapped and intersected in some ways and diverged in others.

future. Looked at from afar and near, my hope is that they invite you to muse, to ponder, to reflect and ultimately, layer⁷⁰ meaning together and in individual ways.

A Heart-full Musing Interlude: Teaching is a Work of Heart



6-Teaching is a Work of Heart

⁷⁰ As another means of mediating and shaping spaces for deeper conversation, layered within this narrative account are heart-full musings I engaged in as I came alongside Anne.

In this *heart*-full musing, my wonders in coming alongside Anne intermingle with heteronormative narratives of school, as well as my wish to disposition them. Using a mix of watercolour paints, markers, and gold tipped gel pens, I played with the differing symbols that I (and others) have come to associate with learning and teaching. I attempted to take the monolithic narratives habitually attached to these symbols and depict them in ways that called the eye and mind to take a second look, to inquire a little deeper. The apple in the righthand corner is spliced and layered in ways that reveal different patterns inviting me to attend to the nuances of stories shared around teaching and learning, within and outside of school worlds. The crayons, the scissors, and paintbrush prompted me to think about Anne's creativity as a teacher alongside her creativity in crafting a life of multiplicity through a variety of mediums. The yellow bus had me turning inward as I recounted memories of my time on school buses traveling to school alongside several stories Anne had shared already about her experiences as a child in school. The stories associated with these travelling memories also propelled me to think about the journeys made between school, home, community, and other worlds. And, I wondered what such travels meant for Anne. I wondered how she navigated the at times challenging terrain of her students' worlds. The pencil and the paintbrush made their ways onto paper as I slowly came to recognize the artificial dualities that can be imposed on teachers who wish to live in creative ways alongside students when co-shaping learning communities that nourish and sustain its members.

It would be later, after I had drawn and painted this particular musing with Anne in mind, that I would learn from Anne about her love for owls and that this was one of the stories she shared with her students about herself. The owl who often represents wisdom and knowledge in Western thinking, symbolically reminded me it is "Who" and not "Hoo" you are which shades—

in multifarious ways—how we think and act. Our memories and experiences are imbued with the differing plotlines of who we are at any given moment. The sound of “Hoo” which the owl is typically represented as crying out, cautioned me to listen with a careful ear to the differing stories shared aloud and also, to the stories which are voiced silently as Anne and I contoured worlds of meaning betwixt us. As Estefan, Caine, and Clandinin (2016) describe:

Thinking *with* [original emphasis] stories is a different approach that embeds story and reader in a reciprocal relationship. In this relationship the reader is invited into such questions as, “How do stories act upon me?” and “How do stories operate among other stories as they are lived, told, retold, and relived?” Entertaining such questions offers access into ways stories make visible experience and shape identities. (p. 16)

These wonders and considerations emerged from our individual and shared stories. They helped to contour the different conversations that Anne and I had. Thinking with these stories invited deeper inquiry into how our experiences were shaping who we are and how they shaped who were in earlier times. In this manner, I was drawn close to Anne and to the experiences she chose to share with me and the experiences I lived alongside her in the classroom during part of this narrative inquiry.

Coming to Know Anne in her Lived Multiplicities

As Anne and I shared stories of experience shaped within, amidst, and travelling to and from our worlds of curriculum making (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011; Lugones, 1987), I kept returning to the writings of Lugones (1987) and Anzuldúa (2015). They helped me to think alongside Anne as we inquired into our experiences. I turned to Anzuldúa (2015) who evocatively rendered identity-making as enduring creative act:

It is an ongoing activity constructing an ordered latticework of time, space, and emotional climate, of stringing together a series of scenes and experiences, and of holding all of these together by memory. Memory is the adhesive and the myths of your tribes....Identity is a composite image that shifts with setting (position) and other people and things in the landscape....Identity is always in process, in nepantla (between who you were yesterday and are yet to be tomorrow. (pp. 184-186)

Thinking with this idea of identity-making as ever-shifting acts and additionally, resonating with Lugones (1987) pronouncement, “I am a plurality of selves” (p. 14), I understood that I wished to know Anne in her lived multiplicities (Menon et al, 2015). Lived multiplicities—the diverse ways in which we identified ourselves and lived our lives—I recognized, which artfully gave rise to how Anne (re)storied herself and how others (re)storied her.

Anne’s Creative and Relational Ways of Being

The following is an excerpt (field text) taken from my notebook of research notes where I penned and sketched my observations and notes of what I was seeing, learning, and experiencing alongside Anne and the children in the Grade Four community at Borderlands School.

The class exploded in an exuberant rush of activity as students jumped up and out of their desks to dance. Eyes glued to the video clip playing out on the Smartboard, bodies gyrating to the fun beat, the children giggled as they mouthed the words to Disney’s Ice Age song, The Continental Drift, as sung by Sid the Sloth. “It’s time to get up on your feet. It’s easy to do, just follow me! Move it out. Do the Sid. Take it back and do the Sid. Step left and then drift! Step right and then drift! Criss-cross and do the Manny! Criss-cross and do the Manny! Now jump! Jump! Wiggle your rump!” Stifling my warm

amusement as children took to vigorously shaking their bottoms, I swept my gaze over happily moving bodies. I deliberately sought out a glimpse of the girls who had agreed to be part of this narrative inquiry. Situated at opposite ends off the room, both were thoroughly engaged with dancing, joyfully mimicking the antics of Sid the Sloth. Smiling widely, I turned my face to Anne and found an echoing grin dancing on her lips. She recognized that the students were restless, needing to be released from the confines of their seats. (Research Notes, January 14, 2016)

Rereading the words that I penned so many months before, I recall the delight I felt in that moment of seeing the children dance, and of their teacher, Anne, whose understanding of the children under her care extended to deviating from a set lesson plan to an offering of unscheduled fun. This moment among many others was how Anne was attending to the diverse lives of the children in her class. Then I had asked Anne, “I thought you had something else planned. Weren’t you hoping to do some more math?” (Research Notes, January 14, 2016). Anne had mentioned she had wanted to get the children prepared for an upcoming unit exam and that she felt some of the students needed more practice time before moving on. Anne’s response that the children needed to release some energy and had spent too much time at their desks was a pleasure to hear. Thinking about Anne’s decision to move away from what had been planned, I began to get a sense that a competing story (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) might be at work.

Clandinin et al. (2006) explicate:

Competing stories are understood as teachers’ stories that live in dynamic but positive tension with the plotlines of the dominant stories of school. These stories live alongside one another in ways that allow for change and possibility in both teachers’ stories and stories of school. (p. 8)

Free style dance with accompanying music and sometimes video, was one of the ways in which Anne sought to creatively build relationship with her students and to also, afford them artful opportunities to explore diverse ways of being alongside one another. A dominant Western school narrative involves the prioritizing of subject matter situated in containers of time. Each container of time is comprised of the lesson plans of what teachers are expected to teach and what students are expected to learn. Anne's choice to live another story alongside her students where they could shift away from a prescribed curricular moment into a more artful one, pointed to how Anne was shaping possibility within the classroom community. Moreover, I recognized Anne's personal practical teacher knowledge⁷¹ stemmed from her creative way of being which in turn, shaped her relationships within her school worlds of curriculum making. Anne's relational way of being was something that was very much visible in how she shaped her practice around the children in the Grade Four classroom community as it was with the teachers she counted on as friends and trusted colleagues. My thoughts skipped back to a moment few months earlier in the classroom to when Anne and the children had surprised me by celebrating my birthday. Singing "Happy Birthday" and proffering doughnuts, I had been touched that Anne had remembered the date and had alongside the children showed me that I had a belonging space within the classroom community. Anne's relationality was made visible in such moments alongside children and adults.

⁷¹ Drawing on her previous work (Clandinin; 1985; Clandinin, 1986; Connolly & Clandinin, 1985), Clandinin (2020) clarifies: "'Personal practical knowledge' is knowledge which is imbued with all the experiences that make up a person's being. Its meaning is derived from, and understood in terms of, a person's experiential history, both professional and personal" (p. 38).



7-Anne at her Desk in November of 2015

Inquiring into Anne's Stories of Why Teaching?

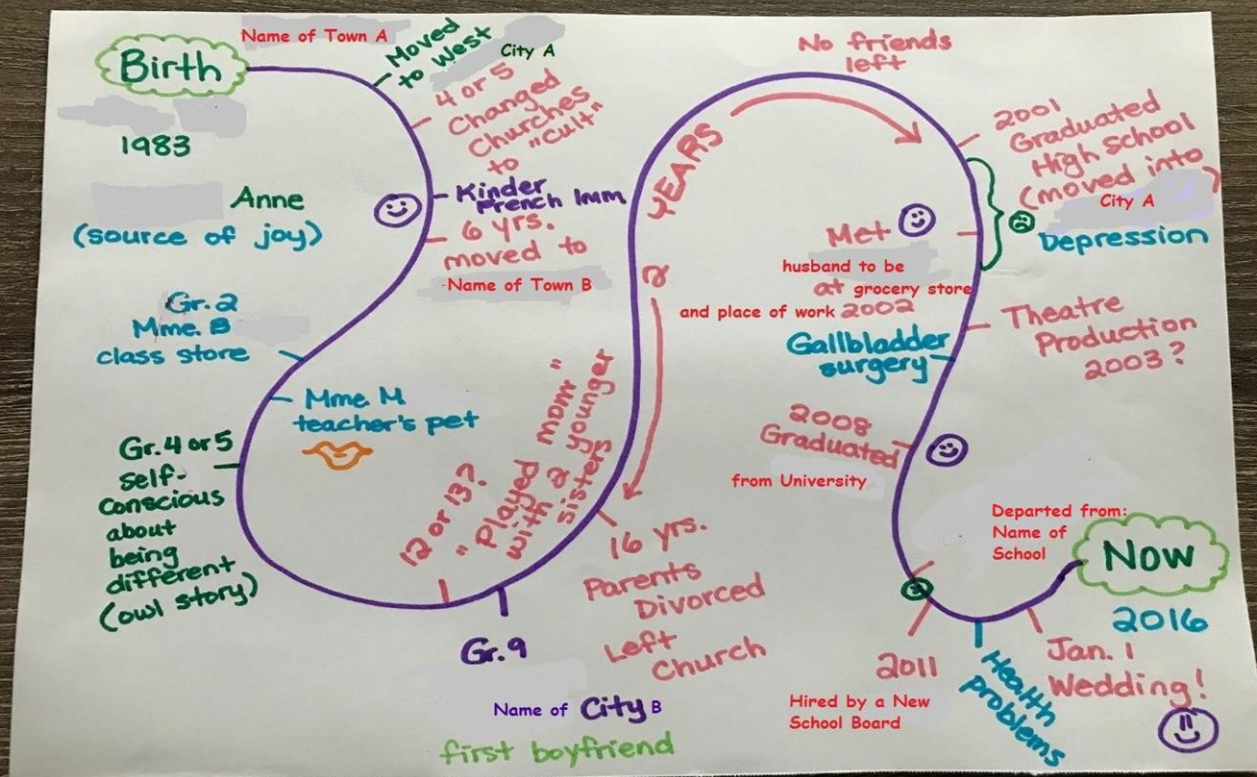
During one of our conversations outside of school, Anne shared some of the more pivotal moments in her life. In doing so, she recalled different experiences with family members and relationships with others. As Anne talked about these curriculum-making moments, I slowly came to understand that the plotline of being a teacher was a story that Anne knew of herself even at a young age. Anne's identity as an artistic person was also another plotline—a deep vein that glittered bright—which made itself prominently visible time and time again in the shifting canvasses of Anne's experiences. Anne confided, *"I always thought I would be a teacher and I wanted to play with my creative side"* (Transcript, February 15, 2016). I wanted to know more about how and why Anne came to decide to take up the rewarding yet challenging path of an elementary school teacher. Anne was tugged back and forth in time as she spoke with me. In these temporal movements, she found herself drawn to certain events and memories which

resonated with her. An annal in narrative inquiry is a sketch of such moments. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explicate:

Annals and chronicles may be thought of as the rudimentary shaping and narrating of personal and social histories We think of annals as a list of dates of memories, events, stories, and the like. Students or participants construct times beginning, for example, at birth; at some distant, important period or date in the past history of the person's family; or at some more recent date, as kind of beginning benchmark. We think of chronicles as the sequence of events in and around a particular topic or narrative thread of interest, for example, the teenage years or the travelling years. (p. 112).

As we talked, Anne invited me into several storied moments. These moments, amongst others helped to shape Anne's annal. Thinking narratively alongside Anne's stories, I gained a deeper appreciation of the different curriculum making that had shaped Anne's journey as a teacher. I began to see the complexity involved in Anne's identity-making over time, in relation to herself and others, and within her worlds of experience. Below is a depiction of Anne's autobiographical timeline or annal.⁷² Anne selected what she wished to include in her visual representation of her storied experiences. The use of coloured markers provide visual markers representing the breadth and depth of Anne's experiences. The curvilinear path Anne depicted reflects her growth was not linear but composed of distinctive experiences. Anne's words work in tandem with her pictorial symbols to animate her representation. As Anne worked on her annal, composing a visual timeline which honoured her experiences, she shared familial stories, stories around school, key moments in her life, and her unique relationships.

⁷² Modifications have been made to Anne's annal in order to exclude identifying information. Not all storied elements represented in Anne's annal are shared in this narrative account.



8-Anne's Annal

Anne's Early Family Life: "So, I sort of took on the mothering role..."

As we sat in the familiar comfort of one of our favourite haunts—an Italian restaurant that helped us both to recollect other moments from an earlier time spent as colleagues—it was clear, that it was Family Day, a holiday celebrated in our province in February. The sounds of children laughing and babies happily giggling echoed this message in pleasant ways. All around us, families gathered together to enjoy each other's company around good food. Minutes earlier, we had hugged and now, as we waited for our orders to be brought to us, I repeated to Anne my hope that we could shape a timeline of sorts composed of any experiences Anne wished to bring forth as we conversed. A bit self-consciously, I turned on my digital recorder. Scanning the

room, I was pleased to note that nobody seemed interested in what was happening at our table. I knew from previous experience that having research conversations in the middle of certain public spaces was not always safe nor enjoyable.⁷³ I did not wish for that to be the case for either Anne or myself today.

Unhurriedly Anne spoke about a time when she was young where she faced a great deal of hardship. Anne related that her older sister experienced significant trauma⁷⁴ when she was just a teenager and that her elder sibling subsequently, was hospitalized for it. This time was marked with upheaval and strife and involved a lot of change for Anne and the other members of her family. As I listened, I understood that Anne's identity had been shaped by responsibility within her family when she was still a child. Anne suggested, that "her role" (Transcript, February 15, 2016) had undergone a drastic change when she was younger because of certain life altering events that had impacted her whole family in complicated and nuanced ways. Anne found herself stepping into new shoes and assuming more responsibility within the household at a young age.

She [Anne's older sister] went to Prairie,⁷⁵ to the mental institution, and so she was there for about a month or so. But I mean, we just had a lot of cops out to our acreage and ambulances because she was having problems with drugs. A lot of my childhood was spent looking after my two younger sisters while my parents dealt with her [Anne's older sister]. So, I sort of took on the mothering role, looking after them [Anne's younger

⁷³ It has been my experience as a person of colour, that certain public spaces are not as welcoming as others nor are they ideal for the in-depth research conversations narrative inquirers wish to engage with their research friends. In these spaces, one's actions and words are under intense scrutiny and can become fodder for negative discussion.

⁷⁴ Clandinin and Connelly (2000), in pointing to parallels between writers who choose not to tell a story for various reasons and the relational responsibilities narrative inquirers have towards co-participants and the stories they share, highlight a sacred trust that is kindled between researcher and co-participants (p. 177).

⁷⁵ Prairie is a pseudonym.

sisters]. (Transcript, February 15, 2016)

Anne spoke in a quiet voice which broke occasionally as she detailed the trauma her sister had undergone and the reverberations experienced by her family in the aftermath. As I listened to this heart-wrenching story unfold, I felt a deep sense of sadness bloom amidst anger. Inwardly, I helplessly questioned, “Why do bad things happen?” Even as I reached out a hand across the table to Anne, I recognized that this event did not only happen to Anne’s older sister, it had shaped all of Anne’s immediate family members in powerful ways. For Anne, this experience had (re)composed the stories she lived by. The emerging plotline of responsibility that Anne had thrust upon her when she was young, altered the trajectory of the stories she had of herself prior to this life-altering event. Anne described this understanding of herself.

And so I never went through that kind of rebellion thing until I was in my twenties and that’s when I had my issues and I went to, and had to, see a therapist ’cause I wasn’t talking like now about this stuff. (Transcript, February 15, 2016)

Hearing the pain behind her comments I gently repeated, “You don’t have to share anything you are not comfortable with Anne” (Transcript, February 15, 2016). We had discussed before that our conversations might take us to difficult places emotionally, but this realization did not make the retelling and the reliving of Anne’s stories anymore easier for her to narrate and for the both of us to hear. Already, in the deeply personal space that had spun out between us, in the midst of laughter and chatter from other patrons in the restaurant, our conversation seemed to be enclosed—almost sacred—in its own secluded bubble as the conversational tone had shifted, and shifted again. The fault lines in our conversation forcibly reminded me of my time in Japan when an earthquake had awoken me from my slumber. Here with Anne I felt that similar jolt. The

atmosphere between was somber and heavy with the weight of our combined memories.

Overcome with emotion,⁷⁶ I was reminded of my ethical responsibilities as a narrative inquirer.

Drawing upon Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) seminal work, Caine, Estefan, and Clandinin (2013) explain:

We also attend to ethical obligations in our relationships, and stay mindful that our words might call forth or shift attention in new and unsettling ways. In the retelling, we contemplate our vulnerabilities and uncertainties and are reminded again that narrative inquiry is first and foremost a relational research methodology, and, while it is research, it is also a transaction between people, which makes ethical issues and concerns about living well with others central to the inquiry. (p. 578)

Within this relational space, Anne continued slowly:

No, it doesn't bother me anymore. Um, but back then I wouldn't talk about it, I'd just keep it all bottled up. So, then I entered sort of like a depression. [Pause] Yeah. I went through some antidepressants and some therapy and I got out of it. (Transcript, February 15, 2016)

I found myself smiling at the quiet pride in Anne's voice. To be able to move from a state of depression and to something more hopeful was profound and, to my way of thinking, a perpetual act of courage. The stigma around the sharing of such storied experiences remains and I understood Anne was very much aware of this particular dominant narrative around health and nevertheless, was choosing to circumvent this storyline by inviting me to understand her better.

⁷⁶ Witherell and Noddings (1991) observe, "A caring relation also requires dialogue. The material of dialogue is usually words, but touch, smiles, affectionate sounds and silences, and glances may also be a part of it" (p. 7). Whereas Witherell and Noddings emphasize the importance of words within dialogue, in this storied moment, I placed more weight on the other elements of dialogue. Bracketing the spaces between Anne and myself, care punctuated itself in our facial expressions and instinctive utterances articulated within our physical movements.

In revealing her vulnerability, Anne was composing a plotline of bravery. Not wishing for her to be in doubt of my response and reaction, I told her a bit of what I was feeling. Anne's nod of gentle affirmation was inspiring to behold.

Anne's Early Postsecondary Experiences: "I'll go into theater production!"

In a much happier voice, Anne, once more took me back in time with her and explained how despite a passion for teaching that had come at an early age, she had initially traversed down a different path before embarking on life shaped by teaching alongside children.

Anne, musing: Then I went to school. The first program I did was um, theater production. And so, I thought, "Oh it would be cool to work like behind the scenes." Because I did it actually in high school too, and that was one of my spare things I could do. I worked behind the scenes on some plays in high school. And I was like, I would take a year off and then I'll go into theater production! And it was really fun! I did costuming and set design.

Me, excitedly: That sounds amazing! I totally can see you doing that! (Transcript, February 15, 2016)

I had worked with Anne several years ago at a different school from the one she was currently employed as an elementary teacher. Then I knew Anne as being artistically inclined. Like me, she enjoyed helping organize the various shows and events we had put on at the school alongside children. Having had the opportunity to be a volunteer teacher in her Grade Four class now, I understood Anne's passion for art had not dissipated. Art was not merely a school-based option but a way of extending and enriching our learning and teaching selves. To be able to share that passion with children, was a perpetual gift. Maxine Greene (1995) encapsulated this thinking when she stated:

At the very least, participatory involvement with the many forms of art can enable us to see more in our experience, to hear more on normally unheard frequencies, to become conscious of what daily routines have obscured, what habit and convention have suppressed. (p. 123)

Anne, too, I believed, understood what it meant for us to open ourselves up to artful ways of thinking and being. Her teaching reflected this consideration and, as I was learning in this moment, she had first considered shaping a career in theater production, an intensely artistic vocation.

In the midst of bites of our tasty aromatic pasta dishes, Anne continued to relate how she came to leave theater production. I was taken aback when she informed me, “*Anyways, I ended up dropping out because of me missing so much school*” (Transcript, February 15, 2016). At my questioning look, she elaborated:

My gallbladder was totally full of stones and they were stuck in my bile duct. They had to put a stint in, and I was waiting two months for surgery. And I was on T3s which are pretty much nothing. I was pretty much bedridden for a long time. So, then my teachers called me in, and they were concerned by how much school I had missed especially since the production I was working on at the time, I was Stage Manager. (Transcript, February 15, 2016)

To be bedridden at a time when she was just starting to explore her career options must have been profoundly difficult. Anne continued to recollect upon the trajectory of her formal education:

I started my BEd the following September. By that point I had my surgery in June and it

was the end of March, beginning of April that I sort of dropped out. So, if you ever look at my transcripts, you'll see a bunch of withdrawals. Withdrawal. Withdrawal. Withdrawal. Withdrawal. So, I think I withdrew before I would've been penalized for it. Anyways, I just started the BEd program at [name of college] so at least then, I could do the open studies. (Transcript, February 15, 2016)

Alongside the physical toll, I wondered about the mental toll that such pain caused. Anne's decision to embark on a career of teaching had been a tension-filled one. Her regular bouts with illness had made it difficult for her to take up her first choice of working in theater. Though Anne's tone appeared flippant on the surface when she repeatedly voiced the value-laden term, "Withdrawal", I could sense deeper undercurrents to what she was sharing. I could discern a wealth of hardship and torment behind her words. Anne's storyline of wishing to be a professional within the vocation of the Arts had been disrupted in powerful ways. As I sat across from her, I wondered how I could comfort her—of whether I could comfort her. I was reminded of Minh-ha (1989) who suggested:

Never does one open the discussion by coming right to the heart of the matter. For the heart of the matter is always somewhere else than where it is supposed to be. To allow it to emerge, people approach it indirectly by postponing until it matures, by letting it come when it is ready to come. There is no catching, no pushing, no directing, no breaking through, no need for a linear progression which gives the comforting illusion that one knows where one goes. Time and space are not something entirely exterior to oneself, something that one has, keeps, saves, wastes, or loses. (p. 1)

Not wishing to "catch, push, direct, or break through" (Min-ha, 1989, p. 1) this moment, I decided against venturing into this thorny territory for fear of causing further pain to Anne.

Making the comment that the role of Stage Manager was a big responsibility, I let Anne take the lead in shaping the rest of our conversation. Anne nodded and went onto discuss how the reactions of her teachers to her serious health issues made her think in deeper ways about her future.

They were like, "How come you haven't been doing any practices and stuff or rehearsals. What are we going to do?" I said, "Maybe I need to withdraw. I'm going through a lot of health problems." One of my profs. He was understanding. I think he was a little bit disappointed that I was withdrawing but I think he understood why. And I had every intention of going back [to the program] when all the testing was done. But I sort of started thinking when I was off that I wouldn't have any sort of stability in that line of work. Like you would be constantly looking for new jobs every few months and especially here. If I wanted to work on a big production, I would have to go somewhere else. Like New York or Chicago. (Transcript, February 15, 2016)

Faced with her growing belief that she probably could not continue with her Arts' program as she hoped, the understanding she received from her favourite professors eased Anne's anxiety about the decision she was making. Anne's wish to remain close to home and to have a job that lent itself to stability was a plotline which resonated in different ways with me. Discovering there was no steady employment for a Bachelor of Arts graduate had been one of the reasons I entered the teaching profession. When I was younger, I had been excited to leave home and work abroad. Now, my inclinations had changed, and I found that being surrounded by family and friends close by was how I wished to craft meaning within my life. Ruminating on these thoughts, I contemplated the stories Anne had already shared with me. As a child she had mothered her siblings and being close to family was a plotline which she lived in deliberate ways. Now I

wondered if Anne's decision had also been because Anne had wished to be close to family and friends. Anne responded to my query, noting that being close to family had indeed been one of her reasons for her change in career choice. As plates and glasses were cleared from our table, Anne explained more fully.

Journeying further back in her memories, Anne described how her life during this tumultuous time in her life was characterized by other strife and surprisingly for her, also, threaded with possibility. Anne was still reeling from the aftermath of her parent's divorce which happened just a little after she graduated from high school in August. Anne described the situation as full of change.

Yeah, my parents had other places. They were separated and they had an apartment on the southside of [city]. They would trade one week with us and one week away like that. Um, so my mom already had some place she could move to. (Transcript, February 15, 2016)

This was a time of tension for Anne. It was difficult transitioning from a two-parent family to a one-parent family. The time spent with both parents was marked by change and feelings of loss. And even as we sat together, I felt Anne's upset linger in the air between us she was drawn back into the past. I knew from other experiences Anne had shared with me that it had taken Anne some time to be in a good place with her mother. Her relationship with her father had remained strong. Anne also had experienced some ups and downs alongside her siblings. Though, when I heard her speak of them now, Anne and her immediate family seemed much more reconciled with one another than they had in the past. Seeing how Anne responded to the needs of the children in her Grade Four classroom community, I wondered if it was in part, because of her own familial curriculum-making which helped her to think with the children's experiences.

Meeting Someone Special: “We do everything together...”

Not all of Anne’s childhood reveries were charged with pain. Within this time of upheaval, Anne met the man she was to marry this year. Anne and her future husband, Gus⁷⁷ worked at a local grocery store, but it would be sometime before their friendship would develop into something closer.

Anne, in a reflective tone of voice: I probably met Gus September of that year. We were friends first for a lot of the time. We had a good group of friends that would just go out after work and hang out. And so, him and I were in that group. And he was actually dating somebody else at the time.

Me, in surprise: Really?

Anne: Yeah, Gus broke up with her when she moved to [name of city]. I would say they were close to marriage I think. ’Cause he had a really hard time getting over her. We were like that for three years. So that’s why we have two anniversaries. [laughing] When we first started seeing each other and when we actually started dating. We actually started dating on the first of January. Three years prior to that, we started seeing each other.

Me: You guys are totally like Rachel and Ross from Friends!⁷⁸

Anne: Totally! And I think that’s why we are best friends still! Like we do everything together and we don’t get sick of each other. Umm, it’s been 10 years since we’ve been dating. And so, when we were walking home from our New Year’s party, we were both like, “We should just go for it.” That was like 2:00 am and that’s why we decided January 1st. So, it’s technically after New Year’s. (Transcript, February 15, 2016)

⁷⁷ This is a pseudonym.

⁷⁸ *Friends* was a popular American sitcom revolving around the lives of six friends in their thirties living in Manhattan, New York. Rachel and Ross were main characters who after some challenges, eventually married on the show. The show ran for ten seasons. Anne had shared with me earlier that when she and her fiancé had become engaged, it was very much in line with a *Friends*’ theme.

Thinking about the numerous stressors Anne was experiencing (both positive and not so positive) back then, I could better see why Anne was concerned about making her future as secure as possible. Ensuring she had some balance in the different aspects of her life could have helped in making Anne feel she had more stability. The friendship with the man she would eventually marry was a bright light in Anne's early adulthood.

A Turn Towards Teaching as a Profession: "You would've thought I learned my lesson!"

Soon after making the significant decision to leave theatre production, Anne decided that teaching might be a good path for her. This was a career choice that Anne felt extremely comfortable about undertaking. Anne drew upon stories of her father as an English teacher in making her choice. Anne also returned to moments when she was "*his little teacher helper*" (Transcript, February 15, 2016). Anne disclosed these occasions as being memorable moments for her within her shaping stories of becoming a teacher.

You would've thought I learned my lesson. Seeing my dad sit for hours and hours reading papers and stuff. You would've thought I'd have learned! I don't like it! But I think it's because of him too, that I think I am a teacher. Because I used to play teacher with my sisters. I was very anal. It was like they were in a classroom and there was a little chalkboard and stuff. And I would give myself assignments and mark them.

Anne thinking back in time, fondly recalled how her father had her continue to hone her reading comprehension skills even after school was out for the summer:

Anne, laughing: The only things that I remember for sure are that my dad used to make us do reading comprehension activities throughout the summer and we were not allowed

to go outside and play or anything until it was done. And he's probably the reason why I'm so anal with finding spelling mistakes and stuff. It really bothers me.

Me, laughing in response: Lay the blame on his doorstep eh?

Anne: Yeah, he's the reason! He was an English teacher and so it was drilled into me. The other thing I remember is asking my dad to help him with his marking. So, anything that was like multiple choice or something, nothing with actual expertise needed. But I would be, "Can I help you?" [adopting an eager voice!] (Transcript, February 15, 2016)

Unable to help ourselves, we burst into laughter at Anne's humorous and gentle mocking of her younger self. How many times had I heard a child in my class ask to help me? How many times had I asked the same question as a youngster to my teacher? Inwardly I chuckled, I had asked this question even as a graduate student! I wondered, did all who entered the teaching profession, have this instinctual need to help? At this point, we had been sitting for some time in the restaurant, but the atmosphere which had been punctuated with the heavy weight of hard memories had ebbed back into one of relaxation and enjoyment.

Class Size and Subject Matter: Shaping a Curriculum of Fun within Dominant Narratives

Anne picked up her narrative thread and continued to paint a vivid picture of her early experiences for me: *"I did Children's Lit, Archeology, which has nothing to do with teaching, but was so interesting. I did Art History. The extra courses for credits I needed were just a bunch of fun ones!"* (Transcript, February 15, 2016). I could sense how these additional courses helped Anne to explore several of her interests. Listening to Anne describe these courses as *"a bunch of fun ones"* (Transcript, February 15, 2016) directed my thoughts once more to Anne's creative way of being. At the same time, I thought about the ways in which schoolwork is often subject to categorization and to ranking from elementary school and onwards. I wondered how Anne had

managed to negotiate her love for art-based activities alongside the other subject matter that she had to learn in university. Had the “*fun courses*” permitted Anne spaces in which she could devote enough time to the activities she very much enjoyed? Anne’s voice had vibrated with enthusiasm as she spoke about her “*fun courses*” and I was reminded how far too often our interests in school are relegated to the background without our permission.

Anne broke into my musings, revealing, “*I did two years in my BEd with the [name of college] program. I transferred to [name of university] for the last two years and did the actual BEd courses.*” (Transcript, February 15, 2016). Hearing Anne share how she made the transition from a smaller institution to a bigger one, I wondered how she felt about the class sizes. Curious as to her response, I let Anne know that I had made a similar transition in my first year of my BA program—moving from a small institution where instructors knew your name—to a larger place where they most often did not. Speaking frankly, I summed up my experiences:

Me: I liked it when the class sizes weren’t that huge!

Anne, in agreement: I thought it was better because the classes were so small. Because as soon as you get to the [name of University] you got like these gigantic auditoriums!
(Transcript, February 15, 2016)

Ruminating on these ideas of the value of certain subject matter over others, taking required courses alongside the lack of agency in determining which courses are of best use to you in an undergraduate program, and the growing class sizes of university programs, I felt at dis/ease. The various turns we had taken in this part of our conversation (re)directed me inwardly to Aoki’s (2004/2011) discussion on what he had coined the “C & I Landscape” where *C* represents curriculum and *I* represents instruction. Aoki explained his choice in terminology:

So prominent is instrumentalism woven into the fabric of curriculum work that we will not be remiss to call this landscape the *C&I Landscape*. The C & I landscape frames many curriculum and instruction course in teacher education. The same C & I landscape has become the curriculum developers' framework, framing curriculum development and implementation. The same C & I framework has become the curriculum supervisors' framework, framing supervision, the overseeing of activities related to curriculum and instruction, curriculum, and implementation. (p. 204)

Thinking about our educational experiences after high school, reflecting upon my experiences as an elementary school teacher and more recently, my experiences alongside Anne in her class as a teacher volunteer, I could better perceive the tensions in shaping a curriculum as lived let alone "legitimizing lived curriculum" (Aoki, 2004/2011, p. 199). Though stated many years ago, the first part of Aoki's (2004/2011) assertion, that "in the C & I landscapes, students become faceless others; in the lived curricula, teachers and students are face to face" (p. 212) still resonates with authenticity. While the second part which speaks to shaping a living curriculum reverberates with heart for me. And, I suspect it does for Anne as well as she continues to strive to see her students as unique individuals and wishes for them to see her in her storied multiplicity also. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) illuminate this consideration powerfully:

Yet from the narrative point of view, identities have histories. They are narrative constructions that take shape as life unfolds and that may, as narrative constructions are wont to do, solidify into a fixed entity, an unchanging narrative construction, or they may continue to grow and change. (p. 95).

They further explicate: "The identities we have, the stories we live by tend to show different facets depending on the situations in which we find ourselves. This is no less true for teachers in

their professional knowledge landscapes” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 95). Though Anne never articulated as such, I saw Anne attempting to live in relationship alongside the students in her class. Her desire to have the children under her care feel cared for and respected shapes Anne’s identity as a teacher and is linked to the stories she lives by and the stories she tells of herself.

A Matter of Trust: A Story Fragment of Teachers’ Convention

Anne’s stories of herself as relational being were sometimes met with resistance by certain institutional narratives and (un)knowingly perpetuated by school administrators. As our conversation continued to meander, Anne spoke about her tensions with an upcoming Teachers’ Convention event that was to be held in the following month. Slipping with familiar ease back into these school rhythms, I asked Anne whether she had signed up for any of the sessions that were available for early registration. Anne’s response was surprising.

I don’t usually do any pre-signing up. Sometimes, I do look at the sessions beforehand and say, I want to go to this one but usually, I don’t sign up early. So, our vice principal walks around with sticker and gives you a sticker every time he sees you. It’s like hurray... (Transcript, February 15, 2016).

To say I was taken aback would be an understatement. The idea that professional development for teachers could be reduced to the mechanics of basic attendance perturbed me. Hearing Anne’s wry undertone, I knew too, that she was unhappy with the situation. Seeing the dismay in my gaze and the worry reflected in my response of, “Really?” (Transcript, February 15, 2016), Anne elaborated: “*It’s like to show that we are there. He [the assistant principal] drew for a gift card for whoever he saw the most or whoever had that many entries*” (Transcript, February 15,

2016). My mind was awash with disappointment. On one hand I could see that Anne's administration wished to boost attendance during this time of professional development. And perhaps, he had thought this was a fun light-hearted way in which to do it. On the other hand, I was struck by the idea that teacher attendance had to be monitored in the first place. The idea of having to be seen by an administrator during a professional conference stuck me as jarring. How could teachers feel trusted to do their work if they were perceived as needing such overt measures of control on their behaviour? As well, I was concerned with the idea of fairness. Handing stickers to teachers who were seen by the administrator did not seem to be a fair process. How could the administrator possibly see all the teachers if he could be only in one place at a time? There was a chance that some teachers would be missed in this process of checking on attendance. I voiced my thoughts hesitantly, "But, how would that be fair? Teachers might be at totally different sessions..." (Transcript, February 15, 2016). My voice trailed off in consternation. *"It's probably who we bump into. So, we try to get seen at least once!"* (Transcript, February 15, 2016). Anne's response did not lessen my concern. This attention to teachers' attendance, on the surface could appear harmless. Yet, it seemed to me that teachers' professionalism was being called into question. Moreover, there was a quality of paternalism to the whole situation which sat ill upon my shoulders. I couldn't help but ask, "Does anyone complain?" (Transcript, February 15, 2016). Anne's reply, *"We just roll our eyes and go for drinks"* (Transcript, February 15, 2016) highlighted for me the lack of agency that teachers can face when bumping up against institutional plotlines which can construct a teacher's professionalism in deficit ways. Anne's lighthearted response also pointed to the possibility that demonstrating humour in the face of reductive measures on their professionalism provided teachers with a cover story. These are "stories told to maintain a sense of continuity with the

dominant stories of school shaping a professional knowledge landscape” (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 7). This cover story helped to diminish the power such measures had on the stories these teachers told of themselves and stories others told of them. I could see how such cover stories could offer protection for Anne and her colleagues.

Anne’s story made me think about how school administrators can (un)knowingly shape a teacher’s professional identity along plotlines which malign character. I wondered what these types of plotlines meant for Anne and teachers like her. How would they shape how Anne felt about the work she did alongside children and moreover, her sense of worth within this school community, and reverberating forward, in other school communities she might work within in the future? As Anne continued to speak, I gained a deeper understanding of the divide that can occur between administrative staff and teachers within one school when trust is missing in the relationships.

Anne, speaking enthusiastically: I usually plan a lunch for staff and I’m still pretty big into that, like getting the staff together! It’s gotten a little carried away this year.

Me, curiously: Why?

Anne: Because there are lots of people who want to come, and I’ve never had that many! Usually, I stick to the Library Club people. The people you can say whatever you want, and nobody cares. Last year, my vice principal got mad that we didn’t invite him but, “I’m sorry, it’s not that your admin. It’s we can’t trust you!” That has nothing to do with it. “It had nothing to do with like you’re the boss and we’re your employees.” With him, it’s more like that. (Transcript, February 15, 2016)

With trust missing in the relationship between Anne and her administrator, Anne noted that she felt like it was more of an authoritarian relationship that existed between them. Her imagery of a boss and his employees foreground Anne’s feelings that within her school there was a distinct

divide between the administrators and the teaching staff. This divide reverberated in complicated ways in who Anne wished to spend her time with during unofficial school hours. Fellow teachers provided Anne and like-minded others a space in which they did not have to guard their speech or thoughts. Clandinin et al. (2006) explain, “Stories of school are the stories composed by others and told to others about what the school is about” (p. 7). One of the stories of school from Anne’s conversation was that the school was a place where everyone’s opinions mattered; that teachers’ and administrators’ perspectives were afforded the same value. Teachers and administrators alike were given the opportunity for professional development. A school story narrated by Anne and her teacher colleagues was that their professionalism was not a given. They had to receive a sticker from a member of their administration in order to show that they had been present at the Teachers’ Convention. The administration did not have to show their attendance in this same fashion. Clandinin et al. (2006) further suggest:

Teachers’ stories, their personal practical knowledge, are the stories teachers live and tell of who they are and what they know. Some teachers’ stories are “secret stories,” stories told only to others in safe places both on and off the school landscape. (p. 7)

Anne’s disclosure that she and other teachers belonging to the Library Club gathered together in places at her school and places outside of school revealed they felt safe to share their “secret stories” (Clandinin et. al, 2006). Anne’s understanding that some things were not meant for the ears of her administration and only for those she could trust, pointed to how Anne’s personal practical knowledge was being shaped by those she worked with in her school. The ways in which she and her teacher colleagues were being treated during Teachers’ Convention contoured

Anne's professional identity as a teacher and was one of many stories⁷⁹ which permeated Borderlands School where Anne worked.

Anne's Teaching Portfolio

Often on the days I came to Anne's school to volunteer, Anne and I went out for lunch. At one such lunch, I asked Anne if there was something by way of a memory box⁸⁰ artifact that she might share with me that she felt gave a temporal sense of who she was as a teacher and who she was becoming professionally. Anne decided to share her teaching portfolio as an artifact. Similar to my portfolio, Anne's portfolio was not merely a repository for her teaching evaluations and reference letters but also contained pictures and other items that provided a deeper glimpse into Anne's experiences as a learner and teacher. However, it was not until later in the year, that we would talk about this highly visible symbol that marked her record of her teaching life.

Recalling Earlier Moments of Friendship in the Midst of a Narrative Inquiry

One evening in early April of 2016, when we met for dinner, Anne drew out a large black binder from her bag and dropped it with a soft thud onto our table. I was aware that this was a very important and tangible piece of Anne's professional identity as a teacher. Like her, it was ever evolving and continually being shaped and reshaped. This latest iteration of her portfolio had come into being after she had worked for several years at the school where we first met. Since then, she had both added and removed items to her portfolio. Yet as we sat together, our

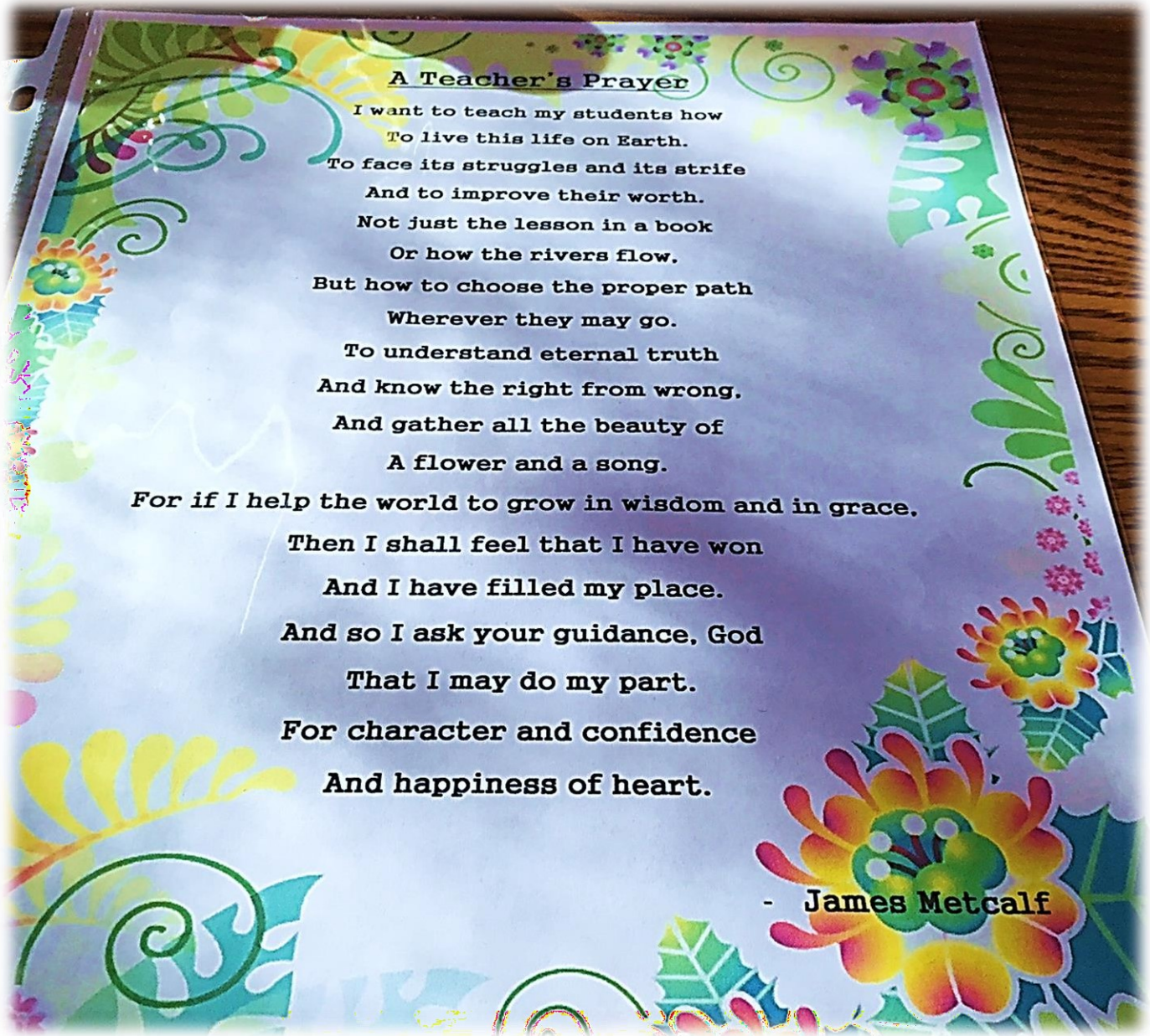
⁷⁹ Many stories lived within the professional landscape of Borderlands School. For instance, Anne also shared stories of her fellow teachers helping her when she needed assistance and of Anne doing the same. Anne spoke of times when she had been selected by her administrators to take part in leadership roles in the school.

⁸⁰ *Memory boxes* "are collections of items that trigger memories of important times, people, and events" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 114).

first thoughts were not about Anne's portfolio but about how nice it was to meet outside of Anne's school on this occasion. Visiting Anne's class and working with the students in her classroom was exciting for me but the time to talk with Anne with any degree of privacy was challenging. Our hops to a local eatery at lunchtime helped alleviate this tension of mine. Meeting outside of her school, and having dinner with Anne was, I inwardly admitted, even nicer because it afforded us more time to chat and provided me an opportunity to hear more from Anne. Sitting across from her, I also recalled earlier times when we had worked together and had found time outside of school to relax. Sometimes we had been accompanied with other colleagues and, in other instances, just Anne and I had met.

"I have my teaching philosophy!"

Later, after the food had been ordered, Anne pulled her portfolio forward and exclaimed in a pleased tone, *"I have my teaching philosophy!"* (Transcript, April 1, 2106, p. 1). The eagerness in her voice was contagious and I was quick to reply, "Awesome!" (Transcript, April 1, 2016). She flipped a few pages and pointed to a poem that she had reproduced on stationary with a border of colourful flowers (see picture below). Turning the portfolio toward me, Anne looked at me expectantly. In turn, I glanced down at the poem sitting before me somewhat hesitantly before asking Anne if she would mind reading the poem aloud. I find that the act of hearing someone read their work or some other content that is important to them, takes on a deeper resonance than when I read silently the material as they sit nearby watching me do so. The sounds of the other diners receded into the background as I listened with careful pleasure as Anne read the lines from the poem she had included in her portfolio. I was captivated by one of the poem's messages and by Anne's articulation of it. The poet suggested an appreciation of



9-A Poem in Anne's Teaching Portfolio

education as expansive and generative. He seemed to be composing a picture of an education not limited by learning through textbooks and lessons in class but one which instead, hinted at the lives of the people involved in the artistry of learning and teaching together in relationship with nature and each other. This was a storyline of education I saw Anne living with children.

I was reminded of, and drawn close once more to Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) understanding of education:

The idea of narrative as a story of a life as a whole, combined with the notion of curriculum ... means that we need to broaden our idea of education beyond that of schooling. Education, in this view, is a narrative of experience that grows and strengthens a person's capabilities to cope with life. It is true that some experiences occur in school, but it is probably also true that many of the most important educational experiences in our narratives occur outside of school, for instance, in family relationships, births, deaths, and marriage. These, and many other matters, often make up the core of our narratives. These are the experiences that we say make the most difference to us in life. Such experiences are educational. (p. 27)

Another message that I felt was being explored in the poem was one of faith. I wondered how faith and teaching intertwined for Anne. In particular, I wondered why Anne had chosen to include this poem. When we were colleagues at one school, she had touched upon experiences with attending church which had been unpleasant for her. I tentatively broached my confusion. Anne was wry when she replied:

Yeah, I think I'm still a spiritual person. I mean I can't forget everything I learned from going to church and stuff. Yeah, I mean I still believe in a higher power. I just don't believe in organized religion. At least not the one I was a part of. (Transcript, April 1, 2016)

In some ways, I felt I could relate. When I was young, I attended a Pentecostal church every

Sunday. I also went to temple to say my prayers. In my house, pooja⁸¹ was a part of everyday life. In my first year at a Lutheran college, it was compulsory to participate in prayer every day. While I no longer attend church, going to temple remains important, as does performing aarti⁸². I realized anew that yes, I, too, was spiritual. My thoughts turned towards Anne's students. I wondered whether faith had come up in school conversations. I knew that Katrina and Deepika practiced their respective faiths. For instance, Deepika often went to temple with her family and Katrina went to the gurdwara with her family.⁸³ Looking at Anne, sensing her disquiet⁸⁴, I decided not to ask her in this moment. Instead, I tried to direct our talk toward the other message. I asked Anne whether she still believed in the words of the poem or if anything had changed for her with respect to that message. Her resounding, "*I still believe in it!*" (Transcript, April 1, 2016) made me smile even as I listened as she elaborated.

Yeah, I guess it sort of reaffirms when I am feeling down about all the people getting after me. I am doing this for a reason. This is what I want to do with my life, and I will have done a good job if I reached one or two kids. (Transcript, April 1, 2016)

I nodded slowly. Anne revealed to me earlier that her ideas of what it meant to be a good teacher had been bumping up with some of the ideas held by her students' parents and administrators. An incident had recently occurred where a parent of one of Anne's students had broached an administrator at Anne's school instead of talking with her first. This troubled Anne immensely and, as she highlighted several "*goals*" (Transcript, April 1, 2016) she endeavoured to meet in

⁸¹ *Pooja* essentially means the act of worship for people who are of the Hindu faith. It also refers to the prayers and faith-based rituals involved in making pooja.

⁸² Lighting a *diya* (a candle resting within a clay holder) and placing it in front of a represented deity is part of *aarti*. Ritual cleansing with incense is part of how we practice pooja in my family. While many Hindus practice pooja in a similar manner, there are just as many who practice pooja differently.

⁸³ These storied fragments are shared in the girls' narrative account.

⁸⁴ Anne had shared (un)happy stories related to faith. Spirituality and faith were intertwined for Anne.

her teaching practice, her concerns became even more apparent. Looking at me directly prior to reading from her portfolio page, Anne earnestly explained, “*This is my teaching philosophy of what I believe an effective teacher would provide or do*” (Transcript, April 1, 2016). As Anne read aloud, Anne elaborated on some of the points (words after an ellipsis indicate when Anne added to her original points).

- *Providing a safe learning environment... to learn with lots of opportunities to explore and grow.*
- *Recognizing that each student is unique and providing different teaching approaches for each of them.*
- *Assessing students on a regular basis to ensure understanding and to provide the students and the parents with the feedback they need and require to learn and to play.*
- *Belief in life-long learning... so that I’m not just teaching them but learning from them too!*
- *An open line of communication between home and school... and getting the parents involved with an open-door policy so that they feel comfortable coming to me when they have concerns instead over my head to my vice principal [laughing]...So, obviously, I’m not doing a good job there! But yeah, basically that’s what it is. (Transcript, April 1, 2016)*

It was difficult for me to hear Anne doubting herself as a teacher. I had seen first-hand how she worked hard to shape a classroom community that invited dialogue with all members. Anne was upset and we talked about her feelings of discomfort when she heard the concerns of a parent from her administrator rather than from the parent herself. Together we wondered what it

meant for Anne that the parent chose this action. Was the parent uncertain of what kind of reception her concerns might be given and was that why she chose not to talk to Anne directly? It didn't seem to alleviate Anne's worries when she further shared that the administrator was not overly concerned. I suggested it was helpful that her administrator was not dismissing Anne's strong work ethic or her understanding of professionalism. Nonetheless, I understood that, for Anne, it was her sense of relationality which was at stake here. It was a foundational tenet in her teaching philosophy. This sense of relationality informed and shaped her personal practical knowledge.

Practical knowledge includes what we call personal practical knowledge and its expression in the minded practices of practitioners. Personal practical knowledge is composed of such experiential matters as personal philosophy, ritual, image, narrative unity, and rhythm. Personal practical knowledge is expressed in such minded practices as a practitioner's verbal explanation of self and actions including both doing and making. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1984, pp. 146-147)

I very much appreciated Anne's concern. There had been one year in my teaching career which had been extremely trying. Part of the challenge had been the ways in which several parents and I had been relating to one another. I shared this story with Anne hoping for her to feel less alone. Anne's response in turn made me feel the renewed strength of our friendship.

It's nice to have a friend who understands my class, that I can talk to about the issues I am having. Talking to [name of husband] is one thing but he doesn't know my kids and doesn't know what to do. Right? (Transcript, April 1, 2016, p. 33).

Right? The word echoed in my mind. Yes, teaching can be an isolating profession if one doesn't have trusted colleagues and friends to share experiences with but so can attending graduate school I thought. However, as I shared with Anne, stories shared can help provide safe spaces to inquire into and make sense of our experiences.

Borderlands School Stories

Within this urban elementary school, my unique positioning as a teacher volunteer in Anne's classroom provided me openings to live and hear stories I would never have otherwise. Similar to Chan and Ross (2009), who engaged in a narrative inquiry within a school represented of different heritages, Borderlands School also had students from diverse backgrounds. In their narrative inquiry, Chan and Ross (2009) noted,

We explored curriculum as the interaction of students' and teachers' experiences that are shaped by cultural influences in their homes and ethnic communities, and through interaction with teachers, administrators, and peers in their school and neighborhood communities. (p. 160)

Being a part of Anne and the children's Grade Four Community allowed me to experience the rhythms of school life once more and "curriculum as the interaction of students' and teachers' experiences" (Chan & Ross, 2009, p. 160). Being able to engage in research conversations with Anne allowed me to inquire, alongside Anne, into her stories of experience around school and children.

Recalling a Moment of Tension with Anne's Principal Alongside Anne

I knew that Anne had experienced other rough moments during this year. I was reminded

of a chance encounter I had with Anne's principal at Anne's school in March 2016. Anne had been feeling under the weather and so I offered to rinse her tea mug for her in the staffroom. I had just finished with the task at the sink when Anne's principal came into the room. While I had met Anne's assistant principal several times to date during my time at Borderlands School, I hadn't met Anne's principal. I introduced myself to her and thanked her for the opportunity to visit the school as a researcher. As we chatted, I shared my feelings of joy at being back in a classroom again and added, the children in Anne's class were wonderful. I was ill-prepared when the principal appeared to take exception to my comment. She informed me the children "*were low academically*" (Research Notes, March 2, 2016). This way of looking at children dismayed me. It appeared to be a deficit one in which the ability to achieve high marks was prized over other qualities. Anne was unsurprised when I related the conversation to her upon my return to the classroom. With a resigned sigh, Anne revealed she had heard these comments before. Drawing close to Clandinin (2020) who too, echoed our dissonance, I understood that Anne and I both "found the language of teacher education an uncomfortable one with its talk of standards, percentages, skills, strategies exit and entrance criteria" (p. 80).

On my way home that day while the chilly weather crept into my bones, I grappled with what I had learned. It had been a hard day for me. I wondered how very much more difficult it had been for Anne. Such unforgiving plotlines allowed for limited movement, limited opportunity. In my research journal I wrote:

These are really sweet kids. It's awful some people think of them in terms of high and low ability. What is this labelling for? How does it help? What does it mean to be storied in such ways? What about teaching and learning as a community??? To see things this way is so reductionist and deficit. It seems like such an uphill battle—to shift how

education can be seen, Where's the possibility? It's challenging to not get depressed.
(Research Notes, March 3, 2016).

Clandinin, Schaefer, and Downey (2014) cast light on the complexity of teachers and children encountering such problematic plotlines:

As we do this work I am reminded of how important it is to understand that teachers are also living in multiple worlds each day and that they, too, are shaped by the increasingly rigid and monitored dominant narratives of school. I wonder, along with my colleagues, where the spaces are for conversation, where teachers can inquire into their knowledge, shaped over time and multiple places. And, even more crucially, where are the spaces for dialogue where teachers, families, children, and youth can create those educative spaces with each other? (p. 30)

Their concerns echo mine. I further pondered, what does it mean for children to grow in stories that are narrated by others? I continue to wrestle with other questions. For instance, what does it mean for teachers who bump up against narratives that conflict with their own? Anne was understandably upset hearing this about this storyline of the students in her classroom. She knew the children in the classroom community to be wonderful, thoughtful, and creative young people. She had voiced this belief to me in many iterations. Anne's unhappy articulation, "*I'm not surprised*" (Research Notes, March 3, 2016) reminded me of other stories she had shared which had emerged from the professional knowledge landscape. Anne's response had me wondering what other stories were not being voiced. Thinking about the children in the class and their families, I wondered also, when the families are made aware, how do the families experience these constrained plotlines which can be placed on their children? My thoughts shifted towards Katrina and Deepika, their siblings, and their parents. I was getting to know them more deeply

and it hurt me to think that stories such as the ones made visible by the principal were being voiced (and lived) among those who had chosen the profession of education.

Thinking about Difference: A Storyline of Discrimination in the Classroom Community

The idea of safe spaces had come up more than once in our conversations together. Anne and I had agreed that such spaces were vitally important for both children and adults. Anne had made me aware that some bullying had been going on in her classroom. Anne related that there had been some incidents of students writing nasty notes inside the pages of children's books in Anne's classroom library and also, in the school's larger library selection of books. I was to be further disturbed to learn that the victim was a young South Asian girl who I had come to know from my volunteering in the classroom, as a quiet but sweetly natured student. I was deeply saddened to hear Leela⁸⁵ had been made the target of cruel messages. This was a young girl who I knew was very close with Anne—a girl Anne had described on several occasions as a *"sweetheart."* Anne had additionally observed, *"She's pretty quiet but she likes to come and walk with me when I'm on supervision outside"* (Transcript, April 1, 2016). Though I did not know Leela well, she had been warm towards me and I had been gifted with her shy smiles on several occasions. I had been incredibly touched when Leela had drawn me a picture of flowers. More so, when I saw Leela had drawn many flowers—a veritable garden—for her beloved teacher which Anne had carefully affixed to the walls surrounding her large desk. This was the same young girl who I had learned from Anne *"was trying to teach [Anne] some Indian words"* and who additionally, *"was super excited that [I] spoke the same language"* (Transcript, April 1, 2016). I was pleased to be on the receiving end of Leela's praise. As Anne continued to speak, I

⁸⁵ Leela is a pseudonym. In my beginning days in Anne's classroom, Leela had indicated she wanted to be part of the study. And I had hoped that she would be able to join in the conversations for this narrative inquiry. However, Leela later shared her parents were too busy to participate.

heard her compassion for this child who had recently moved with her family from India to Canada. As Anne continued to speak, I wondered if Anne was thinking about her own childhood stories of struggle in relation to Leela when Anne suggested, *“Basically growing up, being somewhat of an outcast, I am more sensitive to kids who are different in certain ways”* (Transcript, April 1, 2016). As Anne spoke of Leela, I also wondered if her thoughts travelled to a time when she had been a new teacher at a different school—a school, Anne had described, where *“most of the teachers there were not very friendly”* (Transcript, February 15, 2016). Anne understood what it meant to be treated different and it was clear she was worried for Leela.

*She’s the one who is dealing with the nasty stuff in the books. I had to get my principal to come and speak to the kids because they’ve written in school library books and they’ve written in my classroom library books. I think it’s Navi.*⁸⁶ (Transcript, April 1, 2016).

When I queried if Leela was aware of what was happening, Anne admitted Leela did know and that the student who first discovered one of the harmful messages directed Leela’s attention to the book before taking the book to Anne. This misguided attempt to be Leela’s friend did not help matters. As Anne commented, *“Melissa⁸⁷ just showed Leela. She should’ve just brought it to me.”* (Transcript, April 1, 2016). Anne’s distress was palpable. Navi’s name had come up in our conversations before and in some of the conversations I had shared with Deepika and Katarina. There was friction between the girls. While it was alarming to hear about the hurtful messages in various books, I was further taken aback when I learned from Anne that Deepika’s name and another girl’s name had been signed at the end of the notes. Both girls, Anne suggested were not ones who would likely engage in that kind of behaviour and additionally, *“They*

⁸⁶ This is a pseudonym.

⁸⁷ This is a pseudonym for another girl student in the class.

wouldn't write their names if they had" (Transcript, April 1, 2016). I had heard from Anne before that Navi's parents were going through a divorce and Navi was having a challenging time accepting all the changes now happening in her young life. And, I had seen firsthand some of Navi's difficulties experienced with her classmates and they with her. I think there's sometimes a misnomer or taken-for-granted assumption which holds children as living carefree lives. In this perspective, when upsetting things happen in school, they are to be viewed as aberrations or worse yet, normalized. For instance, an attitude of 'It's just kids being kids!' can be espoused or the idea children are resilient and so certain incidents can be brushed off in this manner. Thinking back to my own childhood, I knew the stories which composed a bullying narrative could do much to damage one's identity and could as well, continue to reverberate later on in one's life in (un)expected and nuanced ways. I am drawn to Lindemann (2019) who renders visible the significance of the powerful shaping forces other people's perceptions and actions toward us can have.

Personal identities make intelligible to us, then, not only how various social groups or people are supposed to act, but also how well or badly other groups or people may treat them.... our identity is a complicated interplay of how you see yourself and how others see you, and both senses of who you are take some of their shape from culturally authorized, shared understandings of what sorts of lives there are and who may (or must) live them. (p. 4)

Lindemann's (2019) description points to a narrative understanding of identity. The stories we tell about ourselves and our lives are narrated in some degree by others and in some degree by ourselves. A narrative view of identity for Lindemann is "an identity consisting of stories that weave together one moment with the next moment and the moment after that, capturing the ways

you change, as well as the ways you stay the same” (p. 7). In this sense, I wondered how the children in Anne’s class were making sense of the complexities of their lives. How were they understanding this phenomenon of bullying? What were the stories they were hearing at home from their family members, at school amongst their peers, and among their different communities? Musing further, I wondered about the ways in which the plotlines of their lives were being shifted in the midst of this prevalent albeit unfortunate, curriculum-making. And, what about Anne? How was Anne’s story of herself as a teacher being shaped? Clandinin et al. (2006) highlight the intricacy of children’s lives and teacher’s lives in motion in what they name as a curriculum of lives.

A curriculum of lives is shaped as children’s and teachers’ diverse lives meet in schools, in, in-and-out-of-classroom places. As children’s and teachers’ stories to live by bump against stories of school and school stories, a curriculum of lives is, in part, shaped. (p 135)

Thinking with Clandinin et al.’s (2006) words, I understood Anne alongside the children she worked and played with, were shaping a curriculum that honoured the experiences of the classroom community. Subject matter and documents, teaching and student resources were included in the enlivened image, but they did not define it. The relationships of the people who were involved in learning and teaching brought form, depth, substance, and story to the foreground.

Crumpled Girls and Boys: Anne’s Interrupting of a Bullying Plotline

Allowing my mind to drift backward and reflecting on my teaching practice, I knew bullying was not, typically, a one-time event. I had determined early in my teaching career such

negative behaviour had to be addressed in an ongoing fashion. There was no easy fix. However, different kinds of conversations allowing for open discussion seemed to help students in both recognizing and naming the negative behaviour. Further, a no tolerance policy for bullying helped to increase the likelihood that the children would report bullying behaviour and decrease the likelihood of them engaging in bullying behaviour. Anne, herself, took these matters seriously. From one of our previous conversations Anne had shared in some detail one of the learning activities she liked doing with the students in her care. This year was no exception. Anne explained to me that she tried to carry out the activity earlier in the school year as a preventative measure to bullying amongst classmates, noting “*I need to do that!*” (Transcript, October 6, 2016) and shared that her class this year, “*They are verbally not nice with each other. So, I need to start my antibullying stuff*” (Transcript, October 6, 2016). If unable to do so, Anne commented that she would carry out the activity whenever she could make time to do so. It was important for Anne to help interrupt bullying narratives which could take up unhealthy residence in students’ minds and behaviours. Describing her curriculum making alongside the children, Anne recollected:

I just print a picture of a girl or a boy. Basically, sitting everybody down in a circle, moving all the desks out of the way. We talk about having something mean being done to us or doing something mean. And we go around the circle. They have the right to pass if they don't want to speak. I use the totem pole from the 7 habits⁸⁸. Usually whoever holds it, speaks. You sit down and talk about when something hurtful has been done to you and we even talk about when we have done something hurtful. Not

⁸⁸ Anne was making a reference to Covey’s (2013) *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and its use within schools promoting personal leadership.

everybody owns up to it. Some kids are very honest. And it's not necessarily the kids in the class, it could be home with siblings. (Transcript, October 6, 2016)

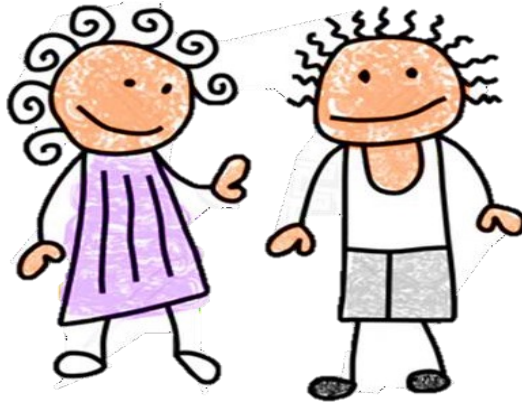
Anne gestured with her arms as she thought back to previous classes. I focused on her words, appreciative of how she included children who had been hurt and those who had done the hurting. I found myself nodding, recognizing the import of including the children's different worlds of home and school in the scenario she was painting for the students and now, me in this space.

Anne elaborated:

As each person is saying something, I crumple it a little more. Listen, crumple. Listen crumple. After we do that, we go around the circle and say, and after the figure is a tiny little ball, we talk about what do you do after somebody has hurt you or after you have hurt somebody else. People will say, "Oh, I apologize, or I'll do something nice, give them a card, give them a compliment, or talk through the incident with them." As they [the students] talk about those things, I unwrap it and by the time everyone has said something or has had the opportunity to say something, I open it up, it's still full but still crumpled. Then we have a discussion. "Even though we said or done these things to make it better, does the hurt go all away? It doesn't go all away." (Transcript, October 6, 2016)

Reflecting some more, Anne revealed, *"I was thinking of changing to the heart because everybody has a heart and can identify with that"* (Transcript, October 6, 2016). I understood this as another way Anne was attempting to be in deeper relation with the diverse children in her classes and to help them in their life choices. It would be in late June 2017, when Anne would

send me via text messaging, the following stick figure images.



10-Anne's Stick-figures



11-Anne's Stick-figures Crumpled

Seeing the pictures Anne used with her students gave me a better idea of what Anne meant when she related how she would show the children in her class, ways in which negative comments and behaviours could take a toll on an individual. Anne's story of curriculum-making

in this manner struck me as intensely powerful. While Anne had no qualms with me visiting her class this year, our timing, to our mutual disappointment, did not work out. When Anne sent me the templates, I printed them out and slowly crumpled up the figures imagining each crumple as an insult (see image above). And as I did so, I found myself thinking about Anne's current students and remembering students from my previous classes. I wish I had known of this activity beforehand. I certainly would have used it. Irrespective if you are a child or an adult, I believe it helps to know you are not alone and that you belong in a community. Anne's curriculum making with her students in this fashion, seemed to me to be an incredibly meaningful way for students to work with metaphors of which they could relate to using their own experiences. Moreover, students could use their imagination to make connections between themselves and the template character and by extension, their very real classmates. Instead of singling children out, the children's community could support one another in their learning of what actions counted as hurtful and further, reasoning alongside one another as to why bullying behaviour was not a condoned method to handling stress and conflict at school or elsewhere.

Thinking about Fantasy Play alongside Anne's Curriculum Making

In an *American Journal of Play* interview with Vivian Paley (2009), Paley comments on the relevance and need for fantasy play in the lives of children. And while, Anne's curriculum making with this activity may not be viewed as fantasy play per se, I believe they share some of the same emphasises. Paley (2009) proposed, "Fantasy play provides easy entree into abstract thinking and sets up patterns of "what if" and "in other words" that become a model for discussions on all subjects" (p. 125) I can't help but think that the actual shift from student desks and chairs to joining Anne in making a circle on the carpet, signaled to the students that something out of the ordinary would be taking place. That is, the natural classroom rhythms were

being interrupted for some special purpose. Anne in making the deliberate choice to invite her students to sit with her in a circle on the carpet to share their experiences communally, invited the classroom community to engage in the abstract thinking Paley (2009) intimated. Being able to imagine alongside the crumpled character allowed Anne and the children to contemplate “what if” scenarios and depict “in other words” through their own storytelling. As Paley (2009) elucidates in the same interview:

[Children] learn to change and redirect the outcome of an imaginary plot and to include the ideas of others in their plans. When the common story becomes more important than one’s habitual stance, the individual mind expands in the search for more common ground. Experience teaches us that we and our narratives become more interesting when we add maximum variety in people and ideas. It is a tall order, but the more we play out the problem involved, the more likely we are to find the right balance between the individual and the group. (p. 126)

In this piece of Anne’s curriculum making alongside the students in her class, the students are given the opportunity to look beyond bullying as a generic plotline or as Paley (2009) calls, a “common story”. They are asked to inquire into their own experiences of “*feeling bad*” (Transcript, April 1, 2016). In doing so, it seemed to me they can enter a state of liminality⁸⁹ whereby they might dwell and ponder their stories, as well as being encouraged to “world travel” (Lugones, 1987) into each other’s storied experiences. Within this curriculum-making Anne and the rest of the classroom community can (re)imagine new plotlines—plotlines which may shift past, present, and future plotlines of “*feeling bad*” (Transcript, April 1, 2016) towards more

⁸⁹ Heilbrun (1999) writes “the most salient sign of liminality is its unsteadiness, its lack of clarity about exactly where one belongs and what one should be doing, or wants to be doing” (p. 3). It is in this state of ambiguity, I believe the children can be free to (re)imagine and play with(in) (new) scripts and plotlines.

hopeful plotlines; perhaps ones in which they can ‘feel good’. As I think upon Anne’s curriculum making alongside the rest of her classroom community, I am reminded of Bateson’s (1989) assertion, “We cannot change the disparity between infant and adult, though we can surely learn to understand and respect children more” (p. 116). Anne’s crumpled child activity proffered a respectful space of engagement. Children’s experiences were valued and welcomed by Anne as (un)complicated moments to learn and understand with and from, within community.

A Heart-full Musing Interlude: Thinking Alongside Teachers in an Art Space



12-Creative Curriculum Making

This *heart*-full musing was created soon after meeting up with Anne and other teachers and a teaching assistant within a pottery studio in November of 2016. Anne had been the individual who had organized the outing and I had been pleased to accept her invite. The chance to chat with people who too, were vested in coming alongside children in school worlds in relational ways appealed to me. Our conversation turned towards our stories of school⁹⁰ and understandings of the bumps we experienced in trying to come alongside children and families in creative and educative ways. I was a researcher, a colleague, a friend, and a creator in this space. I saw once more that Anne's stories to live by were much concerned with artistic ways of being. Her creativity as a teacher was just one story she lived. Another was a plotline of being a creative friend. Listening to Anne speak with the others who were present, I understood that we each were creating a curriculum of creativity in this storied moment. I was reminded that art is so and what opportunities we are able to access. Again, I understood how fortunate the Grade Four community of students were to have Anne as their teacher. She was vested in shaping moments of artistic curriculum making which invited children to create and learn.

Trying to Shape a Space of Artful Curriculum Making within Prescriptive Plotlines

Anne had shared with me her tensions in finding time to thoughtfully work and learn within artful spaces. In one conversation, referring to the differing artistic and cultural activities she fostered alongside her classroom community, Anne noted ruefully, "*I've got to pick and choose. Too much curriculum*" (Transcript, April 1, 2016). Anne's tensions seemed to be

⁹⁰ One recent example of this push for standardized testing was reflected in the provincial's government choice to overturn a decision made in 2013 to remove Grade 3 standardized testing. This was one of the topics that came up in our conversation and, we believed, this choice could point to an appreciation of other ways of knowing. However, in the following year of our conversation, The Grade 3 Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) were expected to be reintroduced into Alberta classrooms in the 2020-2021 school year (Wong, 2019). As of September 2020, this decision may now change due to the persistence of a world-wide pandemic.

indicating a difference in how the arts were viewed. Eisner (2002) foregrounds this divergence in perspective.

“Hard” subjects such as mathematics and science are regarded as primary resources for that development, and the processes of reading, writing, and computing are believed to be the best means for cultivating the mind. We want, especially in America today, a tough curriculum, something rigorous, a curriculum that challenges students to think and whose effects are visible in higher test scores. At best the arts are considered a minor part of this project. (p. xi)

And while Eisner’s (2002) focus centered on American education, his observation arguably could fit aspects of Canadian education. Despite these tensions Anne had articulated, I could see that both inside and outside school worlds, Anne sought art making experiences. Certainly, it seemed very much to me that Anne valued the educative opportunities afforded by the arts. For instance, some of the spaces in which Anne and I met, were art making spaces where we sat together and painted while we conversed. In her teaching practice, instead of giving short shrift to art as curriculum making, Anne provided time for students to think and grow as creators and appreciators of art. Anne’s carefully planned artful encounters helped students to become more aware of their own stories and the stories of other people. Greene (1994) considered such experiences to be of great import in creating relationships which allow us to hear and see one another better.

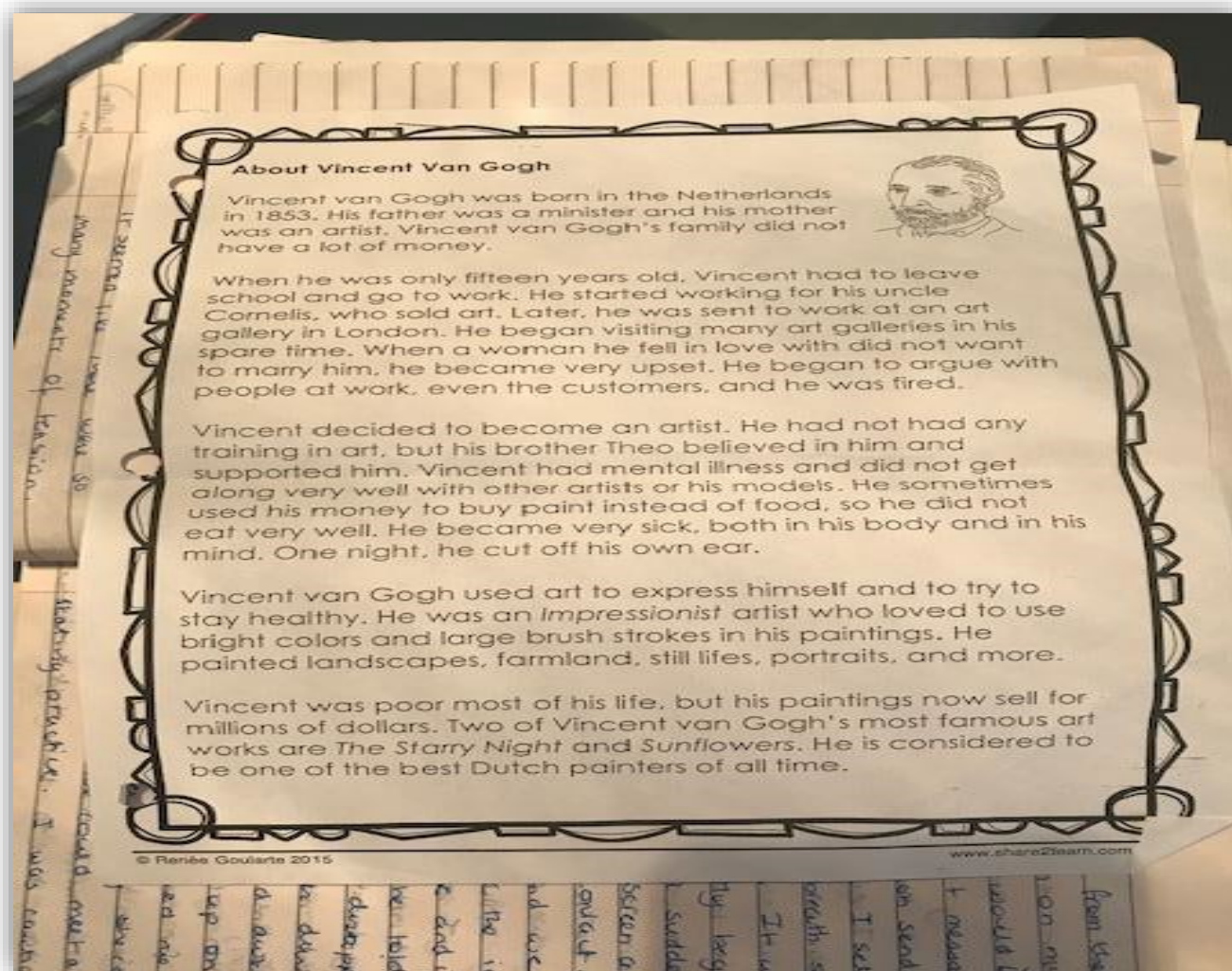
We are finding out that the more sensitive persons can become to what is entailed in direct encounters with works of art, the less likely they are to rely on predefined categories in making multicultural curricula and the less likely they may be to generalize

and obscure, to bring into being a new kind of “invisibility” that leaves the individual stranger unheard and unseen. (p. 504)

The latter half of the morning on Thursday, March 10, 2016, stands out in my mind as one such indelible moment. Anne had planned a mini art study around the painter Vincent van Gogh.

After gathering the children’s attention with a few quietly voiced words, Anne placed an information card of the artist under the document camera. The one-page document proffered a brief sketch of Vincent van Gogh including information of his early life working at an art gallery, falling in love with a woman who did not wish to marry him, and working as a penurious artist. Vincent van Gogh’s struggles in mental health were also touched upon and included mention of the artist’s act of cutting off his own ear. One student asked, “*Why did he do that?*” (Research Notes, March 10, 2016). Hearing the students murmur in shock at learning about the artist’s self-harm, Anne helped students to make sense of what they heard, noting “*He didn’t have good strategies for dealing with stress. He had a lot of feelings. He didn’t think clearly.*” (Research Notes, March 10, 2016). Later Anne would reiterate the importance of having healthy strategies for coping with life stressors, “*It’s okay to talk about depression. It’s okay to talk about your anxiety*” (Transcript, April 1, 2016). But in this moment, students took turns reading aloud the information provided on the card as Anne, used her finger to guide them. I, too, followed along as the passages were read aloud. Shortly afterward, Anne informed the class, “*He lived in a place called The Netherlands*” (Research Notes, March 10, 2016) and then showed the students a map of The Netherlands.

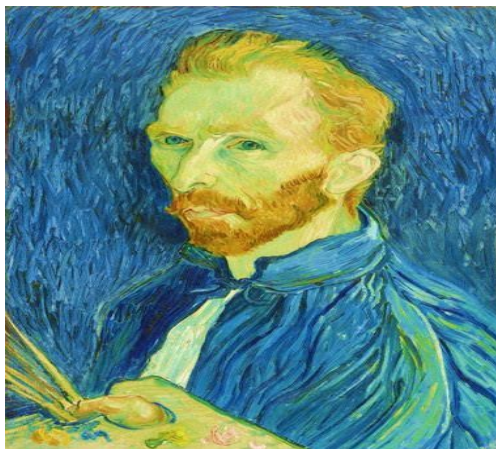
Below is a snapshot of the document, which I had stapled inside my research journal of fieldnotes (notes, ideas, sketches, and observations).



13-Class Handout about Vincent Van Gogh

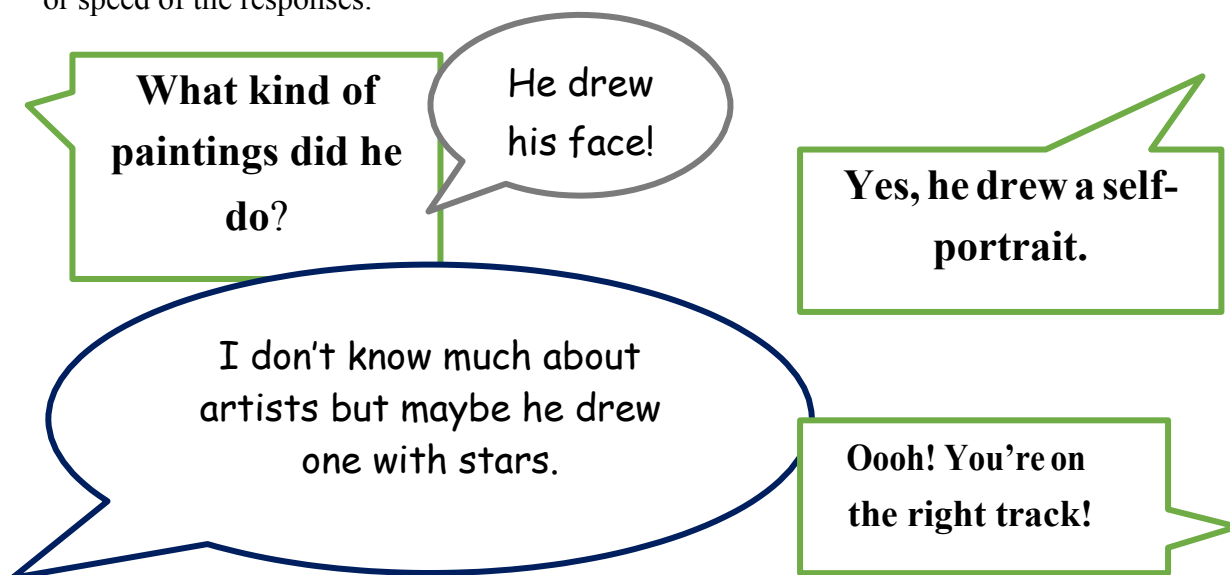
Anne clicked a key on her computer, and the following image of Van Gogh⁹¹ popped up on the projected screen for the students to view.

⁹¹ Images of Van Gogh's art are accessible as Public Domain art. I include several of his works retrieved from <https://commons.wikimedia.org> (see list of references at the end of this dissertation) within this chapter as I wished to show what the students were responding to, and thinking alongside, as Anne and the rest of the Grade Four community engaged in an art lesson together. As well, I was not familiar with several of these works of art and knowing how I, myself am very much a visual learner, believed including these images may help enrich readers' engagement and dialogue with this dissertation while also providing a visual reference.

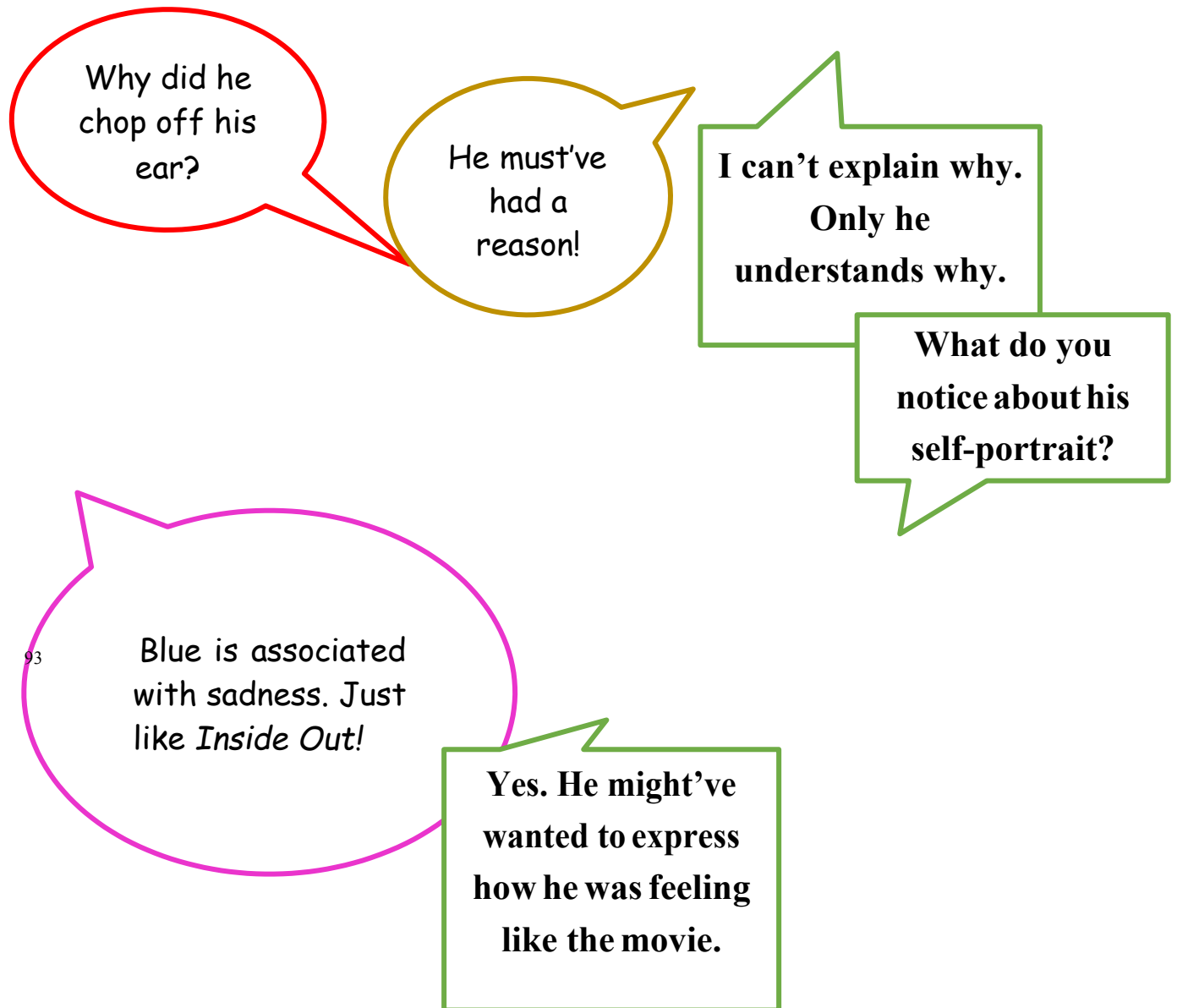


14-Self-Portrait

To better capture snippets of the rich conversation which emerged in the classroom community, in my Research Notes journal, I had hastily sketched out speech bubbles to represent the unique speakers.⁹² The conversation which emerged was at times rapid and at other times, more slowly paced, reminding me that discussions alongside children can shape meaning in different ways. When speech bubbles touch one another or overlap, this indicates the quickness or speed of the responses.

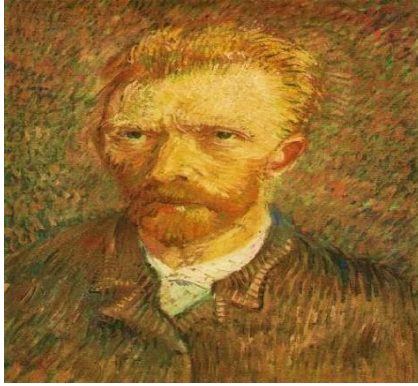


⁹² My observations were interspersed in the dialogue. For the purpose of maintaining anonymity and enhancing clarity—my writing is not always neat—I have reproduced the bubbles here rather than providing a photo of my notes. Anne's speech is depicted in olive green rectangular speech bubbles. Student responses are depicted in rounded speech bubbles in differing colours. Katarina's voice is represented with a bright pink outlined speech bubble. Deepika's is represented with a bright purple outlined speech bubble.



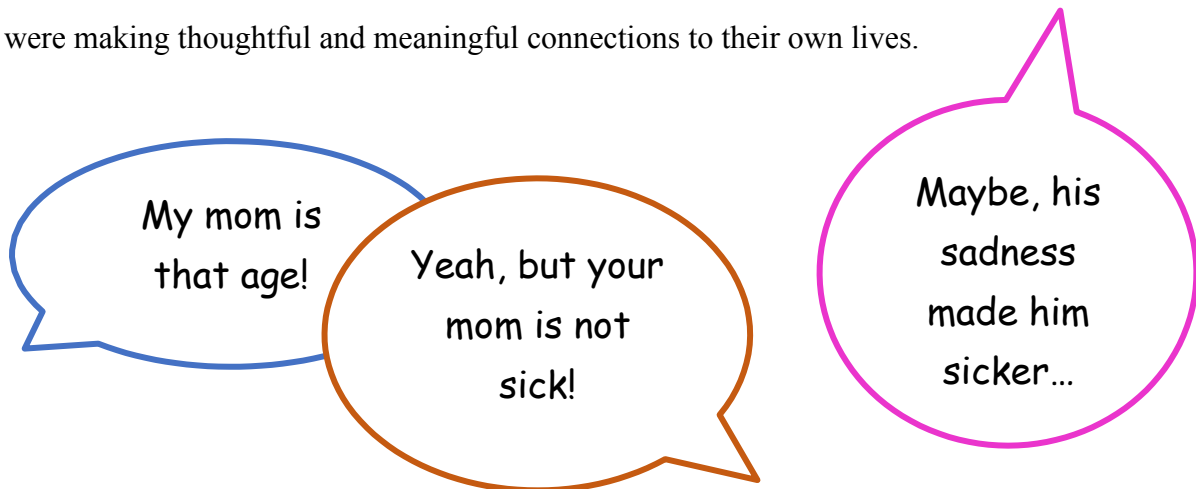
Anne showed the students another self-portrait of the artist and shared with the class, “*He was 37 years old when he passed away. He was pretty sick*” (Research Notes, March 10, 2016).

⁹³ *Inside Out* is an animated movie that was released in 2015 which narrates a story of a young girl named, Riley whose family has to move to San Francisco. The emotional weight of the move causes her feelings to act up with the feeling of sadness being the most dominant alongside feelings of fear, anger, and disgust. The feelings in this movie are personified characters. During Halloween, Anne dressed up as Sadness much to the delight of the children.



15-Self Portrait

Casting my gaze about, I could see the students were absorbed with what they were seeing and hearing. Their responses rendered visible some of the ways in which the students were making thoughtful and meaningful connections to their own lives.



As I walked around the classroom, I was caught by the personal ways in which the different art pieces were speaking to the children. Students were making attempts to link their stories with the ones they had read, heard, seen, and the ones they were artistically fashioning in their mind's eyes. I wondered at Katarina's pronouncement. What stories of sadness was she thinking of in that moment? I thought about some of the things Katarina had revealed in our conversations and wondered if she was thinking about her little sister in this moment. Was Katarina still feeling her sibling was receiving more attention from their mother than her? My heart went out to her.

Anne pulled up some more images. These paintings were not self-portraits and as Anne explained to the class, “*These are paintings of people he helped as a minister*” (Research Notes, March 10, 2016). Anne paused between each painting to allow the students to take a good look. She did not interrupt their perusal with much commentary, nor did she ask students to stop talking amongst themselves. The students’ talk, from what I could see and hear, were related to what they were interacting with on the white screen. Anne projected another painting for the students to view. This one, *Farmhouse in Provence* (1888), was markedly different from the ones she had already shown the class. It was brighter and more vivid. The children quietly exclaimed among themselves at the lush colours that shaped the scenery they could see in the painting.

This is Japanese artwork inspired. It has a brighter mood. Why do you think the change?

He had something good to look forward to.

That's how my mind looks!



16-Farmhouse in Provence

Deepika’s claim, “*That’s how my mind looks like!*” alongside another girl’s comment highlighted for me once more the possibilities aesthetic experiences can have in deepening learning and appreciation along (un)expected paths. How beautiful, I thought that Deepika could envision her thoughts as being bold, bright, and inviting. Her quietly gleeful pronouncement gave me pause. Deepika had been feeling the stress of certain relationships at school and so I was very glad in this change of temperament. More recently, Deepika had expressed excitement about a certain crush—a classmate who “*looked like Harry Styles*”⁹⁴ who liked her. I wondered if this be a reason for Deepika’s uplifted mood. At the same time, I was struck by how intuitively the other student had linked a forward looking narrative for the artist with a shift in colour palette. Could this interaction between the students and the art be what Greene (2009) determined as “engagement” and “involvement of the perceiver” (p. 3), the dynamic interaction of attending to aesthetic qualities while invoking your own stories? She elucidated:

⁹⁴ At the time of our earlier conversations, Harry Styles was a singer in the pop musical group, *One Direction*. He later went solo. Over several conversations, Deepika had indicated a fondness for the singer.

To be grasped as a work of art the poem or the painting cannot simply be, opening itself automatically to any passerby. There ought to be an involvement of the perceiver in a series of questions that promote enhanced seeing, listening, rhythmic movement--an engagement of the perceiver against the background of her/his situatedness, funded meanings and transactions in the world. (p. 3)

The students were involved, and they were bringing their “situatedness, funded meanings and transactions in the world” (p. 3) into their discussions. This was not an automatic process and Anne was inviting students to dwell in their understandings. Her manner was unhurried and her tone, conversational and welcoming. Thinking about Vincent van Gogh and what Anne had shared with the class about the artist, I contemplated whether Anne had chosen this particular artist not only for his remarkable art but also, because she felt some connections with him in other ways. Anne had shared her struggles with depression and recalling her annal and her earlier experiences, I sensed that she resonated with the artist on this level as well. In Health class, Anne and the students were thinking about healthy ways to deal with stress in their young lives. I could see artistry in the manner in which Anne threaded students’ experiences (past, present, and possibly future ones), across subject matter, in this activity. Painting and story had been layered one on top of another—the experiences of Vincent van Gogh certainly—but as well, the ones’ brought by the children, Anne, and even me. I looked over at Deepika and Katarina once more. I wondered, how were they understanding this artful engagement?

Anne showed the class several more famous works of Vincent van Gogh including *The Postman Joseph Roulin* (1889), *The Bedroom* (1889), *The Starry Night* (1889), *A Wheatfield with Cypresses* (1889) and finally closing with *Sunflowers* (1888). For each of these paintings, Anne encouraged the class to notice the lines and sense of movement at play. Anne’s prompting, “*The*

way you're feeling comes out on the page? Does that happen to you? I know that happens to me"

(Research Notes, March 10, 2016) elicited a chorus of affirmative responses from the students.



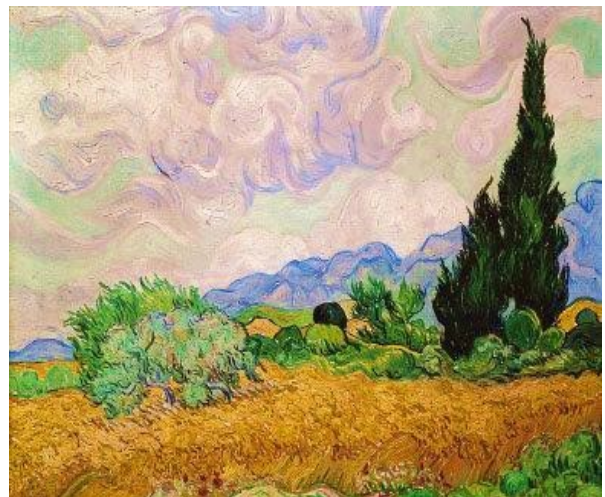
17-The Postman Joseph Roulin



The Bedroom



The Starry Night



A Wheatfield with Cypresses

By way of a clarifying question, Deepika queried, “*What is movement?*” (Research Notes, March 10, 2016). Anne linked her hands together to make a wavy gesture closely accompanied by a swirling motion as she spoke, “*Lots of lines and swirls equal movements. This painting [A Wheatfield with Cypresses (1888)] has lots of movement.*” (Research Notes, March 10, 2016). I saw students along with Deepika nod in understanding, some even mimicking their teacher’s hand motions.

The projection of the artist’s work, *Sunflowers* (1888), indicated a change in activity. Anne shared with the class they would be trying their hand at creating using what they had learned about Vincent van Gogh and his art. *Sunflowers* (1888) was to be their inspiration for their work—a vase with flowers on some kind of table or stand.



18-Sunflowers

“*Taking inspiration from this painting and making it your own, use a colour in the background that does not blend in with the vase and the table,*” Anne suggested before adding, “*Any vase, any table. Try to use as much of the space as possible*” (Research Notes, March 10, 2016). Anne clicked a key on her computer and another picture popped up. She showed a display of one of

her previous classes' artwork who were "*now in Junior High*" (Research Notes, March 10, 2016). As I looked at the pictures of artwork completed by Anne's former students and the expressions on the children of Anne's current classroom community, I saw gathering excitement. Anne was providing them with a forward-looking story. They could be creators too. The students, in turn, were eager to begin. The famous artist's work and stories and Anne's example of art provided by a former class she taught, appeared to invigorate them. The class was a buzz with excited energy and children eagerly tugged out their pencil boxes. As I handed out the paper to the students, I was reminded of similar curriculum-making experiences in art with the students I had been fortunate to learn, work, and play with when I taught in elementary schools. Not all teachers enjoy art as a subject matter and not all students are happy to partake in art making. This class did not have such a teacher and the students, diverse in their skills, appeared to be ready to tackle the task with enthusiasm.

One only had to look about the physical classroom to see that art was very much a part of the curriculum making living within Anne and the rest of the classroom community. In September of 2015, the students had fashioned masks representative of themselves. When I started visiting the school, the brightly coloured paper mâché masks in an assortment of styles and sizes adorned the perimeter of the classroom walls and beckoned my attention. Later in October, three-dimensional maps, of the province's regions crafted by the students from modelling clay in a variety of hues hinted at one of the ways Anne approached Social Studies with the children. These too, were carefully displayed. Snowy December saw the students creatively writing about being trapped within glass snow globes.⁹⁵ And later, as the

⁹⁵ Anne had taken pictures of the children posing in terror. Their expressions of shock invited viewers to believe that such an incident did occur. The students had tapped into their real (and imagined) experiences of winter in Canada to craft their scenery and used a variety of pencil crayons, markers, and wax crayons to imbue them with



Katrina's Snow Globe



Deepika's Snow Globe

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the students were introduced to higher mathematics, pictures of the children in their own stylized karate outfits⁹⁶ leaped across a bulletin board devoted to multiplication.



Deepika's Figure



Katrina's Figure

-20-

vibrancy. Katrina is standing beside a snowman. Deepika is standing beside a house. Both girl's faces have been disguised for anonymity. The two girls were proud to show me their snow globes.

⁹⁶ Anne had actually taken pictures of the students using her camera but for the purposes of maintaining anonymity, Deepika (white and blue outfit) and Katarina's (red, blue, orange, and yellow outfit) faces have been disguised. Anne had shared with me how the children in class had fun posing for their pictures.

Anne drew upon art and art making as a means of bridging understandings with her students. As Connelly and Clandinin (1985) cautioned: “There is the seductive risk of treating the modes of knowing as concepts to be applied to various teaching and learning situations according to their character” (pp. 196-197). They further intuited:

Teaching and learning situations need continually to “give back” a learner’s narrative experience so that it may be reflected upon, valued, and enriched. We want knowing to come alive in classrooms as the multifaceted, embodied, biographical, and historical experience that it is. (p. 197)

As the students began to sketch out their flowers onto their paper, I had a sense that this activity had encouraged them to reflect on their own “narrative experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1985, p, 197) and engage with art and art making in ways which were richly textured. For Anne, it appeared that providing the students with opportunities to engage with art in a variety of ways helped Anne to infuse her love of art with her passion for being a teacher.⁹⁷ As I think about Anne in this classroom moment and others, I am reminded of Aoki’s (2004) “doubling” (p. 431) experience at an art gallery where, at his son’s urging, he stands between two paintings. “Located in the in-between” (p. 431) space, he attempts to view the paintings simultaneously while also listening to a Zen parable. It seemed to me Anne very much wanted to encourage students to enter the “in-between” (p. 431) where they could cultivate their aesthetic appreciation alongside their burgeoning skills.

On March 22, 2016, I was delighted to see the children’s hard enterprise come to fruition. Their completed pieces of artwork were handsomely displayed on one of their bulletin boards

⁹⁷ Anne had discussed in earlier and later conversations that several members of her family had taken up the teaching profession—Anne was living an intergenerational story of teaching. Both her parents had been teachers. One of her grandmothers had been a professor of English. Anne also had an uncle and aunt who taught.

outside of their classroom. It would be in a later conversation that Anne would impart, “*Some teachers don’t like bulletin boards, but I do*” (Transcript, April 1, 2016).⁹⁸ But for now, the exuberant blooms informed me that pastels had been used to robust effect. Several of the children excitedly pointed out their work to me. It was thrilling to see the children’s smiling faces. Katarina and Deepika were among the children who proudly showed me their art pieces.⁹⁹ Katarina employed a purple background. Deepika employed a green background.



Katrina's Bouquet of Flowers

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Deepika's Bouquet of Flowers

As I looked at their lovely creations, I wondered, which stories of herself Deepika had drawn upon to depict her art. Had Deepika held that positive image, “*That’s how my mind looks!*” (Research Notes, March 10, 2016) close to her heart as she worked on her vase of

⁹⁸ In other conversations, Anne shared a story of how she had been asked by her administrator to help with other teachers’ displays because, “*the principal appreciated me then*” (Research Notes, September 27, 2016). Not all of her colleagues were pleased with this decision. Anne felt that her artful curriculum-making was not always valued by her colleagues and administration. This was a tension-filled experience for Anne. She shared other stories of helping teacher friends set up their classrooms at the beginning of the school year. These were brighter moments for Anne.

⁹⁹ Similar to Vincent van Gogh, the children had signed their vases. To protect anonymity, I have covered their handwritten and handprinted signatures.

flowers? Were there specific stories of happiness that she was grounding herself in when she worked on this art? And what about Katarina? I thought about her comment about Vincent van Gogh, “*Maybe his sadness made him sicker...*” (Research Notes, March 10, 2016) and wondered what sad stories had been conjured up for her in that moment? The bold colours employed by her in her art, suggested that as she worked on her piece, she may have been thinking upon happier stories.

Catching-up in the Midst of our Unfolding Lives

Anne and I continued to meet after Katrina and Deepika transitioned into Grade Five. The texted messages we had exchanged over the summer months and into September had kept us connected to one another. We were aware of some of the challenges that were occurring in each other’s lives and tried to support one another as best as we could.

A New Class for Anne: Parent Conferences and Recalling an Earlier Celebration of Learning

The next time we met, Anne and I laughed as we caught sight of one another. The early October wind had played havoc with our hair. Quickly smoothing these unruly strands down, we exchanged hugs before being directed to a table. We had agreed to meet at the end of the school day for a bite to eat and to catch-up. The waiter was quick to take our orders and we were free to chat while we waited. From our text messages, I knew Anne was in the midst of getting ready for parent student meetings. Anne clarified, “*This one is a sit-down conference, so I have to write down notes for each kid*” (Recording, October 6, 2016). I asked Anne if she would be receiving some time covered by a substitute teacher in order to prepare. Anne, noted while no extra time would be provided, things were a little different now.

Anne, in a pleased tone of voice: We use an online booking thing now which is kind of fun. We don't have to send any paperwork home and try and organize a schedule or anything. The parents go online, click the time they want and sign up their kid's name and it's done

Me: How long do they have to sign up?

Anne: Up until the day of... (Recording, October 6, 2016)

As Anne spoke, I recalled the celebration of learning event she hosted for her previous class. Then, Anne had expressed frustration when parents and children had come in at the very end of the day. This had been a bumping place for Anne. Wishing to give space and time to the children in her class and their families, Anne also, recognized she needed time for herself if she was to try and work towards a healthy and balanced life. In this moment of tension, Anne had wondered if parents and other family members understood that coming that close to the end of the allotted time for meeting, meant Anne had to stay longer at the school and that she still had to make the long commute home to have a late dinner. I also recalled on those two days in March of 2016, Anne had once more shown her creativity and had planned elaborate centers where students were able to share with their families some of the curriculum making that was occurring in their Grade Four community. Being present on one of those evenings, I had been in awe of how Anne had devised the centers around a theme of travelling the world with students using passports to travel with their families from one nation to another showcasing their skills in active and fun ways. The children who came in were excited to demonstrate their skills in the various subject matter and loved getting members of their family involved. I understood that that Anne had made it possible for familial curriculum making to occur within a predominantly school curriculum-making world. Parents and other family members were equally enthused and chatted with Anne that they were pleased with what was happening in the classroom. I also was witness to the fatigue that

weighed on Anne as the evening wore on. Living a plotline of artistry and creativity as teacher meant that there was additional work to do. Lovely and engaging as these centers were, they took time to set up and to dismantle. I knew from my experience as a teacher who too enjoyed having children share in creative ways with their family and friends the curriculum making going on in the classroom. I had an appreciation that families did not necessarily understand the level of commitment, time, and effort that went into planning such creative ways of showcasing students' learning and teaching.



22-One of the Stations¹⁰⁰ Anne Created

Thinking about this new way of scheduling online for this year's student conferencing, I hoped the possibility that the meetings would run over would be less likely for Anne's sake. I hoped that with these times marked in advance, families would have the opportunity to chat with Anne as she shared what she was experiencing alongside their child(ren). And later in the year,

¹⁰⁰ At this particular station, books were made available for the children to read alongside their family and friends. These were picture books introduced in class.

when the children had the opportunity to actively share and celebrate their learning with their families, I wished that the time would unfold in ways in which Anne too, would be granted the spaces to truly enjoy.

Slipping into Memories Crafted Within Relationality

As Anne I continued to chat while waiting for our food, Anne shared, “*The girls have been telling me how excited they are to see you again!*” (Recording, October 6, 2016). In return, I told Anne that I was excited to hear this, as I was going to see Deepika on Friday. Deepika’s grandparents had left and were on their way back to India. The family had been busy with that visit. I was looking forward to spending time with Deepika. I had just seen Katrina and her family the previous weekend. Anne talked about still seeing Katrina and Deepika despite their move into Grade Five.

Anne: They’ve [Katrina and Deepika] been coming to visit me a lot.

Me: I know, they miss you.

Anne, laughing: Yeah, they pull me in to give me hugs. I miss them a lot. It usually lasts about three months and then they get too old to get hugs.

Me, reflecting on Anne’s statement: What about your former student¹⁰¹ who came and visited you last year?

Anne, remembering happily: Yes, Mila’s [a pseudonym] already visited me!

Me: I saw Katrina last weekend. And by the way, her mom said, you were an awesome teacher. She really liked you.

Anne: I’m not her teacher anymore.

¹⁰¹ I had met one of Anne’s former students who was now in Junior High during the Talent Show held last year at Borderlands School.

Me: Yes, but she knows you had a good relationship with Katrina.

Anne: I get to see Deepika three times a week because I am partnered with one of the other teachers for gym. (Recording, October 6, 2016)

I could sense how Anne missed her students from the previous year and how she attempted to keep in relationship with them now. This relationality, I knew from my visits with Deepika and Katrina were important to them. They missed their Grade Four teacher. Visiting the girls in their different Grade Five classrooms at Borderlands School, I understood that while they were in the midst of creating relationships alongside their Grade Five classmates and their new homeroom teachers, they also remained connected to the teachers they had known in the previous school year.

Thinking about Curriculum Making Alongside South Asian Families and Children

March 26, 2017 found Anne and I, at another studio on a different side of the city entirely. This time, it was just the two of us. As Anne and I sat quietly together at the wooden table, I glanced back at her. A large cup was carefully cradled in her hands. She was debating where to start painting first. My own project, an incredibly chubby elephant, was placed before me. I knew I wanted this to be a whimsical piece and so was already drawing designs using a pencil which I then planned to paint over employing the sharp edge of a paintbrush. Observing that her oversized latte cup was “*just perfect*” Anne began to paint. As we chatted, I shared with Anne that I was still in conversation with Deepika and Katrina and their families and continued to meet up with them as I did her. Our conversation slipped into a discussion about her experiences of teaching alongside South Asians children.



23-Anne Enjoying an Artful Moment

Storied Expectations around Subject Matter and Testing

Understanding that Anne had many cross-cultural experiences she could draw upon alongside diverse children, I was particularly interested in her intercultural experiences with South Asian families. I already knew that Anne worked from a very relational point of view. I wondered what her understandings were of the South Asian families she had met through her teaching over the years.

Me: What are your experiences working alongside South Asian families? Do you see Indian parents as being different from other parents?

Anne, speaking slowly: The expectations are a lot higher. I find they want their kids to

be constantly working at home. No play time, instead they want extra work. I've had three families who have asked me for textbooks and extra work...crazy amounts of things. I've given textbooks. We haven't had conferences yet. It was Meet the Teacher Night, and one parent asked me, "I want extra work for my child." The easier thing for me to do that doesn't involve a whole lot of extra work is to offer them the textbooks I don't use in class. We have Social Studies textbooks that cover the same stuff. I check them out under their names, and I did it the day of Meet the Teacher. Umm, I also give them the Math textbook. There's no Science textbook unfortunately. I find the Social one to be helpful. The terminology is tricky especially with a second language. (Transcript, March 26, 2017)

I was unsurprised to hear that several parents had broached Anne about additional homework. For families coming to Canada as newcomers and immigrants who were settling into a new land, education proffered a means to shape lives build around plotlines of opportunity. Both Vam, Deepika's mother and Barb, Katrina's mother had suggested so to me in our conversations together. My own practice as a teacher alongside South Asian children had helped me to understand that for many families knowing that their children were able to master the different subject matter was one step on a formal educational journey. For Anne and I, subject matter did not share the same significance that relationship building and teaching and learning in creative ways did. I sympathized with Anne and understood her decision to provide families with textbooks that would aid in skill development. Thinking about Deepika and Katrina and their mothers' stories of hope that their daughters (alongside their siblings) would be educated well, I understood that these hopes were a way of resisting a cultural narrative which could serve to diminish girls' opportunities for education. I asked Anne whether Deepika's or Katrina's families wanted more subject-based materials for use within their familial curriculum making. Anne shook her head in negation, *"No, their parents didn't ask for extra. But they were pretty hard workers themselves. They have that drive to do well"* (Recording, March 26, 2017). Anne

went on to describe, “*Katrina and Deepika always felt anxious. There was always this expectation that they needed to do well. I don’t know if it was them putting that stress on themselves or the parents. They never really said*” (Recording, March 26, 2017). This too, did not surprise me. Katrina and Deepika had shared their different understandings of success at school and their ways of trying to be good students.¹⁰² I was awake to how institutional narratives of educational success can work to erode confidence within children. Anne, I understood was as well.

What Plotlines of Girlhood and Boyhood were Rendered Visible in Anne’s School World?

Wanting to know about whether Anne had noticed a difference among families in how they treated their children, I found myself hesitantly voicing the question. My sense of trepidation I recognized arose from my different experiences, some of which have been layered and collaged within this dissertation. Anne, who knew about some of my concerns, spoke thoughtfully.

I see a lot of babying happening especially with my boys. I get that mom didn’t pack my agenda for me and, “I’m like you’re in Grade Four, you need to do this yourself. It’s your job to remind to sign but you can pack your own bag. So yeah, I notice a difference for sure. For some work ethic wise, some are pushed really, really, hard but I get the opposite too where they’re really babied, they need more time. (Recording, March 26, 2017).

Anne also brought up two students who she worried about. These were boys whose mothers continued to bring them their lunches to the school each day. Anne elaborated, “*They both walk*

¹⁰² Some of these storied fragments are textured and made visible within the two girls’ narrative account.

to school every day to give them their lunches” (Transcript, March 26, 2017). I recollected Anne’s stories from last year when she had demonstrated concern that these children in particular were going to encounter difficulties later on in their lives if they weren’t provided with opportunities to demonstrate a sense of responsibility for their actions. Anne continued to share from her positioning as a teacher of a different classroom community this year. Maintaining anonymity, Anne explained her understanding of a plotline for gender preference which continues to permeate South Asian communities and makes its way into school worlds.

We have a set of twins in Grade Four this year. Fraternal twins. I find that she’s really hard on herself. Like, “I need more work to do.” She very much wants to please her parents. So, yes, I do I see a bit in the girls. You sort of see the extra pressure on the girls and the babying with the boys. You definitely see a bit of the one sidedness. Like the girls sometimes feel that they have something to prove. Like my girl twin. Especially since she has a boy twin. She’s actually higher than the boy twin. (Recording, March 26, 2017)

Anne’s stories worked on me even as Anne and I worked on our figurines. I wondered about Deepika and Katrina and their understandings of cultural narratives which positioned Indian girls and women as less than Indian boys and males. I wondered about Katrina and Deepika’s mothers and their stories of experience. How were they shaped and being shaped by this dominant narrative?¹⁰³

Thinking about Now and Later...

As we dipped our brushes into the coloured paint and carried our brushes across the expanse of one latte cup and an elephant, Anne spoke about trying to make time for all her

¹⁰³ These considerations are taken up in Vam’s and Barb’s respective narrative accounts.

students noting, *“I would say I am hard on myself when I’m not doing a good job. Especially I get to the point when I am so tired and I can’t get caught up on my marking and it piles up”* (Transcript, March 26, 2017). Looking down at her dripping paint brush, Anne laughed as she observed:

I don’t feel it’s fair for children to learn in chaos. At the same time, the Assistant Superintendent commented on the decorations on my walls. But I didn’t know if I should take it as a good or a bad. He said, “You like to put lots of stuff on your walls.” And I was like, were you saying that because of [province’s regulatory board] or are you happy with it? My walls have gotten busy? I like putting up student work. (Recording, March 26, 2017).

This was not the first time Anne had expressed uncertainty around her bulletin boards. Covered with student artwork and other creative pieces, I had seen first-hand how delighted the children in Anne’s class were to show off their work. With pleasure I remembered a younger Deepika and a younger Katrina alongside some of their peers guiding me to their work peppered on the classroom walls. Not far from these memories were other memories alongside the diverse children I had come alongside in my teaching over the years. I, like Anne, loved to have students’ work placed where it could be seen and appreciated. Similar to her too, my creative ways of being, my school curriculum making alongside children was not always valued. Conveying my enthusiasm for the many displays I had seen in Anne’s classroom over time in Borderland School and another school, I sought to provide her with the weight of my support. Cheered somewhat, Anne welcomed me to visit with her again at the school, *“Stop by anytime. You don’t have to tell me. See the new masks the kids have made!”* (Recording, March 26, 2017). Assuring her that I would love to do just that, we continued to paint and continued to talk,

recognizing that there would be other moments where we would come together to share and inquire into our experiences as friends.



Anne's Latte Cup



-24- *Jinny's Elephant*

Chapter Five: Coming Alongside Two Remarkable Girls

A Preamble: Preparing the Canvas of Deepika and Katrina's, and Katrina and Deepika's Narrative Account

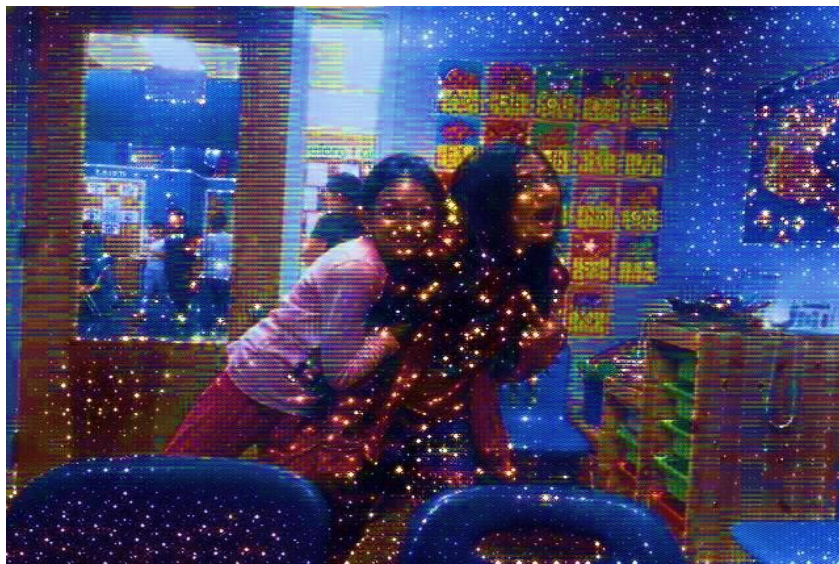
In what follows, I share a narrative account of coming alongside Deepika and Katrina and in some of their unique worlds of curriculum-making. At the beginning of this narrative inquiry, I had the privilege of working as a researcher and volunteer teacher in the girls' Grade Four classroom. At that time, both of the girls were in the same classroom community and had the same home room teacher, Anne. It was Anne who helped guide me to these lovely girls. Anne shared with her class that I was hoping to engage in a narrative inquiry alongside Anne, South Asian girls, and the girls' mothers. I learned from Anne that Katrina and Deepika had been gratifyingly keen to be my research partners. Later, I was able to meet up with their mothers, Barb and Vam, who also, fortuitously, agreed with their daughters to join me on this journey.

Throughout the course of engaging in this multiperspectival narrative inquiry, I had the honour to learn alongside the girls inside their elementary school and additionally, outside their school, and within differing community spaces. Frequently, the girls and I met in our unique home worlds and had opportunities to meet various family members. Many of the times we met, we did so together and subsequently, the choice¹⁰⁴ was made to compose a narrative account of both girls together—rather than artificially unraveling them apart—as a way of making visible their intertwined and individual experiences. Over the span of this research odyssey, we lived, told, retold and relived stories (Clandinin, 2013), and many conversations were had.

Nevertheless, for this work, selectivity was involved in determining which

¹⁰⁴ This decision was not an arbitrary one. It involved much thought and conversation. Jean helped me in making this determination.

research conversations and/or accompanying stories could be brought to the foreground and which by unfortunate, pragmatic reasons, had to be relegated to the background. Paying heed to Heilbrun's (2008) insight: "Power consists to a large extent in deciding what stories will be told" (p. 43), it is my hope that what is shared here illuminates the unique incandescence of each of these two incredible girls who not only helped me to learn more deeply and work more creatively, but who moreover, brought joy to my life through the gifts of their friendships. As such, I hope too, that their storied experiences provide opportunities for enriching conversation and dialogue that continues to build upon this research. Story, prose, poem, image(ry), and text help to shape this collaged¹⁰⁵ narrative account. Through a space of what I call *heart-full* musings, I too, texturize this account, lending yet another storied layer to what is inquired into alongside research friends, you, and others.



25-Katrina and Deepika Having Some Fun During Lunch Break

¹⁰⁵ The artform of collage helped me better inquire into the experiences shared between the girls and myself and to more fully represent them within this narrative account. Sometimes contradictory, sometimes, messy, many times complex, these storied images were (in)complete. They did not always fall into neat, discrete categories when imparted. Rather they overlapped and intersected in some ways and diverged in others.

A Heart-full Musing Interlude: Different Worlds of Curriculum Making



26-Travelling Between and Amongst Canadian and South Asian Storied Worlds

In this heart-full musing, as I came to know Katrina and Deepika better, I began to gain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of who they were in their unique and textured worlds and the ones that we were crafting between us as research friends. We were becoming to settle

into a cadence of comfort where not only the girls seemed to feel free to share more and share more intricately of their interests, their concerns—the wonderous vibrancy of their lives—but I felt an answering openness. This reciprocity was being shaped, I believed because Deepika and Katrina understood that they very much mattered to me. I wanted to understand the complexities of their worlds, their travels to and from these worlds, and how they were experiencing their storied worlds. My beginning place in their Grade Four classroom world as first a teacher volunteer and a researcher had taken on additional tones. Being able to talk with the girls in spaces outside of the classroom, though still in their school, had helped to embolden who I was in their stories and who they were in my stories. Our relationships further became enhanced, when our conversations moved to other worlds, including community worlds and home worlds. As we came to know one another, I wondered at what additional stories would be shared between us...which stories would remain silent...and those stories which would be retold and relived as our relationships continued to unfold over time and within different spaces across and within our curriculum making worlds (Clandinin, 2020; Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011; Lugones, 1987). I also wanted to view, hear, listen, and feel alongside Katrina and Deepika as we moved between their storied worlds of culture and geography patterned with images of Canadian-ness and Indian-ness. In this drawing, I symbolically represent these (in)tangible qualities through a depiction of a Canadian Goose within an Indian styled domicile. The blending of reds, oranges, and yellows are meant to convey the blurred boundaries of where such stories begin, rest, and end. Recognizing that there still exists a vacuum around the experiences of South Asian girls and that too far often, children's experiences are not given the same kind of attention as adults' experiences or even when made visible, are rendered less-important than adults (Clandinin et al., 2016)—I found myself trying to create deliberate opportunities for the

artistry of our lives to be co-composed and to be made more visible.

Creating within Conversation

Katrina and Deepika: Shaping Memory Book Spaces

It was fairly early on in my relationships with Deepika and Katrina when I brought up the idea of creating a memory book alongside other activities, we (and sometimes, initially only I¹⁰⁶) wished to undertake during the course of this research adventure. Deepika and Katrina were excited to plan and shape a memory book which would hold whatever they wished to keep and document as memory. We settled on the name of memory book over scrapbook as a way of moving away from a traditional conceptualization of a scrapbook. In our experience, scrapbooks are typically oriented towards a collection of pictured moments. I encouraged the girls to think of their books as a space where they could store moments of special times—much like a scrapbook—but also to think of them as imaginative and creative spaces where they could record their thoughts about certain ideas, events, and moments at different points of time in their lives. I was drawing upon hooks' (1990/2015) understanding that “memory need not be a passive reflection, a nostalgic longing for things to be as they once were; it can function as a way of knowing and learning from the past” (p. 40) and that it can also “serve to illuminate and transform the present” (p. 147). In much the same way, I believed a memory book could be as agreeably (un)complicated as the creator wished. There was no need to adhere to a set pattern or design.

That is, it needn't adhere to a certain prescription of what it ought to be but could instead be what assume whatever creative thinking and remembering space the girls wanted it to be, at

¹⁰⁶ I discuss later in this section, a moment in which there was some tension initially around a mehndi activity.

any given time.¹⁰⁷ This was important to me as I did not wish to place limits to the girls' ways of being and knowing (Clandinin et al. 2016). Creativity, was something that I had lived in my teaching practice and even in graduate work continued to make room for despite encountering in some spaces, constraints on how I could represent and communicate my knowledge and understandings in ways which made sense to me (Kubota, Saleh, & Menon, 2020; Menon, 2018; 2019). Minh-ha's (1991) words temper my thinking, "They only speak their own language and when they hear foreign sounds—no language to their ear—they walk off warily, saying: "It's not deep enough, we haven't learned anything""(p. 62). She is speaking in this instance about (dis)engagement with film. Yet her words re-directed me to the gravity of being open—the import of allowing for ambiguity in being a receiver of stories and as a narrating artist of stories. Subsequently, I wanted to avoid as much as possible, setting up impenetrable borders (Menon & Saleh, 2018) in thinking with stories, and also in safely representing, and sharing experiences. This is both an ethical and relational consideration. As Clandinin, Caine, and Lessard (2018) remind me, for narrative inquirers, "Conceptualizing¹⁰⁸ relational ethics calls us to considerations of how we have lived relational ethics in our lives and to questions of how we have come to see and to name relational ethics in our lives" and additionally, "relational ethics call us to live, calls us to take action with ourselves and with participants" (p. 10).

Deepika and Katrina: Mandalas as a Creative Beginnings

The black hardcover sketch books I had gifted Katrina and Deepika with earlier in our

¹⁰⁷ This deviation from a scrapbook to a memory book was an idea that came to me as a result of the mixed feelings that arose for me when re-reading my proposal. My proposal (parts of which are integrated here in this dissertation), had been loosely created around the metaphor of a scrapbook. Subsequent re-readings had me wishing for a way to convey a more intense expression of fluidity.

¹⁰⁸ Autobiographically thinking back to their childhood and youth, Caine, Clandinin, and Lessard (2018) share through encounters, through familial stories, and through place, how they each came to relational ethics.

relationships soon shed their drab coverings for more elaborate trimmings. The girls had shown interest in a book of Indian mandalas¹⁰⁹ I had brought with me one day to school. Together, we had looked through the pages and with some gentle prompting from me, the girls noticed each of the mandalas depicted were circular and these forms, if looking from the centre, were radiating outward into growing circles. Soon thereafter, Katrina and Deepika asked if they could select a few of their favourite mandalas for themselves and I happily acquiesced. Each girl picked a mandala and coloured and decorated it as they saw fit to paste on the front cover of their books.



Deepika's Front Cover



Katrina's Front Cover

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I had imagined that the girls would enjoy taking pictures and being able to include these in their books. To this effect, I had also provided Deepika and Katrina with disposable cameras at various times throughout this research so that they could take pictures of people, things, events

¹⁰⁹ In Sanskrit, a *mandala* is a literal translation for circle. In Hinduism, mandalas are depicted to represent worlds beyond the physical. To help better share this symbolism with Katrina and Deepika, I provided the girls with the example of how one act of kindness can radiate forward into larger acts of kindness.

that mattered most to them. I was honoured that throughout the time I spent with Katrina and Deepika, the girls would eagerly share with me pages from their books. During some of our lunch time conversations at their elementary school, Deepika and Katrina would bring their memory books to work on and sometimes, they would bring them during their times spent with me outside of the school. I didn't always take pictures of their books in these sharing moments. And when I did, it was with both Katrina and Deepika's permission to do so. What I began to become more aware of was how these special lunch time moments were also creating spaces in which the girls could speak more freely about their concerns and feelings, than perhaps possible in the regular confines of the classroom. Below is a picture taken of the girls during one (March 10, 2016) of our many lunch time conversations together at their elementary school.



28- Katrina and Deepika Drawing on a Whiteboard

Katrina and Deepika Navigate Tensions: “Well, you didn’t come to my birthday party either!”

On one such occasion on May 12, 2016 during lunch, the girls and I sat together at small red u-shaped table in the little room assigned for us at the school. Deepika and Katrina took turns sharing their memory books with me and each other. Katrina was not feeling well that day. Her face was a pale oval peeping above her turquoise and green striped hoodie, and she spoke about feeling cold: “*It’s freezing cold in the classroom. I’ve been shivering all day*” (Transcript, May 12, 2016). At my urging, she returned to her class to gather up her winter coat to wear in the room. In contrast, Deepika who, wearing a pretty peach blouse paired with jeans, was full of smiles and was a fount of energy. She had recently celebrated her tenth birthday and excitedly shared, “*It was a Hawaiian themed party and so had leis. Me and Indira,¹¹⁰ because the rest didn’t want to, put on Hawaiian music and danced*” (Transcript, May 12, 2016). Katrina and I watched as Deepika jumped up and demonstrated some of her dance moves, swaying gently from side to side while rhythmically waving her arms. I noticed that my clapping was more enthusiastic than Katrina’s and I attributed this to her not feeling well. However, as our conversation progressed, I realized that this might not be the only cause.

Deepika happily shared: We got the leis from Dollaramma.¹¹¹ Then we had these super cute tumblers.

Katrina dejectedly responded: Tumblers? I don’t have those either.

Deepika in an upset voice: If you came to my party you would have but you got invited to Chris’s¹¹² party and couldn’t come to mine.

Katrina in an equally upset voice: But I didn’t go to his birthday party. I was very busy.

¹¹⁰ Indira is a pseudonym for Deepika and Katrina’s classmate.

¹¹¹ This is the name of a chain of stores known for offering merchandise for good value.

¹¹² Chris is a pseudonym for Katrina and Deepika’s classmate.

Deepika, still upset: Well, you didn't come to my birthday party either! (Transcript, May 12, 2016)

Listening to the girls speak, I realized that they were both unhappy with one another. And slowly it came out that Katrina was feeling left out because Deepika and some of the other girls in the classroom had been talking about Deepika's birthday party. Deepika, on the other hand, was feeling betrayed because Katrina had not attended her birthday though invited. We discussed the situation a bit more and Deepika came to understand that Katrina had truly been busy over the weekend with family obligations. Katrina told us: "*We go to the gurdwara*¹¹³. *We usually go on Sundays*" (Transcript, May 12, 2016). Katrina, in turn, came to understand that Deepika had really wished that Katrina had attended her birthday party. Deepika spoke about how several other friends from their class also didn't attend the party. With sadness, Deepika shared, "*Indira came but Jashree*¹¹⁴ *and Lilly*¹¹⁵ *were sick. But Jashree wasn't sick. My mom even talked to her mom but she didn't come!*" (Transcript, May 12, 2016). I could sense that Deepika was trying to express the reasons for her unhappiness by pointing out those friends who didn't come to the party. She felt bad that her friends hadn't come. Her upset with Katrina arose from her feelings of being neglected on her special occasion. Hearing Katrina's explanation helped to soothe Deepika and to some extent, the same with Katrina. Nonetheless there was still some tension between the friends, and, I found myself trying to ease into another topic to help the girls obtain some breathing room to cope with their feelings. The girls had aired out their feelings, but I felt they might need some quiet time alone to reflect on each other's comments. In a deliberately cheery voice I asked, "Who'd like to share from their memory book first?" (Transcript, May 12,

¹¹³ A *gurdwara* is a Sikh place of worship.

¹¹⁴ Jashree is a pseudonym for Deepika and Katrina's classmate.

¹¹⁵ Lilly is a pseudonym for Katrina and Deepika's classmate.

2016). Deepika's keen response of "*I will!*" (Transcript, May 12, 2016) was a welcome lightening of mood.

The Necessity of (Close) Friendships

For Deepika and Katrina, this discussion about Deepika's birthday illuminated for me once more the importance of friendship in their young lives. Having a group of girlfriends which they could each depend on made a difference in how they navigated their border-crossings within their school worlds certainly, but also, in their travels between their home and school worlds. Having friends, they could rely upon, share experiences that others might not be so easily able to understand allowed for a shorthand to what each other was feeling. In this instance, I could see Deepika did not have to ask Katrina what she meant by having to attend the gurdwara. Deepika attended temple regularly and these faith-based worlds the girls traversed and dwelled within were not the same worlds of faith but there did exist a shared understanding of the import and subtext of such travels.

Alisha Sawhney (2019) in a recent opinion piece, entitled, *The Magic of Finding Your Girl Gang as a Woman of Colour* draws attention to the bonds of love and friendship among girlfriends. Having such "foundational friends", shifts "the brown girl experience" (p. 7) which is undeniably heterogeneous, into prominent focus.

There is something powerful about seeing a part of your experience reflected back to you, particularly in the small moments of your day. These quiet realities amongst us speak to the ways in which people of colour engage with the world. Discussions about culture and religion aren't reserved for podcasts—they're already embedded in our everyday experiences. (para. 7)

Katrina and Deepika were able to access a shorthand of experience between them. Young though they might be, I understood both girls needed to have close friends around them who understood them in their multiplicities. Such friends helped them to imagine who they were in any given moment and permitted them the freedom to try on and live different ways of being. For young girls of colour especially, these kinds of friendships are inherently valuable.

Deepika's Border-crossings with her Names: "My Name Story by Deepika"

Deepika opened her book with an audible crack and both Katrina and I craned forward for a look. I smiled as I saw Deepika had followed up on one of our earlier conversations where we had talked about our individual names. I remembered how Deepika, unlike Katrina, had evidenced a degree of disappointment when I shared my name of Jinny was a derivative of my longer Indian name. I had wondered then at the cause for she had been quiet as to why she was irked. Many thoughts ran through my mind. Had she felt in some way betrayed by my not having shared immediately that I too, had several names? Was she feeling upset that I had another name by which it seemed it was easier to traverse my different worlds than she was currently experiencing? Had I missed an opportunity to share with both Deepika and Katrina how I managed to hold onto my different names in the face of certain challenges? My relational responsibilities to the girls were growing more complex, the more I got to know and care for them. I resonated with Clandinin et al. (2006) who continued to wonder who they were in their work and who they were in relation with participants. They commented, "It also made us think about the relational responsibilities we undertook as we lived alongside children, teachers, families, and administrators and what we were asking for as we became characters in their stories" (p. 17). I had been through some similar experiences as Katrina and Deepika and my thinking was deepening as I continued to puzzle about what happens when opportunities of how

it could be otherwise are not taken or for whatever reason, are not made visible. And similar to Clandinin et al. (2006), I continued to wonder about my relational responsibilities as both a researcher and a friend to Deepika and Katrina.

I had written about the significance that names and the complicated understandings of naming arising from my different experiences (Menon, 2015; Saleh, Menon, & Kubota, 2018), and, I was hopeful of learning what Katrina and Deepika thought about their names. I had asked them earlier if they were called the same names in their worlds of home and in their worlds of school and had suggested this could be a possible entry for their memory books. I was pleasantly surprised Deepika had taken me up on the suggestion. Her page was wondrously constructed into quadrants each with a brief descriptive explanation. Quadrant 1 included a drawing of a tall wooden gate and Deepika revealed, *“This is my Indian home”* (Transcript, May 12, 2016). Deepika’s Canadian home took up real estate in Quadrant 2. Quadrant 3 was comprised of a descriptive explanation of what Deepika’s friends from both home and school called her. In the remaining quadrant, Deepika wrote about what her teacher, Anne and other teachers called her at school. I loved how Deepika was able to make visible the nuances of her various names in her various worlds. I was reminded yet again, that names matter and how they are used and by whom, also matter. My excited praise pleased Deepika and she readily instructed me to *“Take a picture!”* (Transcript, May 12, 2016). I hastened to comply, recalling how months earlier when we were first getting to know one another, she had shared a story about having to use her middle name in class because her first name was *“too difficult”* for some teachers and students to pronounce. Though outwardly matter of fact, her words then struck a resonating chord within me (Menon, 2015; Saleh, Menon, & Kubota, 2018). What happens when you are compelled to assume a different name from the one you have been given in love? In deferring to her middle

name at school, I saw Deepika learning how to border-cross (Anzaldúa, 1987/1999; Menon & Saleh, 2018) so that she could better handle how she was constructed and named in her school world of curriculum making (Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin, 2011; Lugones, 1987).

Quadrant 1

Back home [India], everyone knew me, so they called me [nickname] made by me when I was 3!

Quadrant 2

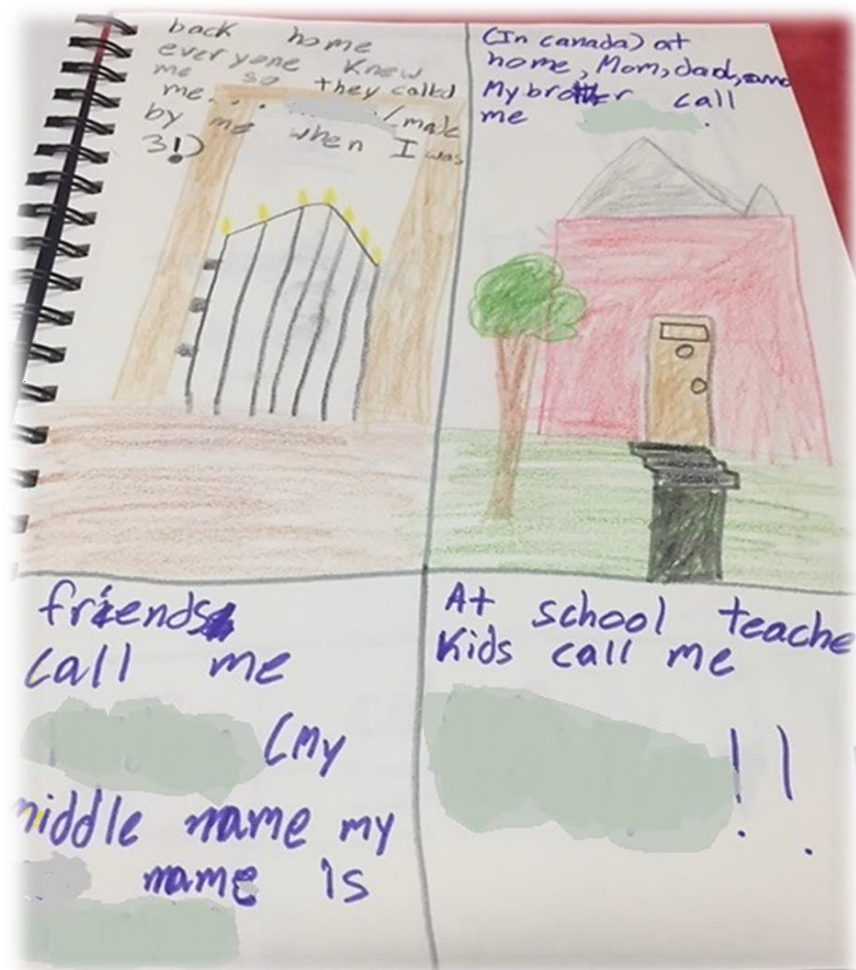
(In Canada) at home, Mom, dad, and my brother call me [nickname].

Quadrant 3

*Friends call me Deepika (my middle name).
My first name is*

Quadrant 4

At school, teachers, kids, call me Deepika!!!



29-Deepika's Stories of her Names: Drawings and Writing Composed within Home World

In my doctoral proposal (Menon, 2015), I had touched upon some of my own naming experiences as a young person. I wrote:

As a child and a youth, my name had been the albatross that hung heavy about my neck.

It weighed me down and added to the innate differentness of who I was in relation to my peers. It was indelible reminder, if I needed one, of how I was perceived as not Canadian by some. A Canadian would not have such an odd name. (p. 12)

I wondered whether Deepika had felt as bewildered and hurt as I did whenever her name was mispronounced. How had she felt in relation to some of her peers who had more westernized names? How had she felt when she made the difficult choice to use her middle name instead of her first name for the sake of easing other people's concerns over her first name? Had she too, struggled with a sense of Canadian-ness? Did she find that her life was made more challenging when people struggled to pronounce her birth name? Did she find it confusing that people wanted a short-cut to saying her first name? Did she wonder how she could make border-crossing back and forth from her home worlds to her school worlds more of an easier journey? That is, I wondered what complicated and nuanced feelings of (be)longing shaped Deepika's decision to switch names¹¹⁶ within her school world. Deepika's drawings indicated an awareness of the complexities involved in her day-to-day travels between her various worlds through her different names.¹¹⁷

Exploring Deepika's second page I was reminded of my time in the elementary classroom. With the students I had the privilege of coming alongside as a teacher over the years, I had arranged some fun activities around naming. One of my favourite activities was asking the

¹¹⁶ In conversation with Deepika's mother, Vam had evidenced pride in her family names as well as her children's names. For her, the school curriculum-making world needed to widen to accept a diversity of names (Research Notes, April 2, 2016).

¹¹⁷ Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2012) share a story of young girl (Ji-Sook) who experienced tensions with her different names. Ji-Sook's tensions became more visible after a class reading of the book, *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi—a story of a young Korean girl who decides whether to keep her given name or take on an Americanized name. Ji-sook's mother, "Mrs. Han spoke of how she had seen the choice of an English name [Elizabeth] as a way for Ji-Sook to fit into the Canadian school curriculum-making world" (p. 115).

children to inquire into the meanings of their names, how they were named and even writing about the different names they are called and by whom, amongst their family and friends. Then the children would select a few points and write/draw a name patch. Each name patch was then ‘sewed’ by me onto a bulletin board display of a classroom quilt. Space for student’s photos was made available on part of the patch. By providing students the opportunity to share some of their home stories of their names, I was attempting to learn more of how they saw themselves and though I didn’t name it such, to draw closer to a richer understanding of their lived multiplicities within their familial curriculum making. Clandinin, Murphy, and Huber (2011) elucidate:

Awakening to familial curriculum making allowed us to see not only teachers but learners (children) and members of their families and communities, as curriculum makers. In this way then, the composition of a curriculum of lives is negotiated not only in school but, as significantly, in familial (home and community) contexts (p. 17)

I knew from speaking with Katrina and Deepika, as well as from their teacher, Anne, that the children had completed a naming activity in class sometime in September of 2015—a month before I had joined the classroom community. Anne had shared previously with me that this activity afforded everyone an opportunity to learn about themselves and one another. Though Anne, had not explicitly said so, I understood this activity was also a way for her to privilege children’s familial curriculum making. I was very keen to see the writing the children had done and both Deepika and Katrina had assured me they would show their writing to me. To my delighted pleasure, Deepika had chosen to include this piece of writing in her memory book. And as I looked at this page, I was reminded of some thoughts I had composed in a paper co-authored with my response community at the time. In it I commented

how the bestowal of a name can be received in much the same incandescence as a much-treasured gift from an individual or not so happily received—whereupon a name is thrust upon a person without her consent and becomes an indelible source of pain. (Saleh, Menon, & Kubota, 2018, p. 339)

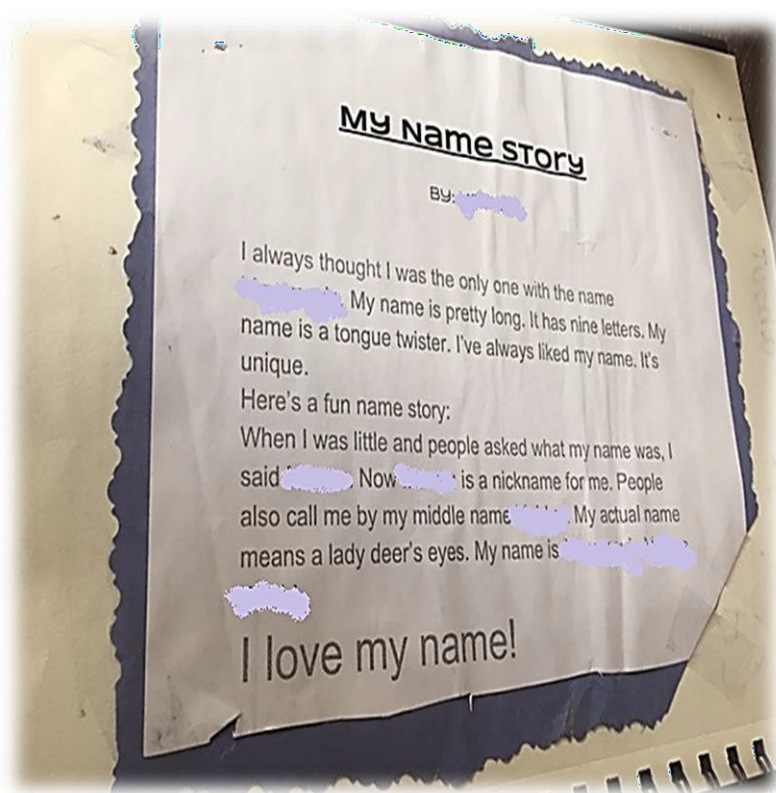
Deepika wanted to include this piece of writing about her name in her memory book. To me this spoke volumes about how she was negotiating the intricacies of her names and processes of

My Name Story
By Deepika

I always thought I was the only with the name _____ [birth name]. My name is pretty long, It has nine letters. My name is a tongue twister. I've always liked my name. It's unique. Here's a fun name story:

When I was little and people asked what my name was, I said _____. Now _____ is a nickname for me. People also call me by my middle name. My actual name means a lady deer's eyes. My name is _____ [first, middle, and last names].

I love my name!



30-Deepika's Stories of her Names: Writing Composed within School World

naming. In her penultimate sentence, the combination of her first, second, and last name stood out to me as way of resisting a story of what some might consider a challenging name. In sharing this paragraph with her classmates, I could see how Deepika's names were intimately intertwined

with her identity-making stories of a young girl in Grade Four. In her stories she had shared with me, Deepika had revealed her understanding that her first name was not one which some of her peers and some of her teachers found easy to pronounce. To help mitigate this challenge, Deepika had taken the incredible step of switching to her middle name to help ease other people's comfort. Yet Deepika also understood the value each of her names held and made the decision to share her own love of her names through her writing. Deepika's last sentence, composed in a much larger font than the rest of her text, alluded to her deep appreciation of the gifts her names were, are, and continue to be.

Deepika and Katrina: A Peace Offering in the Midst of "All About Me!"

The bell rang signaling that it was time for children to go outdoors for the remainder of their lunch break. To compensate for the sudden cacophony of children's voices and rush of footsteps in the hallways, Deepika read more loudly from her book: *"All about me...I love lavender, pizza, donuts, Starbucks, my family in neon [referring to a highlighter created stick figure drawing of her family in the right hand corner of one of her pages]!"* (Transcript, May 12, 2016). At the end of Deepika's exuberant trill, Katrina turned to Deepika and kindly offered some of her lunch, *"You want some of my pizza?"*, to which Deepika replied, *"Sure! Everyone loves pizza!"* (Transcript, May 12, 2016). I was glad to see that the girls were trying once more to reconnect. It felt good to know that Katrina had been paying close attention to what was being shared by Deepika. The pizza she offered was as much a peace offering as it was an understanding that her friend, Deepika enjoyed pizza. While I recognized the girls might revisit their respective tensions with respect to the birthday party, Deepika's contented response signaled the girls were back in good standing with one another in this moment.

Deepika's Storyline of Wishing to be Source of Inspiration for Others

Deepika showed two more pages during this particular lunchtime conversation and these were pages I didn't get a chance to ask any questions about though I truly wanted to do so. But I was aware that time was passing, and I wanted Katrina to be able to share if she wished to do so.



31-Deepika's Earth Day Poster and Speech Ideas

Later, pouring over these two pictures of Deepika's memory book, I wondered if perhaps, her humorous poster for Earth Day was an extension of classroom curriculum-making. And, her wonderful ideas for a school speech had me metaphorically crossing my fingers that Deepika would get a public forum at school to share her ideas. Deepika's desire to give a speech floored me! When did she come up with these thoughts? Who or what was helping her to think in such

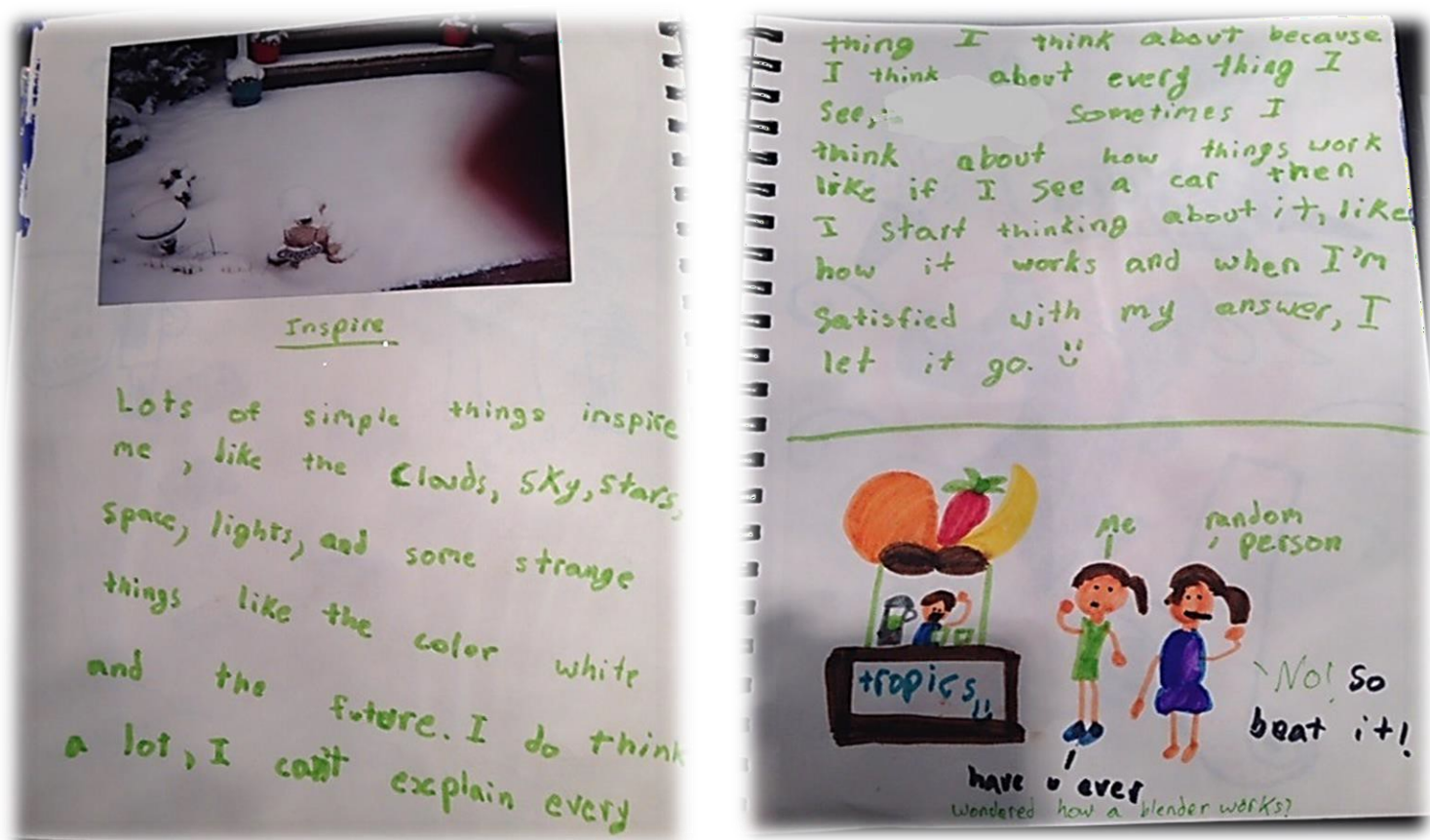
expansive ways? Where did she get this idea to give a speech?¹¹⁸

Her notes, though jotted did not appear random at the least. These ideas seemed very well thought out for someone as young as Deepika. I couldn't help but feel impressed. Some of her thoughts leapt out at me then and I had a great many wonders. For instance, Deepika's thought about "*how fortunate we are to have our education*" and even "*learning from the past*" were ideas that made me think of her mom, Vam. Vam had spoken to me several times on the importance of her children having a good education. One of our first conversations veered into the need for girls especially, to have not only the right to an education, but a good one. And I recall now how, in relation to challenges, she had also talked about the importance of how our actions in the past could inform our actions in the now. Were these thoughts then part of the curriculum-making shaped within the family home? My gaze travelled to the other side of her page, and I reread Deepika's point, "*how important it is to respect all people.*" This mattered to Deepika. She had shared stories with me (individually) and together with Katrina about different instances where she experienced feelings of not being treated favorably in comparison to others. Was this point a way of Deepika drawing upon her familial curriculum-making and her own knowing as means of advocating for herself.

And when she spoke of role models, I understood Deepika's mother was definitely a powerful one for her. But I also wondered who her other role models were? Similar to Katrina, Deepika had evidenced a yearning to be like some of her peers. Were these other girls then role models for Deepika? Or when, she wrote this point down, was she thinking of some other people entirely or perhaps, even one person? My thoughts returned to an earlier moment. Deepika, during one of our lunchtime chats had brought up Malala Yousafzai—the young lady from

¹¹⁸ Marsh (2003) draws attention to the legitimization of nursery literacy practices over home literacy practices and calls this re-occurrence one-way traffic. Deepika's Earth Day poster seemed to be pointing to similar transference whereby school curriculum-making was making its way home.

from Pakistan who had survived an assassination attempt and was a vocal advocate for the rights of girls to have an education. I knew Deepika held her in high esteem. I wondered if Deepika was inspired by her. Certainly, this young Nobel Peace Prize recipient was an incredible role model for all people.



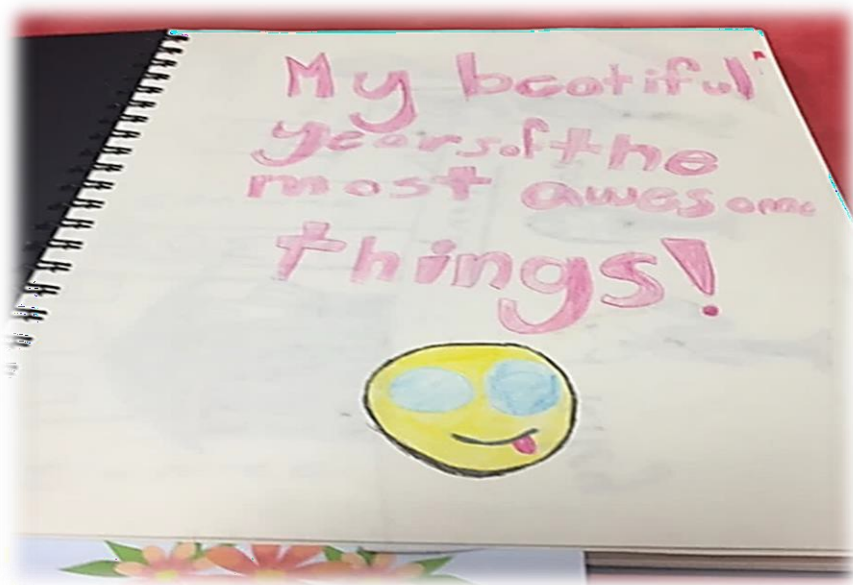
32-Deepika's Inspirational Spread in her Memory Book

It would be in April of 2017, during a visit to my house, Deepika would open up her memory book to share other things which inspired her. They spoke to her sense of curiosity in her day-to-day life. In this two-fold spread, Deepika had taken time to write about her thoughts on the matter (see: *Deepika's Inspirational Spread* above). As well, Deepika had chosen to include a picture of a little statue of a dog holding up a welcome sign that sat in front of her

house. Using different disposable cameras I had provided her with, Deepika had taken numerous pictures of this little dog over the seasons—surrounded by lush green grass and flowers, guarding a pile of crunchy brown leaves, and in this particular photo, covered in snow—and its import as a visual source of inspiration was not lost on me. She had included a vivid description of the many-hued things which inspired her. Deepika had also drawn and coloured a picture. The colourful drawing revealed Deepika’s playful nature as she lent her artistic skills to visually animate a pun about a blender. I realized this was Deepika depicting what inspired her.

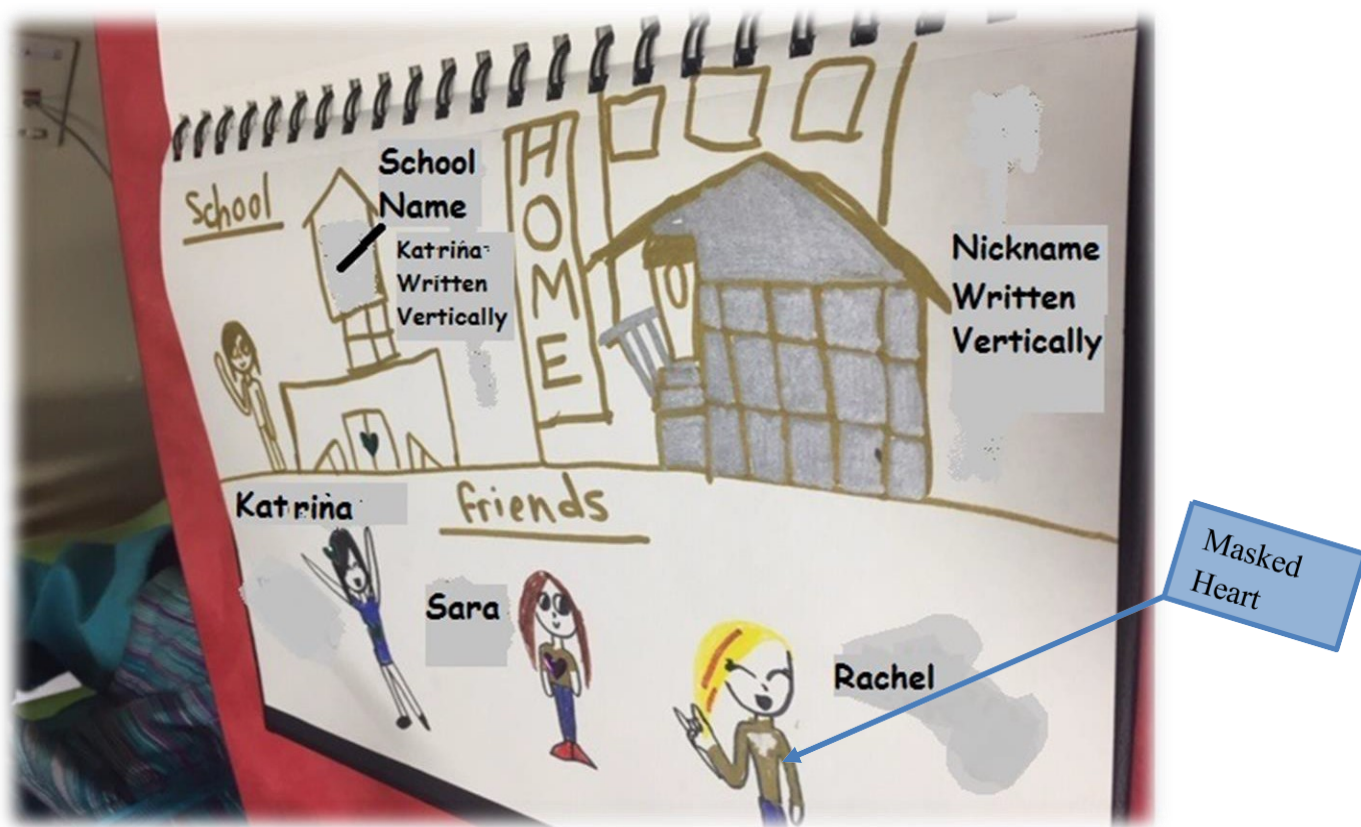
I understood that over time, Deepika was not only concerned with being a source of inspiration for others, she was interested in understanding her own thought processes in relation to what inspired her. Deepika’s curiosity, I recognized was a trait which allowed Deepika to bring her considerable powers of creativity to life. Her curiosity and her creativity enabled Deepika to be inspired and in turn, be a source of inspiration.

Katrina’s Representation: “My beautiful years of the most awesome things!”



33-Katrina’s Title Page

Katrina also enjoyed exploring her drawing skills within the safe spaces afforded by her memory book. Using drawings as a platform for expressing her interior self was a creative plotline that became visible as we continued to meet in school, home, and community spaces. Within this school space in this moment, I could tell Katrina was not feeling her best though she tried to put on a happy front. She continued to sniffle indicating the onset of a cold. Nonetheless, relegating her little bag of Cheerios to the side, she opened her book with a bit of a flourish and indicated her first page. I exclaimed over the wonderful use of adjectives, “I love your title page! The emoji is so cute!” (Research Notes, May 12, 2016). Katrina loved emojis and often doodled them on the whiteboard in the small room allotted to us, during our lunchtime conversations at her school A pleased smile played about her lips before we turned to the next page.



34-Katrina's Worlds of School, Home, and Friends

I was somewhat surprised to see that Katrina too, had decided to devote a page to her name as well. I was surprised because Katrina had not mentioned this when Deepika was sharing stories about her name. Then I recalled the tension that existed between the girls when we first sat down at the table. Using a gold marker, Katrina had divided her page into thirds. One third was devoted to her school world. Here, Katrina clearly expressed that her first name was the one used in school. Another third was concerned with her home world. In this section, Katrina¹¹⁹ wrote down the nickname her family members called her at home. The derivative, akin to Deepika's, was imbued with the love and care of those who bestowed it upon her. The bottom part of Katrina's page was focused on her friends. It was here my gaze dwelled. I noticed Katrina had chosen to include her best friend, Rachel from her classroom this year and her best friend, Sara¹²⁰ from the school she attended previously in Grade Two. Katrina had mentioned on different occasions that she continued to miss her (first) best friend. I knew from our conversations that she hadn't seen Sara since her move to this school. My sense has always been for as long as I can remember that if a person can at least have one good friend to share experiences with, then there is less chance of isolation and challenges, when they occur, can be shared or mitigated. I have carried this belief into my adulthood. And so even in my teaching career, when I have noticed a lone(ly) student, I have tried to create additional openings for peers, for new friendships to be shaped. Looking at this page, I saw a connection to Katrina's title page. Sarah, though a friend of Katrina's past was still very much present in Katrina's thoughts and heart. She, similar to

¹¹⁹ It would be on December 11, 2016 while Katrina was sharing her memory book with me that she would show me the written piece she had done for her school naming project. This particular story is shared in the chapter entitled, *Coming to Know Barb Alongside Katrina*. Katrina would also share another story of being named by peers at her school. Katrina's parents had discussed Katrina's name with me and informed me that they had thought of naming Katrina differently but had settled on her name because it was easier to pronounce than other names. Barb, Katrina's mother, noted that they wanted a name that would not be "ruined" by other people (Research Notes, May 7, 2017).

¹²⁰ Sara is a pseudonym for Katrina's friend.

Katrina's friend, Rachel, was part of *"the most awesome things"* of Katrina's *"beautiful years"*.

Katrina's Sharing: "I took the heart off Rachel because she started to be a mean girl!"

As my gaze traversed the bottom of her page, I caught what I had missed during my first look. I noticed Katrina had drawn a lovely coloured heart on Sara's T-shirt. However, beneath Rachel's streaked hair, her T-shirt was missing a similar heart and now, Katrina's words, *"I took the heart of Rachel because she started to be a mean girl"* (Transcript, May 12, 2016) took on a deeper resonance. I was saddened to learn this. Katrina had shared her appreciation of Rachel as a friend over several of our conversations. This was unwelcome news and my response was subdued, "Oh no! I'm so sorry to hear this." (Transcript, May 12, 2016). Deepika who had been quiet, suddenly piped up, *"Tell her the story about Rachel!"* (Transcript, May 12, 2016). I turned my attention back to Katrina and she was quick to take up Deepika's suggestion.

Katrina, in a disbelieving tone: So, this is the weird thing. When she gets a C, she gets even more popular than ever! Seriously. She gets a C on a test and then she becomes more popular than ever.

Me, curiously: How?

Deepika: Three people, four people¹²¹ have a crush on her. It's Bill, Vick, Calvin, and Nick.

Me: Wow!

Deepika: And more people but we don't know them! [Laughing] Anyway, Rachel is so popular, I can't believe it! So pretend like she does something—like has a little scrape and says, "I got huuuuurt!" and then everyone is like, "OH MY GAWD, Rachel! ARE YOU OK?" That's her.

¹²¹ Bill, Vick, Calvin, and Nick are pseudonyms for classroom peers.

Me trying not to smile and failing: Oh, my goodness! [Looking at Katrina]: You've got Katrina laughing! (Transcript, May 12, 2016)

Even while I was trying my best to stifle my sense of humour at Deepika's antics, I could sense that Katrina was truly upset with Rachel. If Rachel was truly receiving a high degree of positive attention from the girls' classmates, I could see why both girls would find that frustrating especially Katrina who was close to Rachel. Katrina also had shared stories of her home world where she believed her younger sister was receiving more attention than she was from her mother. That would mean in both Katrina's home world and school world, she was living a story of feeling lonely at different times. My instincts were telling me there was more to what the girls had shared, but I knew that if Katrina wanted to talk more, she would do so in her own time.

At any rate, the time for more conversation was not possible as a quick look at my phone showed that it was almost time for the girls to return to class. They had a substitute teacher today and I was fearful of getting the girls in trouble. We quickly cleared up our area and I walked the girls back to class just before the bell rang. And then I was pleasantly swallowed up in a tangle of arms by a group of children who bombarded with me questions as to when I would be back in class. Uncertain, I responded, "I hope soon!" (Research Notes, May 12, 2016). The girls and I also hugged and said our byes recognizing that soon we would meet up outside of school to watch a movie and perhaps, even some painting of pottery.

A Heart-full Musing Interlude: Seeking a Sense of Narrative Coherence

It was a cool day, when I came to pick up the girls from their homes on Monday, May 23, 2016, and I was trying not to worry and failing miserably. I was not in a good place emotionally. It was Victoria Day and it felt like only a few days had passed since my mom had left the

hospital against her doctor's wishes. She still looked weak but at least the nasogastric tube had been removed, I consoled myself. I wondered too about the research I was undertaking for the doctoral dissertation. I hadn't been able to visit the school for some time—during the whole month of April and a little after, my days being swallowed by remaining at my mother's bedside at the hospital. As well, I was hurting in physical ways. I was having problems with my back. Yet, I knew I had to make some effort to reach out. Otherwise, what would happen to my research relationships and that layered work in progress I had been so carefully co-composing with my research friends? Would all the different pieces begin to fade or worse fall apart like my life appeared to be doing in this moment? While Anne understood why I couldn't make it to the classroom, the girls wouldn't understand why. Anne had texted me to let me know they missed me, but I knew that young as they were, they would feel hurt by what appeared to be an abrupt withdrawal from their lives. I would be remiss if I did not confess that I also missed them. I had become used to seeing them and now this absence too, was taking its toll on me.

In this *heart*-full musing, I was reminded of Bateson's (1989) metaphor of a quilt and putting "together a life" (p. 62). She cautioned:

At the same time, you cannot put together a life willy-nilly from odds and ends. Even in a crazy quilt, the various pieces, wherever they come from, have to be trimmed and shaped and arranged so they fit together, then firmly sewn to last through time and keep out the cold. But even crazy quilts are sewn against a backing; the basic sense of continuity allows improvisation. (p. 62)

What did it mean that I was having metaphorically struggling with putting the bits and pieces

together “so they fit together” and were firmly “sewn against a backing” (Bateson, 1989, p. 62)?



35- Mismatched Worlds

Within these quilt-drawn borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987/1999), I felt like I was trying to grasp at the mismatched pieces of my life—my different worlds—which felt altogether like a life unraveling rather than a life being assembled. The looming face of a watch in the corner of my musing reveals my preoccupation with the passage of time and time passed. The glimpse of disappointed faces represents the many people (especially Deepika and Katrina) who I felt I

would be letting down if I could not make a positive movement in this undertaken research. A narrow triangular piece reflects the irregular loop of my negative thoughts that caught me during this troubling time. Recognizing that these unhelpful storied images arose from a negative fecund filled mind space, I queried, “What fruits are born here?” The nested group of birds resting on a branch recalled for me the different stories I was living alongside my research friends even as I wondered, in the light of many a moon passing, “Is this [bad time] just a phase?” Above, two butterflies flutter nearby a maple leaf, metaphorically giving rise to my thoughts that perhaps, this time would metamorphosize into something less painful and I would be able to continue with the research and other parts of my life. As my musing continued, I saw that different aspects had found their way out of the borders I had made for them. In my thoughts, Minh-ha’s (1989/2009) words sprang to mind yet again, “Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak” (p. 94). Yet, I understood I needed to (re)gain some measure of control.

If I wanted a “basic sense of continuity” (Bateson, 1989, p. 62), I had to pick up the wayward threads of my life. I was, in essence, seeking a sense of narrative coherence. In this manner, I was reminded of Carr (1986) who noted, “Whatever we encounter within our experience functions as instrument or obstacle to our plans, expectations, and hopes. Whatever else “life” may be, it is hardly a structureless sequence of isolated events” (p. 122). I contacted Deepika’s mom Vam and Katrina’s mom, Barb respectively. Through text, we communicated and arranged for a day in which I could see the girls. Their understanding of my situation helped.

A Thought-Provoking Artful Curriculum Making Moment

Katrina and Deepika: “Why haven’t you been to see us?”

Following one of the more comfortable routes Google Maps provided me with, I picked up Katrina first on this occasion and then Deepika. I was so happy to see their smiling countenances as they nestled with quick familiarity in the back seat of my car. This time there was no arguments as to who would “*ride shotgun*” as both girls understood my reasoning of wanting neither of them to feel bad if they did not occupy the passenger seat. “*Why haven’t you been to see us?*” Deepika soon asked (Transcript, May 23, 2016). “*Her mom’s been sick,*” Katrina replied on the heels of Deepika’s question (Transcript, May 23, 2016). “That’s true. I’m sorry I haven’t been able to, but I am so glad that I am able to see you guys today!” (Transcript, May 23, 2016). My vehicle made swift work of the roads for it seemed like no time at all before we reached our destination. It had been long discussed by us—during our lunch conversations at the girls’ school and later outside of school—that in addition to seeing movies and reading books, we also wanted to do some work with art. The girls came up with the idea of working with pottery and I was more than amenable to the idea.

Deepika and Katrina: Entering an Artful Space

As we entered the studio, the girls eagerly pointed out the different pieces on display. There was so much to choose from. The shelves were fairly bursting with a wide range of pottery items to paint. I followed Deepika and Katrina as they moved first to small plates and mugs, before coming to pause in front of a display of fantastical creatures real and imagined. Amidst purring cats and bashful puppies, dangerous dragons and flowery fairies peeped mischievously down at us from the higher shelves. I found myself holding my breath to see what these two would select. The girls gravitated almost in tandem to a shelf where a row of identical mermaids reclined. “*You both want mermaids?*” I asked. Their responses were gleeful, “*Yes! Yes!*” I caught the indulgent smiles of some adult patrons sitting nearby. How could you not smile at

such enthusiasm? *“What are you going to choose?”* Deepika asked me. My gaze settled on a small plate shaped like a cupcake. I was not feeling overly ambitious today and I wanted something more manageable. Katrina was quick to point out in a somewhat dubious voice: *“It’s small...”* Unlike mine, the girls’ figurines were not small, and the children were careful in carrying their mermaids—lest they fell—to the table we would occupy. Tricky navigation accomplished, I couldn’t resist asking about their selections.

Me: So why did you choose the mermaid?

Katrina in a singsong voice: Because they’re soooooooo pretty!”

Deepika: Because it would be cool to colour and paint—because the detailing is fun!

(Transcript, May 23, 2016).

The mermaids were indeed pretty and with their flowing locks and accompanying striated sea horses, they would make for an immersive painting experience. And I recognized for the girls—much to my amused chagrin—in comparison to their glamorous mermaids, my choice of a small cupcake plate was rather unadventurous. A debate ensued as to which paint brushes would best suit our needs. Deepika and Katrina were conscientious in their discussion and weren’t shy about asking me for advice. We hastily discussed the merits of the brushes—hastily because the girls were eager to begin. Thinner haired brushes would be good for detailed work while, thicker haired brushes would bode well for larger areas. A small selection of thin and thick brushes soon joined the sponges, palettes, and water at our table. As our painting got underway, our conversation followed suit and we found ourselves in (un)familiar territory. Familiar for me, in the sense that I felt the mantle of teacher ease onto my shoulders with unobtrusive ease. Unfamiliar for me, in the sense that I had to also remind myself I was a researcher as well. For

the girls, I recognized Deepika and Katrina were embarking upon a new path as they had not had the chance to explore painting in the way we were about to do so.

Katrina in an exasperated tone: Oh my gosh! My brush is too watery!

Me: You can thicken it by doing this.

Deepika in an upset voice: I made a big mistake!

Me: No, no. You can just wipe it off here using the sponge. (Transcript, May 23, 2016).

Deciding to make a bright and cheery piece, I dabbed a bit of purple paint on the surface of my plate. The wrapper of the cupcake would be comprised of narrow strips of colour. And as the girls agreed with my creative license, I looked over at them. I was pleased to see Katrina and Deepika were engrossed in their work, careful hands to hold and to paint their pieces. Their mermaids were slowly and methodically being infused with colour.

Katrina and Deepika: The Siren Call of Mermaids

It took me an instant to recognize that both Deepika and Katrina had selected variant shades of yellow for their mermaids' hair colour. I couldn't help but wonder why.

Me: Hmm. So why did you both choose blonde hair for your mermaids?

Deepika in a distracted voice: I don't know. It's just like she should [original emphasis] have blonde hair. Mermaids have blonde hair.

Katrina in agreement: Yeah!

Me: Have you ever seen a brown mermaid?

*Katrina: The Little Mermaid.*¹²²

Me: Hmm. I don't believe she was brown. Was she?

Katrina: Once she was brown.

Me, nonplussed: Oh.

Deepika: She has brown hair.

Me: Do you think a mermaid can have Indian features? Can she have brown skin or hair that's not blonde?

Katrina: She can have red hair.

Deepika: Mermaids have peachy skin.

Me, curiously: Why?

Katrina: That's the colour for mermaids.

Deepika: Yeah, their skin is light. [Pausing] I'm going to make mermaid eyes.

Me, wonderingly: So, what are mermaid eyes?

Deepika: Umm...They're light brown. (Transcript, May 23, 2016)

This conversation was disheartening for me. As an elementary teacher I had encountered such experiences with children before. Experiences, whereby children of colour seemed to follow a restrictive narrative which conferred less value on them in comparison to others and served to place them out of view. Nevertheless, I was somewhat taken aback when both Deepika and Katrina dismissed the idea that mermaids could be of different ethnicities. And I realized that it was the high degree of assurance in both girls' tone which caught me off guard. Mermaids, imaginary beings, could only possess certain physical traits. Katrina's comment that *The Little*

¹²² In this conversation, the girls brought up Disney's (1989) animated movie *The Littlest Mermaid*. The main character is Ariel, the mermaid. In this movie, Ariel is cute and pale skinned with vivid red hair and blue eyes.

Mermaid was once brown I felt was her way of mollifying me. I had misjudged my ability to keep my feelings hidden and had not been as adept as I had hoped in keeping my disquiet to myself. Similarly, I took Deepika’s suggestion that “*mermaid eyes*” are “*light brown*” (Transcript, May 23, 2016) as a concession to me. And while I was appreciative of Katrina’s and Deepika’s consideration of my feelings, I stubbornly wondered why brownness had to give sway to peachiness. Couldn’t little brown girls see their likeliness replicated in imaginary mermaids? I wasn’t blaming the girls for their beliefs, instead I was thinking about the pervasive and systemic inequalities that appeared to even have a stranglehold on worlds of make-belief. Why after all this time, was the same story of one standard of attractiveness being upheld?

Turning My Gaze Inward as a Means of Reflecting

I turned my gaze inward, reflecting on my early experiences. Not knowing what I was missing, I searched for images that were readily available to me when I was younger. What this typically meant was that I was accessing images of people that did not reflect my experiences as a South Asian person. Certainly, in my childhood, I had held such a strong hankering for a Barbie Doll¹²³ with blonde hair and blue eyes that I pestered my mother to buy me one. And even when other girls had given up on dolls, I still desired a Barbie Doll. She epitomized a westernized glamour. It was only later, that I would recognize the threat of subscribing to a singular appreciation of attractiveness. Young Claudia in Morrison’s (1970/1999) *The Bluest Eye* is unequivocal in her revulsion of such dolls and insightfully summarizes a more widely accepted understanding:

¹²³ Mattel has over several decades mass produced a doll, named Barbie. In her earliest iterations she was manufactured along strict guidelines—guidelines which held certain western female characteristics as being ideal. Reflecting current trends, Barbie now comes in different ethnicities and holds a variety of careers (see <https://barbie.mattel.com>). However, these dolls are often priced higher than other dolls making them less accessible for certain people.

Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window sign - all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. ‘Here,’ they said, ‘this is beautiful, and if you are on this day “worthy” you may have it. (pp. 18-19)

This understanding was not merely relegated to the pages of an author’s creative work. It was an image which I recognized continued to persist in our daily lives in North America. Children of colour are limited to the kinds of dolls they can access. This disappointing situation was what I had experienced when I was young and then as an aunt seeking dolls as gifts for her friends’ and family’s children, found that dolls of colour were still, very rare indeed. Though Katrina and Deepika were painting mermaids with certain traits and not discussing their specific doll preferences in this storied moment, I was concerned.¹²⁴

In this moment alongside the girls, my mind raced with the intensity of my thoughts even as I knew some people would think I making too much of a fuss over the whole situation, that I was making ‘much ado’ about nothing. These were just merely mermaids and nothing more. Nevertheless, I thought, if imaginary characters—such as these mermaids—were constrained in appearances, what did the girls’ understandings mean when considering real people? Other questions arose for me. Did their responses mean that Deepika and Katrina equated prettiness with the presence of certain physical traits and following that, did the absence of certain physical traits translate into a lack of beauty? What did beauty mean for them? And perhaps of more importance, how were Katrina and Deepika perceiving themselves within this restrictive narrative of attractiveness and beauty...of who is to be valued and more worrisomely, who is not

¹²⁴ I shared this concern as part of a presentation of my ongoing research work at the 2018 Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) held at the University of Regina.

to be valued? How did their understandings shape their self-esteem? How were their identities being shaped by this dominant storyline? Attractiveness, similar to other traits, is a socially constructed category—and when there is a hegemonic assumption about which groups of people possess these sought-after characteristics, then diversity, in its multifarious beauty is flattened.



36-Deepika's Mermaid: An Artwork in Progress



Katrina's Mermaid, an Artwork in Progress

A Hidden Curriculum within a Course of Life

In their work alongside adolescent girls, Little and Hoskins (2004) respond to the question, “How does one construct the “self?”” (p. 78). They direct attention to the limited choice afforded girls as a consequence of a media steeped in North American consumer culture.

We believe that girls do not come to us with fixed and static interpretations of themselves and their world. Social convention, in this context includes the varied visual types of media, hyper-communication modes, and bombardment of images on any available surface, be it ice on a rink or highway billboards, high school yearbooks, or airport baggage claims. The invisible social conventions then become the internal process of making an identity out of the limited choices that abound in these different forms. (pp. 78-80)

Little and Hoskin (2004) foreground shaping forces of “invisible social conventions” (p. 80) upon identity-making. Their work, in turn reminds me of the powerful and possibly, deleterious shaping forces a hidden curriculum can have on children and youth in school worlds and beyond. In this moment, I drew upon Connelly and Clandinin’s (1988) understanding of “curriculum as a course of life” where “a curriculum can become one’s life course of action” and “it can mean the paths we have followed and the paths we intend to follow” (p. 1). Already awake to the undercurrents of a hidden curriculum at work inside of schools, I began to think more deeply about the implications of a hidden curriculum at work outside of school curriculum making. How could children and youth not be lured by these forces? I began to wonder what reverberations are made when a hidden curriculum which privileges hegemonic images over a heteroglossia of storied images has shaped “the paths we have followed” and can possibly shape “the paths we

intend to follow” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 1). To better help me reflect, I turned to Rosiek and Clandinin’s (2016) discussion on curriculum and teacher development where they foreground the importance of being wakeful to the pluralities of stories students bring into the classroom. They point to the deleterious impact that a hidden curriculum can have on students’ lives. They suggest, “students need to be guided from where they are” (p. 299) and additionally,

they also need to be educated to appreciate—not erase—the different histories and experiences of others in the process of learning more general truths. Otherwise, the hidden curriculum of schooling becomes one of suppressing and erasing difference—usually the different histories and ways of knowing of those already at the receiving end of various forms of oppression and erasure. (p. 299)

“Suppressing and erasing difference” (Rosiek & Clandinin, 2016, p. 299)—these plotlines frightened me. And, it seemed to me, as I continued to reflect, a curriculum of life can also be powerfully (and negatively) shaped by a hidden curriculum of life which pays undue homage to a select set of values to the detriment of others. The differing images the girls were exposed to vis-à-vis different forums helped to shape their identity-making experiences—what they thought of themselves in relations to others, framed within hegemonic plotlines of attractiveness, intelligence, opportunity, and other qualities.

Children’s Literature and Other Literature as Embodying this Hidden Curriculum of Life

Sitting with these ideas and this growing belief in this hidden curriculum of life—where certain images are promoted to the exclusion of others reminded me of Rudine Sims Bishop’s (1990) work in relation to children’s literature. She noted nonwhite children have frequently

encountered a paucity of storied images in children's books. As a means to mitigate this inequity, she adopted a perceptive metaphor:

Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books. (p. 1)

Sims Bishop's (1990) work helped me to think about what happens when storied images steeped in nuance and complexity are missing for individuals of colour. I continue to wonder, why we can't have more inspirational books which showcase the joy and pleasure of being brown (Menon, 2014). In her important TED Talk, *The Danger of a Single Story*, Nigerian author, Adichie (2009) speaks of her girlhood experiences as an early writer. She reflected, "I wrote exactly the kinds of stories I was reading: All my characters were white and blue-eyed"; making clear the paucity of other kinds of stories which foregrounded people of colour. Adichie later comes to understand that it is due to the limited kinds of books she had been exposed to when she was young that necessitated her characters being dissimilar to her. In the same TED Talk, she explains her realization.

Because all I had read were books in which characters were foreign, I had become convinced that books by their very nature had to have foreigners in them and had to be

about things with which I could not personally identify.

It is only when Adichie is exposed to African writers, that she can imagine the characters in her stories as looking like her and whom she could “personally identify” with. Deepika and Katrina spoke of their mermaids in terms of their physicality and in doing so, linked traditional western conceptualizations of beauty to their figurines. And, this I admittedly found challenging. As Gergen (2001) points out, “To live in a story of the body that is different from another's can render an impasse of understanding” (p. 74). A mismatch in what you see all around you and what you know of yourself, can arguably lead to feelings of inadequacy and/or the overriding need to conform to particular plotlines. Another and dire possible outcome might be a rejection of one’s own self. Morrison’s (1970/1999) female character, little Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, provides us with a distressing illustration of this predicament.

Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes... Thrown, in this war, into the binding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her, she would never know her beauty. She would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people. (pp. 44-45)

Young Pecola, shows us what can happen when certain plotlines are privileged to the exclusion of others. Pecola, presented with only one kind of narrative of who can be attractive, experienced repeated anguish. This type of cognitive dissonance, this mismatch between in plotlines of who she was and who she wished to be emphasized the tensions I was feeling hearing Katrina and Deepika speak during this art activity.

Imagination as Possibility and a Means to Negotiate a Hidden Curriculum of Life

I began to contemplate the implications involved in the two young girls’ narrowing their choice with an imaginative character. I began to wonder if Katrina and Deepika could not picture

mermaids as being brown, what other identities could be narrowed for them or even, made unavailable to them if they were unable to envision themselves as holding those identities? And here, I am thinking about going beyond ideal body images. Recognizing worlds overlap and the need for world travelling (Clandinin, Huber, & Murphy, 2011; Lugones, 1987), I also questioned, what about opportunities in play, school, and in work? The girls were in Grade Four in this moment, and would most likely, continue to be in school for a long time. Sims Bishop (1990) had pointed to the enormous potential of children's literature to activate positive self-identification and to also help others to acknowledge and maybe even enter into other's worlds. But what about the school curriculum itself? Style (1988/1996) had made visible the need for the same kind of perspective taking or metaphorical donning of other's shoes in the mandated curriculum—a very public and visible curriculum. She contended:

All students deserve a curriculum which mirrors their own experience back to them, upon occasion—thus validating it in the public world of the school. But curriculum must also insist upon the fresh air of windows into the experience of others—who also need and deserve the public validation of the school curriculum. (p. 5)

Books alongside school curriculum need to invite positive identity-living, identity-making, and perspective-taking in home, community, and school worlds. Like Huber and Clandinin (2005), I understood “children as developing and living out their own shifting and multiple stories to live by, stories shaped by their knowledge and context” (p. 313). As I pondered what these scholars had illuminated for me, I understood that it was the ability to imagine and to be imagined into being, which helped to shape these considerations. As hooks (2010) powerfully suggests, “What we cannot imagine cannot come into being” (p. 53). Could imagined identities be denied to Deepika and Katrina if they couldn't actively visualize alternative plotlines into being for

themselves?

I started to wonder anew what happens when a curriculum of life, shaped by a hidden curriculum, thwarts opportunities to engage deeply and richly with imagination. The ability to imagine helps us to picture forward-looking stories, “confirming what [we] care about” and “how [we] hope to go on from here” (Lindemann Nelson, 2001, p. 79) Greene (1994) highlights the possibilities inherent in imagination and imagining.

Imagination, as is well known, is the capacity that enables us to move through the barriers of the taken-for granted and summon up alternative possibilities for living, for being in the world. It permits us to set aside (at least for a while) the stiflingly familiar and the banal. It opens us to visions of the possible rather than the predictable; it permits us, if we choose to give our imaginations free play, to look at things as if they could be otherwise. (pp. 494-495)

Drawing wisdom from Greene’s (1994) words, I felt myself contemplating if Katrina and Deepika’s imagination and processes of imagining were being put at risk. Such endangerment could dampen sensitivity to the extent that the girls could become unaware of various “barriers of the taken-for granted” and dismiss “alternative possibilities for living, for being in the world” (Greene, 1994, pp. 494-495). What could such a lack of sensitivity mean especially when, as Huber and Clandinin (2005) elucidate, in “the narrative life compositions of children”, children are “shaped by, and shaping, their contexts” (p. 314)? What happens when other plotlines are rendered less visible or even, most disturbingly, not made visible at all?

Conversely, and more hopeful, what happens when opportunities to imagine oneself differently open up? What happens when imagination goes to work on a hidden curriculum of

life. Thinking about the hopeful possibilities of being able to imagine, I drew close to South Asian philosopher Narayan (2003) who dares to act on what she imagines as possible.

The riskiness of philosophy as a career option might have been less distressing to my father if I had shown signs of growing into a daughter whose central life ambition was an arranged marriage. My father would have been able to imagine and help procure a secure life for such a daughter. But alas...I was a woman vocal about her desire for unconventional and independent life. (p. 85)

Narayan, made aware of the assumption that she would have an arranged marriage, chose to imagine a different plotline for herself. It was different from the one her father had imagined, and she was able “to look at things as if they could be otherwise” (Greene, 1994, p. 495).

Contending with a hidden curriculum of life, would not be easy. This artful moment alongside Deepika and Katrina showed me that the girls might have trouble seeing beyond certain imposed narratives. These narratives, which closed off imagination especially with respect to imaginary figures, as mermaids, could appear innocuous at first glance but when I inquired more deeply into this moment, I understood differently. I hoped for Deepika and Katrina, there would be also times where they too, could see more than what might be in their current vista. I hoped that in coming alongside them, I could help to bring other vistas into view.

A Heart-full Musing Interlude: Brown Mermaid

Later alone, as I continued to sit with these wonders, I found myself gravitating to my collection of paints and markers. I had discovered working creatively allowed me a space in which to think about this research in a multiplicity of ways and it was with pleasure that I once



37-Defiance

more pulled out my book of heart-full musings. Thinking about mermaids, especially the existence of brown ones, my paint brush dipped into blues and greens gliding over textured paper to form the overlapping vestiges of waves of an ocean. Soon a figure appeared, curling herself about her fishy friends. Rendered visible, this brown mermaid silently proclaimed, “I am here to stay.” Her very presence, serving as a rupture, to a dominant narrative that situated even imaginary creatures such as mermaids off-limits to certain peoples.

Deepika and Katrina: Mermaids as Gifts...Mermaids as Symbols of Hope

The conversation continued to ebb and flow between us even as paint colours were carefully chosen and less carefully discarded. The girls paused to wave at passersbys who stopped to look through the window to sneak a peek at their work. They were having a good time and enjoying the positive attention they were garnering.

Katrina: I'm just painting this carefully. I wish we could just pause time to paint. I love to paint.

Me: Yes, that would be wonderful!

Katrina: I can feel the paint in there! I'm just going to stick this in here. I need a really fine brush. [Sound of paint bottle being pounded on.]

Deepika: I'm going to use your colour here.

Me: Sure, go for it!

Deepika: Thanks! (Transcript, May 23, 2016)

Deepika and Katrina's joy in this moment had me considering yet again what happens when we have the privilege and the ability to invite such artful experiences into our lives. While the girls

continued to paint, they spoke aloud their feelings about their mermaids. Katrina and Deepika articulated what their mermaids meant to them.

Katrina: She looks so special. She could be a gift!

Me: It's nice to give yourself a gift!

Deepika: I put 'hope' on her blue tail.

Me: That's beautiful! Why did you pick 'hope'? It's a lovely choice!

Deepika: Because she looks like a wishing mermaid!

Me: I love it! (Transcript, May 23, 2016)

I could not have asked for a better way to conclude our little outing. Hearing about Katrina's joy in painting and her wish to keep painting, highlighted the specialness of this time. Katrina's comment that she wanted to pause time so that she might continue to paint was a compelling image which lingered with me long after she said the words. When Katrina equated her mermaid with a gift, I could see for her that meant something very special and I was glad for that meant she was pleased with her work. It meant that she was taking pride in her creation. Deepika's artistic decision to paint *hope* on her mermaid's tail indicated pleasure in her artwork. It also seemed to show her state of mind was one which was imbued with positivity. Despite my misgivings about the girls' articulation of a single story (Adichie, 2009) of a mermaid, they were clearly appreciating their artful experience. And, I understood while it was important to think about the different spaces of tension and dis/ease associated with the monolithic storying of mermaids, I also had to be careful to attend to the beauty that was happening in this artful moment. Recognizing the girls' happiness in this moment was significant as well.



Katrina's Glazed Mermaid

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Deepika's Glazed Mermaid

Pentimento as a Means of a (Re)Composing of Curriculum Making?

Coming back to the idea of pentimento, which I mentioned in my narrative beginnings, I began to wonder about pentimento as a metaphor of (re)composing curriculum making in this moment. Pentimento occurs when an artist has a change of heart or has “repented” and painted over an image, and the markings of the original image are still discerned beneath the new work. Katrina and Deepika had their own ideas and understandings. Though young, the girls’ knowing was no less powerful than an adult’s understandings (Clandinin et al., 2016), and I wondered how their understandings (these original images) could be built upon or expanded to include other ideas beyond the “danger of a single story” (Adichie, 2009). Thinking about Deepika and Katrina in this moment, I wondered what would happen if this characterization of otherness—which the girls seemed to ascribe to themselves—could be altered. Would there ever be a time

where the qualities of otherness could be considered as something more than otherness? That is, could these qualities of otherness, physical or otherwise, ever be deemed as acceptable or even desirable? I wonder what would have happened in that moment for both Katrina and Deepika if other ways in which to see mermaids, had been made available for them. If free from the constraints placed on them, could they have possibly seen their likeness in the artforms of the mermaids they painted? Could they have imagined other possibilities? In this artful curriculum-making moment, the girls were caught by a pervasive western narrative of attractiveness which I believe could constrain their imagination of the different opportunities available to them in other kinds of curriculum-making moments. It seemed to me that these considerations were made visible in large part because the girls and I were able to engage in artmaking and converse within an intimate space outside of school. School, with its set times and set curriculum outcomes, can make it more difficult to move beyond fixed relationships. Further, teachers have a lot to contend with and with a continuous increased intensification¹²⁵ of their workloads (Apple, 1986), they are challenged in shaping relationships that can go beyond scripted plotlines of student and teachers' lives¹²⁶ that are often told (Schaefer, Downey, and Clandinin, 2014). The types and quality of books that are typically available to students also determines which images and stories of experience students have access to and perhaps, more significantly, which they do not.

¹²⁵Apple (1986) suggests with the increased professionalism of teaching, there has been an increased intensification of teaching workload. According to Apple,

[Intensification] has many symptoms, from the trivial to the more complex—ranging from being allowed no time at all even to go to the bathroom, have a cup of coffee or relax, to having a total absence of time to keep up with one's field. We can see intensification most visibly in mental labor in the chronic sense of work overload that has escalated over time. (p. 189)

¹²⁶Schaefer, Downey, & Clandinin (2014) in their work on early teacher attrition, noted,

In the participants' stories of their experiences, they described their teaching lives as "hard." Certainly the long hours, physical, social, and emotional demands made teaching hard, but we began to see that stories shaped around these plotlines, stories that often reverberate in school hallways and early career attrition literature, can also act as a kind of cover story, an easy and acceptable alibi. The less acceptable stories, the ones that reside between teacher and person composing lives on two knowledge landscapes, were harder to tell. The participants told of struggling to find ways to compose and recompose their whole lives, ones that were lived on and across personal and professional knowledge landscapes. (pp. 23-24)

Children's literature, which is often positioned as the canon of what can be taught, alongside student textbooks, teacher resources which are most *easily* available to a teacher, can influence what is used by teachers and students. This deference to the books and resources which are readily available and have been used, doesn't require much thinking. However, if one of our hopes is to try and shape inclusive classrooms which support and respect a diversity of voices, then wakefulness (Greene, 1995/2000) is a necessity.

I ruminated in optimism, what if the conversation the girls and I were having in this curriculum-moment, could be a beginning of contouring a pentimento plotline for the girls...for myself... My imagination was caught by the brilliant hues of this possibility. What would happen if we moved to other artforms? Would different and more healthy narratives be shaped and be built upon other conceivably, more damaging ones? The girls might be heeding this particular siren's call in this moment, but surely other songs could make their way into their hearts. I was hopeful that we would find out together. There would be other artistic opportunities and there would be more conversations.

Sharing and Inquiring into Memory Book Spaces

In our meet ups inside and outside of school, Katrina and Deepika continued to add (and take away¹²⁷) bits and pieces of writing, art, photos, and mementos to their memory books. I was learning more fully that their books were truly reflective of their storied experiences. What they chose to include and what they chose to remove reminded me that Deepika and Katrina

¹²⁷ When I first thought of the idea of a memory book in relation to the girls, it had not occurred to me that Deepika and Katrina might remove items from their books. Throughout the unfolding of this narrative inquiry, the girls would share their books with each other and me (individually and together) and I noticed storied moments that had been represented in multifarious ways on their pages would appear, disappear, and sometimes reappear in different forms. The pages of the memory book became a space in which Katrina and Deepika could (re)imagine their identities and decide for themselves which moments could be shared. This pleased and excited me. Far too often, children are not afforded opportunities to assume control over their individual stories or the power to hold them. In essence, their lived agency is overlooked and/or negated (Clandinin et al., 2016; Huber et al., 2018).

understood best what was of most importance to them in any given time. The girls were exploring different multiplicities of their selves and their memory books were representative of this exploration.

Katrina's Negotiation with Meanness: "This one's really, really, really true!"

Seated beside Katrina at my dining table, I watched uncomfortably as she peeled off a speech bubble sticker and stuck it by the mouth of the boy's photo she had just pasted into her memory book. What would she write? I wondered with a sense of trepidation. The title of the page: *"The Most Meanest People Ever!"* (Katrina's Memory Book, July 29, 2016) was as arresting as it been several weeks ago when she had first shown me the titled page. Now as I watched her scribble the phrase, *"I am mean!"* in the speech bubble, I knew there was cause for concern. This was a boy she had mentioned to me several times over different conversations. Sometimes, he had been named as a friend and then later as someone who was *"mean"*. Katrina continued to write and as I watched with growing worry, she added the descriptors, *"Mean! Blehh!"* and in gold marker, a message of hurt, *"Sorry! Not sorry!"* (Katrina's Memory Book, July 29, 2016). Misreading my expression for disbelief, Katrina voiced aloud her thoughts, *"This one's really, really, really true!"* (Transcript, July 29, 2016). I understood she meant that Vance¹²⁸ was no longer a friend but someone to not be trusted. Then, I felt a certain knowing brush through my mind. The memory book space was allowing Katerina a platform for her to be honest. So, while it might be okay for me to be concerned about her relationship with this boy, I had the responsibility to ensure she did not feel censored.

During a video recorded interview, Gilligan (2012) spoke about children's capacity

¹²⁸ Vance is a pseudonym.

for a unique kind of capacity for honesty. Adults, she had suggested, lost this quality of honesty when they grew up and learned that such honesty was not considered appropriate behaviour when one left childhood behind. Gilligan (2012) proposed:

Children have a sense of emotional honesty, which is why some people are scared of babies. Because they can read emotions. You can smile at a baby, but if the baby feels you're not really in connection, the baby will start screaming. Or children will shy away from people where they read—the person may be presenting as if they are very friendly and everything else, but the child picks up there's anger, or whatever.

Gilligan chose to define this quality as a type of emotional honesty. And it was the following insight which struck a reverberating chord within me: “So as humans, we have a capacity for that kind of emotional honesty and emotional reading of the human world. And then we learn to suppress that and cover it”. I would do my best to not deprive Katrina of her freedom to express herself in the ways she wished to do so. Katrina’s emotional honesty and emotional reading of her world of friends was exactly that—her’s—and I needed to respect how she wished to disclose her feelings. I would honour Katrina’s stories by being the listener she wanted me to be in this moment.

It would be much later, nearing the end of January of 2017, when I would be sitting with Katrina’s mom that I would learn more details as to why there was such pain and hurt evidenced by Katrina. As Barb and I sat watching Katrina skate with her fellow peers from bleachers above the community ice rink, Barb shared her worries for Katrina (Voice Notes, January 29, 2017). She was concerned that Katrina was becoming more and more depressed. There had been some instances of bullying from a neighbourhood boy, one whose parents Barb and her husband, Ron,

knew quite well socially. The rift had continued to widen when Barb reaching out to the boy's mom, her friend at the time, who she learned was not going to do anything to help remedy the situation. Discovering that her friend would not admit her son was capable of any wrongdoing, Barb shared that the families were no longer friends.

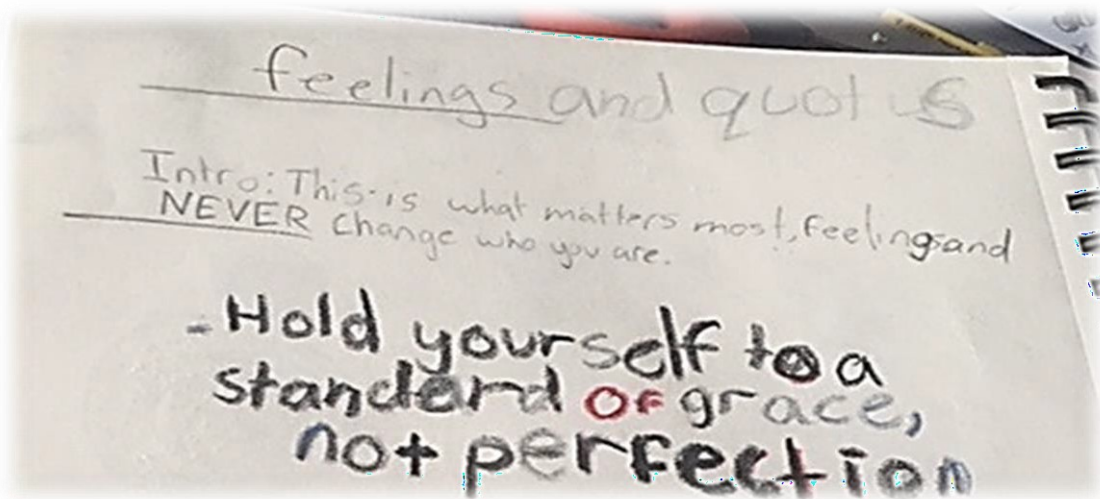
However, in this moment at my dining room table, I wasn't privy to this knowledge. I listened carefully as Katrina spoke. Her fingers curled over the page. Katrina revealed:

"He's not really a friend. One time I told him I recently got a PS3¹²⁹ and he was like, "So? I don't care." I'm just like, "But I just wondered if you wanna come over." And he's like, "Well, I don't care." I'm like, "That's mean!" (Transcript, July 29, 2016).

I suspected there was more to this incident. Katrina's added point, *"But he is so mean! He's so mean!"* (Transcript, July 29, 2016) indicated as much. It was clear to me that Katrina was upset and the exchange she shared signified that there was much that was not being said. I didn't say anything and continued to let her take the lead in our conversation. In pencil, suggestive of a tentativeness, Katrina had started a list of others who were no longer her friends. The heading *"Name others:"* had only one name below—that of her former best friend, Rachel¹³⁰ followed by faint dashes beneath which indicated the possibility of other names to be added. Seeing where my gaze had landed, Katrina was quick to respond, *"Rachel. It's different now"* (Transcript, July 29, 2016). Deciding, she had said enough on the topic, Katrina next pointed to a quote she had copied into her memory book. I asked her about the meaning in the words she had written,

¹²⁹ Sony's PlayStation 3 (or PS3) is a home video game console.

¹³⁰ Rachel is a pseudonym.



39-Quote Copied into Katrina's Memory Book

but in this moment, Katrina indicated a reticence that I was wary of disturbing. I understood Katrina's silence around her carefully chosen quote to be a signal that this was a story she wished to keep close and private. Nevertheless, reading the words in the quote, I could not help but ponder if these were words which guided Katrina in her connections with her peers. With the stories Katrina had shared (and the ones she had been quiet about), I understood Katrina was grappling with the intricacies of differing relationships—who she was in her peers' stories of her and who they were in her stories of them. With a decided flip of the page, Katrina interrupted my musings and she went onto share a new section entitled "BFFs".¹³¹

Katrina: Thinking about Friendships within Memory Book Spaces

Our talk meandered as we continued to look over Katrina's pages at my dining table. As she chattered, it was clear to me that Katrina was proud of the pictures she had taken with the disposable camera. I marveled silently at how the internal cameras of our minds recorded our

¹³¹ BFFs is an acronym for: Best Friends for Forever.

thoughts and memories imperfectly whereas an actual photograph could act as a bridge for those memories and thoughts, inviting conversation and (re)collection. Patting gently first, and not achieving the desired result, Katrina then pounded the curling edge of a recalcitrant puffy sticker on her BFF spread. Satisfied, Katrina then reflected about a time when she had slept over at her former best friend's house.

Me: You went on a sleepover? That's pretty cool.

Katrina: Yeah, my mom was like, "I missed you being with me."

Me: I can see that. That was very nice of your mom to let you go.

Katrina: Yeah.

Me: Whose house did you go to?

Katrina, slowly: Rachel. She's the only one who's a student who lives close to me.

Me: How did it feel? Was it scary or was it okay?

Katrina, happily recalling: It was fun. Last time, we made a fort in the house, in the bonus room where the TV was upstairs. After we made the fort, we slept in there.

Me: Pretty cool! Are Rachel's parents, friends with your parents?"

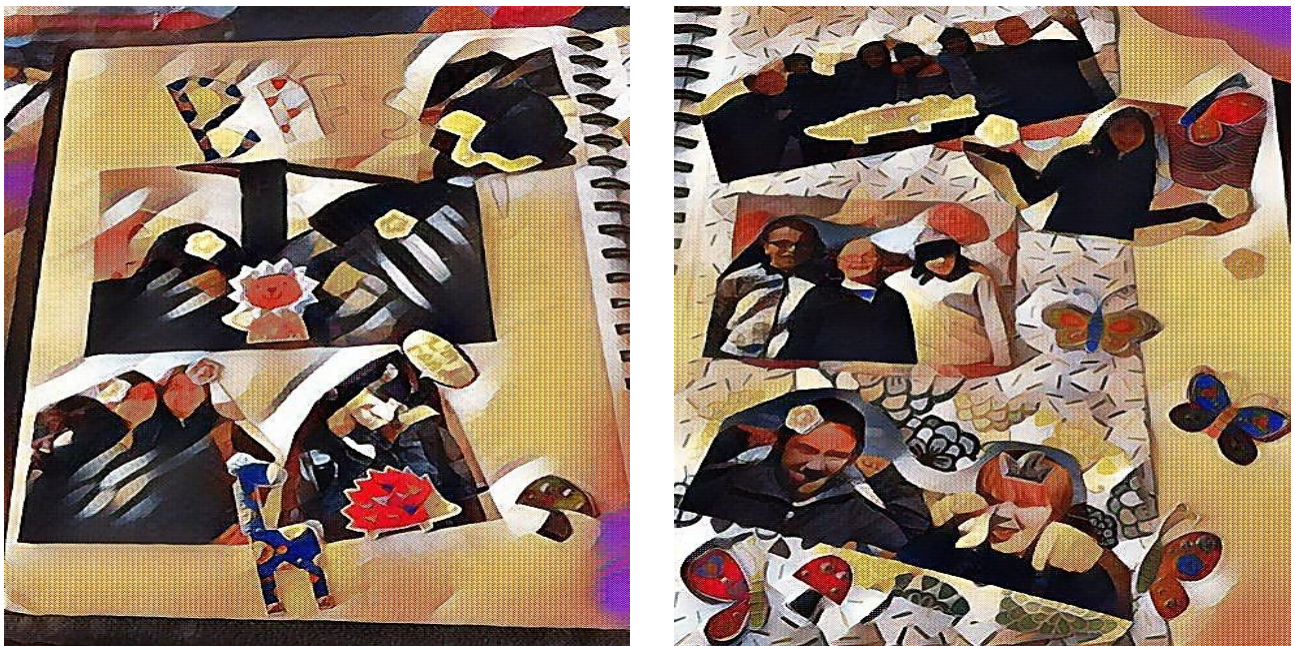
Katrina: Mm, yeah, but they used to have contact with each other, but they don't talk anymore like that. So, my mom deleted the contact. She's in BC.

Me: Rachel's not coming back?

Katrina, quietly: It's been long. It's been three weeks already since she's been gone. (Transcript, July 29, 2016).

As I listened quietly, I thought about the rift between the two girls. In Katrina's earlier stories

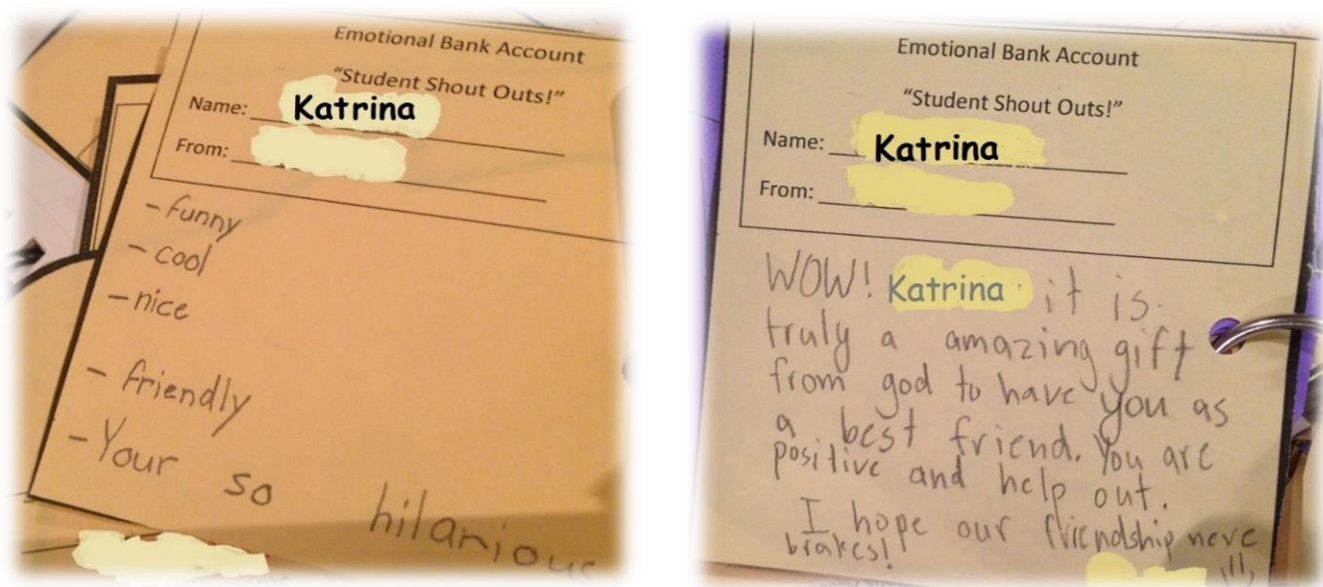
she had shared with me, I knew she had felt Rachel was slowly distancing herself from her. I fervently hoped there would be an opportunity for the girls to come back together, and failing that, stronger more enduring friendships for both of them in their near future. It was with this idea of possibility teasing my thoughts I noted Katrina had included a shot of herself with one of her classmates, and while the smiles of both girls were gleeful, Katrina's seemed especially pleasure filled. My eyes drifted over the various snapshots of the beaming children that



40-Katrina's "BFF's" Spread in her Memory Book (July 29, 2016)

Katrina had captured so winsomely with her lens. I was aware that Deepika and Katrina had experienced moments of tension and togetherness with one another. These (un)comfortable moments were part of growing up. Yet, it did my heart good to see Deepika had been included as well in this specially organized spread. Friendships were complex and the girls were reminding me that this was not an adult only concern.

Friends continued to be a storied thread that intertwined into Katrina's stories of school in the following academic year. In a later conversation, Katrina spoke of an activity which her Grade Five teacher had set up, whereby students could provide positive comments to their classmates. Katrina explained it to Deepika and myself: "*We have our Emotional Bank Account every week uh where our teacher randomly picks a student and everybody gets to write something nice about them. And then our teacher makes them into a [binder] ring*" (Recording, November 20, 2016). Katrina was obviously proud of sharing her peers' comments with me as she instructed, "*You can take your time with them*" (Recording, November 20, 2016) and held



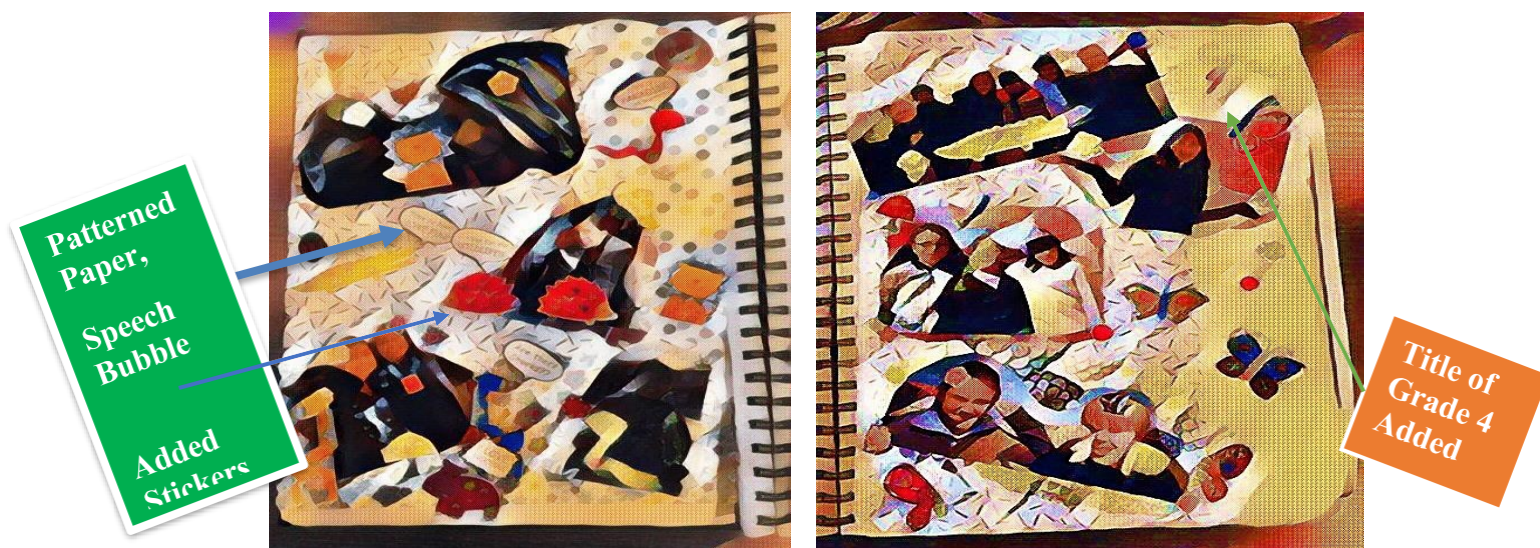
41-Emotional Bank Entries Included in Katrina's Memory Book

her pages up for me to take pictures of them. Katrina's friendships inside her Grade Five classroom were clearly important to her. She had chosen to include all 24 student comments in her memory book which ranged in detail and written form.¹³² These entries, written by students in Katrina's Grade Five classroom community had made their way into Katrina's memory book.

¹³² In Grade Five, Katrina and Deepika were in separate classroom communities.

I could see how this valuable school curriculum making was helping Katrina to compose a storyline of herself as a good friend and good person across and within her multiple worlds.

In May of 2017, as Katrina shared her memory book with me again, I saw that she had embellished upon her BFF spread. Speech bubble stickers commenting humorously about life peppered a newly scrapbooked page. Glitter glue, providing a tactile, rainbow effect, had been traced over hair and used to outline features of people. On the top right-hand corner of the second page, Katrina had added the title, “*Grade 4!*” Below are two digitally contoured pictures of Katrina’s reworked BFF spread of her friends that she had first created in Grade Four year. In Grade Five, Katrina looked fondly back on her younger self’s experiences with some peers.

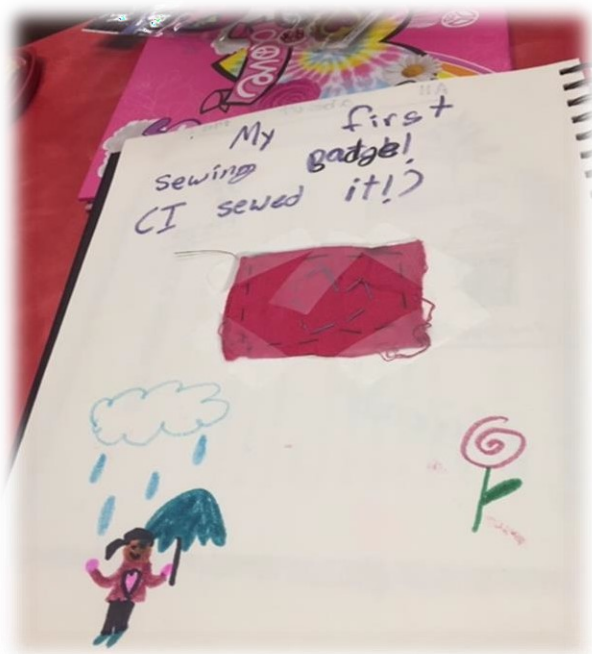


42-Katrina’s BFF’s Spread in her Memory Book (May 7, 2017)

It was clear to me that Katrina was using the pictures as memory markers for an important year in her life. I wondered what the images she had carefully selected to include in her book were giving and taking away for her. What stories was she (re)composing as she continued to work on her book? The movement from one grade into another alongside the

pictures she had selected for her memory book appeared to have given her a rear window in which she could look back and reflect upon her experiences with a kinder gaze. The addition of a title and adornments also seemed to give credence to this view. Friendships change over time. Some of our friends stay with us while others do not. I wondered how Katrina might look back on these pictures of her childhood. What would be the stories that would be brought forth for Katrina from these pictures as she continued to shape her identity in relation with others?

Deepika: Thinking about Grandma and Another Home of the Heart



Deepika's Heart Badge

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Deepika's Indian Landscape

It was a fairly regular occurrence for the girls and I to read different picture books together. I loved the idea of exploring children's literature with Katrina and Deepika. As Louise Rosenblatt (1938/1995) elucidated the transactional nature between reader and literature, "A novel or a poem or a play remains merely inkspots on paper until a reader transforms them into a

set of meaningful symbols” (p. 24). Each of the girls as readers, would bring their unique experiences to the different texts (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995; 1978). They each would have individual perspectives and the reading of children’s literature I hoped could help shape spaces for conversation.¹³³ Carefully selected offerings I hoped would help us to inquire into (and perhaps even represent in creative ways) our experiential stories, as well as, illuminate positive and affirmational stories of female South Asians (Menon, 2014). A little while ago we had finished reading Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s (2013) picture book, *Grandma and the Great Gourd*. Illustrated with beautifully vivid collage-like images by Susy Pilgrim Waters (2013), this was a story about a grandmother who lived in an Indian village and manages to outsmart some very tricky animals from eating her as she travels through a jungle on her way to her daughter’s home. Katrina had approved of the grandmother’s cleverness, exclaiming, “*It’s amazing how she fooled the animals! They couldn’t catch her!*” (Transcript, May 12, 2016). Deepika had been more subdued in her response, quietly saying, “*I miss my grandma*” (Transcript, May 12, 2016). The vibrantly illustrated book was flipped open to an early page in the story and my gaze landed on the passage that Deepika was silently re-reading:

One day, Grandma received a letter from her daughter, who lived on the other side of the jungle. “Please come and visit me,” said the letter. “I haven’t seen you in so long. I miss you.” Grandma missed her daughter, too, and decided to visit her. (Divakaruni, 2013, p. 4)

Re-reading the passage, I saw more clearly how the story of this grandmother might recall for

¹³³ Engaging in narrative inquiry, Murray Orr (2005) hosted a book club during certain lunch hours with young children at the elementary school which was the site for her doctoral research.

Deepika her memories of her time in India. When she had been quite young, Deepika had lived with her grandparents in their household while her parents had lived elsewhere due to their work. During this time, Deepika had being raised by the older couple in their home and when speaking about her grandmother, I strongly sensed that Deepika had viewed her as another mother. Thinking about the possible reverberations of this children's book for Deepika, I had asked, "Do you write to your grandma," (Research Notes, May 12, 2016) and Deepika had responded that she and her mom talked with her often on the popular cellphone platform *WhatsApp* using the camera function to see each other. Even now, I knew, she was especially close to her mother's mother who had taken great care of her. The importance of this bond was made clear in her memory book.

When Deepika shared what she had recently included in her memory book, I initially did not understand what I was seeing. It took me a moment of re-adjusting my gaze and upon looking closer, I saw that Deepika had cut out a scrap of silky material and handstitched a border around the small rectangle. Within this rectangle, Deepika had stitched a tiny heart. She had then affixed this crafted patch, what she had named as "*My first sewing Badge*" (Deepika's Memory Book, May 12, 2016) with tape onto a page of her memory book. "Oh!" I exclaimed, "This feels so soft! Is it material from a saree blouse?" (Transcript, May 12, 2016). Deepika shook her head, replying "*No, it's just the saree material. Because I was so sad about leaving my grandmother in India and I took one of her sarees with me. Now she lets me use it.*" (Transcript, May 12, 2016). As additional details, Deepika had drawn a picture of herself under an umbrella smiling under a rainy cloud. On the other corner of her page, Deepika had drawn a posy. The positive aspects of these small illustrations appeared to narrate Deepika's connecting stories of living in Canada even as her lovingly stitched heart reminded her of her beloved grandmother.

Deepika let us know that she had been experimenting painting with watercolours. She pointed out a landscape she had depicted of mountains and greenery. Commenting on the bright use of colour and the juxtaposition of mountains and water, I observed it was a lovely piece. Deepika, in turn, told Katrina and me that the painting reminded her of some of the places she had visited in India when she had lived there. When gently pressed for what these places were, Deepika smiled mysteriously at us and wouldn't say anymore.

Deepika: (Re)Connecting to Stories of Grandma Through Painting

Sitting together in my living room, Katrina and I peered eagerly as Deepika shared from her memory book. “*This is a family painting!*” (Recording, November 6, 2016). Glued to a new page in her memory book was a painting of several members of Deepika’s family. “This looks



44-Deepika's Painting of her Family

awesome! But what happened to your brother? His head is floating, but where's the rest of his poor body?" (Recording, November 6, 2016). My exaggerated expression of shock had the girls

giggling as intended. *“His head is there...”* Katrina added supportively in the midst of peals of laughter (Recording, November 6, 2016). *“He’s kind of floating. I still have to finish him.”* (Recording, November 6, 2016). *“And you? Are you wearing a cloak of invisibility?”* I had prompted, deliberately referencing J. K. Rowling’s famous Harry Potter book series (Recording, November 6, 2016). *“No! And me too,”* Deepika agreed, giggling (Recording, November 6, 2016).

As we continued to look at Deepika’s latest addition of artwork, Deepika related a story of being with her grandmother.¹³⁴ At the time the whole family had been living in Hyderabad but her parents had to leave for work. She stayed with her grandparents.

*When I was in Grade One and in India you get to join Kindergarten even if you’re four. You have to be able to talk. I started talking at two, so of course I could talk very well when I was four. So, they [Deepika’s parents, Vam and Kade] came back usually every month. My grandma would make me idli. It was so good.*¹³⁵ (Recording, November 6, 2016).

In another conversation later that month, Deepika would impart fondly to me, *“I really, really like my grandma a lot”* (Recording, November 20, 2016). In this conversation, Deepika, resumed speaking, noting that with respect to her painting, *“I think my grandpa looks the best!”* (Recording, November 6, 2016). The following is a fragment of our conversation as the three of us continued to inquire into Deepika’s watercolour painting of her family members.

Katrina, admiringly: Your grandma looks good in her saree.

Deepika, shyly: It was so hard to do. I never drew a saree before.

¹³⁴ Deepika had lived with her grandparents until she was five years old.

¹³⁵ *Idli* is a popular South Indian dish made of rice and lentils that is often served at breakfast time.

Me: You did a great job!

Katrina: That's cool! (Recording, November 6, 2016).

Deepika had shared stories of her grandmother and her life in India over the course of different conversations¹³⁶ with me. This blended palette of experiences had made their way into Deepika's memory book and ushered to the foreground the love shared between Deepika and her maternal grandparents, especially, her grandmother and also revealed the continued love she held for her other home. Thinking with these stories, I wondered what spaces were made available to Deepika in her worlds of school to share this type of familial curriculum making. I recognized that schools could (un)intentionally uphold prescriptive storylines of families.¹³⁷ As Tammy Turner-Vorbec (2008) commenting on the "highly impactful, null and hidden curricula of family in schools" (p. 176), observes:

It may be somewhat surprising to many of us involved in schooling that there are multiple forms of school curriculum that commonly address several dimensions of family. Among such dimensions are the structure, psychological soundness, ethnicity, and morality of various forms of family. (p. 176)

Turner-Vorbec's (2008) consideration in turn, drew me close to Clandinin et al. (2006) who

¹³⁶ I understood school worlds can sometimes dishonour children's knowing, disavowing their power. For instance, Miller Marsh (2008) shares an experience where schools did not conceive of her children as "capable, knowledgeable, and accepted" (p. 103). I tried to co-create spaces alongside the girls where felt empowered.

¹³⁷ Narratively inquiring into the experiences of "eight urban Indigenous families" as they readied their children for kindergarten and as they participated in kindergarten" illuminated for us that each

family and their life situations are unique; families wish for mutual respect and collaboration between school and family; respect is significant; families are invested in their children doing well in schools; siblings shape stories of school readiness; and intergenerational stories and places shape readiness (Huber et al., 2018, p. 46).

through their work with children, families, and schools, make clear the distinction between *family stories* and *stories of families*. Family stories are the stories family members live and tell about themselves, they are stories “handed down across generations about family members and family events” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 112). School oftentimes can be a place where family stories are silenced and/or unwelcomed if there is no effort being made to go against the grain or to put it differently, to agitate commonly held assumptions. Huber et al. (2010) explicate

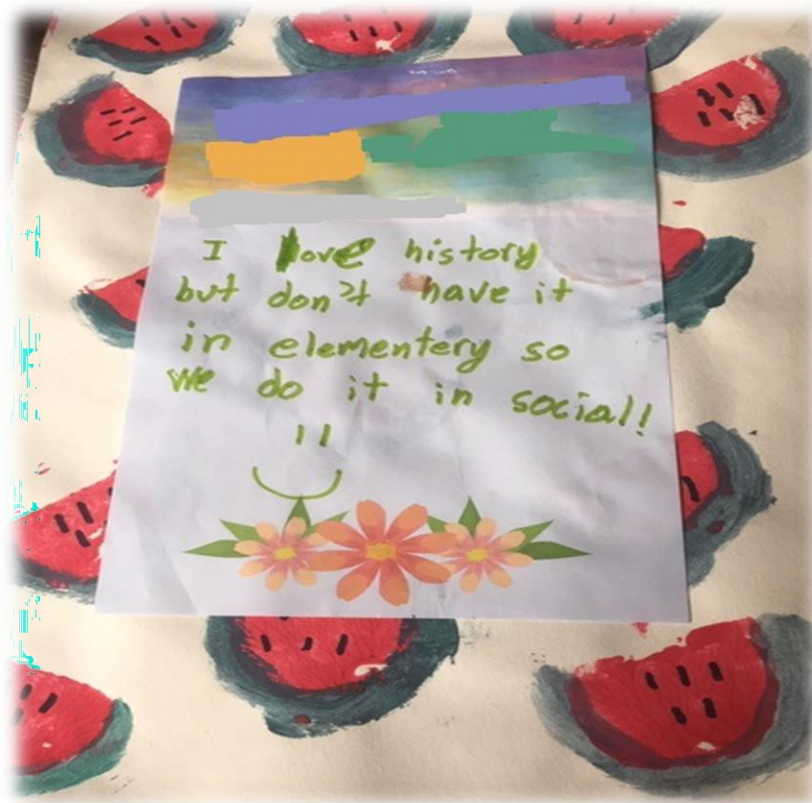
stories of families [original emphasis] are composed around dominant cultural, institutional, and social narratives, they are stories often experienced or told to individuals or families when they are seen by members outside of the family to be living in ways that conflict with dominant narratives (p. 80).

Huber et al. (2010) provide the example of the pervasive Western master narrative that a family is composed of a mother, father, and their children. Thinking about Deepika and her family, I wondered about how Deepika’s knowing of her family, which included her maternal grandmother who she viewed also as another mother, bumped up against this master narrative of family. I wondered whether Deepika had opportunities to share stories of her grandmother with her friends at school...within her community.

Katrina and Deepika: Inquiring into School Subject Matter and ‘Good Student’ Imagery

Deepika had added a few additional pages to her memory book. She had decorated one page of her scrapbook with watermelon prints. Deepika had related in previous conversations that she had been exploring with different applications of paint through watching various YouTube videos online. Both Katrina and I loved the cheerful pattern depicted in Deepika’s memory book page. I was pleased that Deepika had continued with her painting adventures.

Admiringly, I asked, “What did you use? A potato?” and a beaming Deepika happily confirmed, “*I used a potato wedge*” (Recording, November 6, 2016). The girls and I had talked many times about school subject matter and having been regularly helping out in their Grade Four classroom, I had seen firsthand Deepika and Katrina’s enjoyment with different learning experiences. While I had visited Katrina and Deepika in Grade Five, I had not been a volunteer in their classroom community. I was curious about their preferences this year. Deepika’s appreciation for historical events had remained one of her favourite subjects. Deepika had artistically paired juicy



45-Deepika’s Visual Metaphor

watermelon—which she confessed she loved to eat—alongside an expression of one of her most enjoyable subjects. This visual metaphor in turn reminded me of an earlier time when Deepika had pointed out to me her rendition of the province she lived in, rendered in colourful playdough.

She and her classmates had completed that project as part of their learning in Grade 4 Social Studies.

It would be in a later conversation in May 2016 of their Grade Five year that both Katrina and Deepika would share, through their memory books, their ideas of the different subjects they were studying in class. Deepika noted that, Math was one subject which worried her. In the conversation fragment below, Deepika and Katrina speak about their tensions and around school subject matter. In the process, they revealed a sense that a hidden curriculum of competition between classroom communities was at work.

Katrina with a sigh: We are doing multiplication in math. Double digits.

Deepika, hurriedly speaking: Each class goes at their own pace. Our class is not that behind.

Katrina, proudly revealing: In Social, I got 19 out of 20 for literally staring at a piece of paper!

Me: What do you mean?

Deepika, speaking simultaneously: What!

Katrina, excitedly sharing I literally stared at a piece of paper. Study already! I was like study! Study! (Transcript, May 12, 2016)

Katrina conveyed to Deepika and me that she had memorized information for a test a night before the unit exam on the Appalachian Region. I learned for Katrina, to study often meant to memorize different facts. Deepika too, was familiar with this mode of studying and nodded in response. Deepika, whose class was now embarking on a different course of study, shared Katrina's feelings about the Social Studies unit test, announcing "*That was easy! I didn't even have to study!*" (Transcript, May 12, 2016).

As I pondered this ubiquitous understanding of studying for tests, I wondered about the girls' thinking around the qualities that made up a poor student or a good student. What were the images they held in their minds when they thought along those unfortunately, still pervasive dualistic plotlines? How did they perceive themselves in the dim light of these narratives? It seemed like a natural extension of our discussion to ask them their thoughts on this matter.

Deepika sharing quickly: A person who doesn't listen in class or who doodles in class.

Katrina, assertively: Um I doodle. Everything is a review of last year so far. Like place value. A good student is a person who listens in class and takes notes.

Deepika, worriedly: Really?

Me to both girls: Are you good students?

Deepika: Yeah. During my student conferences, my teacher was like, "Thank you for putting Deepika in my class." I think that's a good indication. I listen and my teacher appreciates me.

Katrina: Our teacher said I have unique talents. He said I could write a story well using paragraphs. If I hear something interesting, I stop doodling. If it's important as well. Like, I can tell if he is giving us different strategies or helping us with homework.

Me: Sounds like you both are wonderful students, but in different ways, which is awesome! (Transcript, May 12, 2016).

The girls made visible their tensions with the images they held of good and not-so good students. Different ways of being in their class seemed to shape their understandings of themselves as good students. Listening to the girls speak, I learned that Deepika placed a fair amount of value in how her teacher spoke of her. Deepika's teacher had complimented Deepika during a student conference and combined with Deepika's belief that she listened well in class, Deepika surmised she was a good student in Grade Five. In response to Deepika's claim that

poor students doodle in class, Katrina pointed out that she listened even as she doodled and when necessary, stopped doodling to attend even more closely to her teacher. Katrina too, drew upon her teacher's words of praise about her writing skills as a way of showing that she like Deepika was a good student. In this moment, I recognized Katrina and Deepika were very much like other students, needing the positive affirmation of teachers to help shape their understandings of themselves in their school worlds. At the same time, I also understood that Deepika and Katrina were caught up in a dominant story of school whereby studying was comprised of memorization and recitation of facts and figures. This redirected my thinking. How could schools move beyond being institutions where children found themselves contending with singular plotlines of success? Clandinin et al. (2012) were part of a group of researchers who narratively inquired into the experiences of youth who left school before graduating. They spoke about the difficulty youth experienced when confronted with challenging plotlines.

The youths' stories spoke of, and to, contradictions between cultural narratives, familial narratives, and stories of school. Caught sometimes in these contradictions, youth were humiliated or embarrassed in front of other students and teachers. Within the institutional landscape, composing an identity seemed to be more challenging than passively accepting one. We understood in deeper ways that there were stories that lived in schools about individuals who were seen only within those institutional, cultural, and social narratives. We understood how difficult it was for the youth to negotiate stories to live by outside the plotlines of those institutional, cultural, and social narratives. (p. 15)

Similar to the experiences the early school leavers Clandinin et al. (2012) foreground, Katrina and Deepika's negotiations with the different plotlines they had to contend were also complex. In their navigations at school, I could see they too, were challenged in composing their identities,

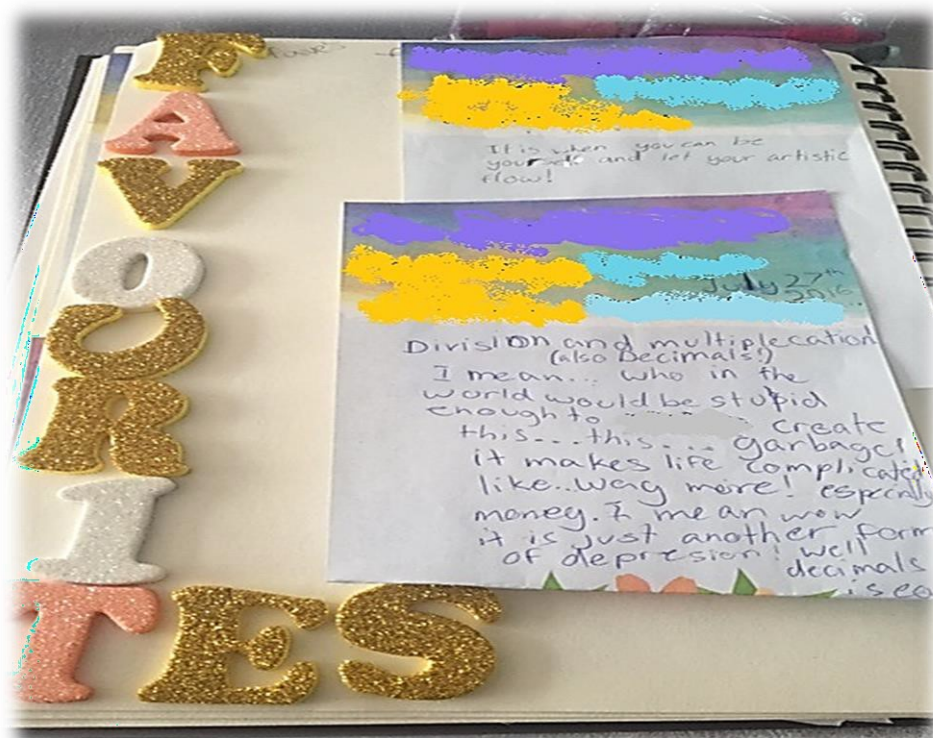
especially as good students. Being a good student involved storylines which depicted a certain set of skills as valuable over others. I knew both Deepika and Katrina to be high achieving students and kind-hearted people. Yet, I recognized that the two young girls' thinking around notions of good students and poor students, very much shaped by a dominant narrative of quantifying skills, at times, overweighed other considerations of themselves. I realized Katrina and Deepika too, found it challenging to see that there existed other qualities within themselves and each other that did not need to be narrowly defined by measurable skill sets.

However, I wondered how could Deepika and Katrina be able to shift beyond such confining plotlines of success when schools were seen as the *very* vehicles for promulgating those prescriptive storylines of good and poor students. Though Eisner (1999) is not explicitly talking about such plotlines, I found his discussion on standardized testing in American schools to be helpful in my understanding of what needs to be changed if girls such as Katrina and Deepika are to be fully engage in possibility. Eisner (1999) explained his position.

From my perspective, what we need is a change in the public's conception of the mission of the schools. Of course, bringing about such a change is no small task. Yet a shift needs to be made from a conception of schooling as a horse race or a kind of educational Olympics to a conception of schools as places that foster students' distinctive talents. The good school, as I have suggested, does not diminish individual differences; it increases them. It raises the mean and increases the variance. (p. 4)

Differences, as Eisner (1999) indicated, were not qualities to erase but rather qualities that needed to be encouraged. My response to the girls' discussion, "Sounds like you both are wonderful students, but in different ways, which is awesome!" (Transcript, May 12, 2016) could

only be taken as a beginning point in trying to blur imposed plotlines. I could only hope that as we continued to talk and share stories, Deepika and Katrina would be able to see themselves and each other through a perpetual cycling of myriad images—a kaleidoscope of moving pieces coming together and apart, shaping and forming with every turn.



46-Katrina's Favourites of Art and not Math

I began this section with a page from Deepika's memory book which highlighted her enjoyment of Social Studies as a way of learning about historical events and people. It seems fitting that I would come full circle in this section, by sharing Katrina's preference and dislike for certain subject matter. It would be in late July, after the completion of their Grade Five year that Katrina would open up her memory book to share the following page which she entitled, "Favourites" (Katrina's Memory Book, July 27, 2016). This was a page she wanted devoted to her favourite

subject of Art. She read aloud from her page, noting that Art class, *“It is when you can be yourself and let your artistic flow”* (Katrina’s Memory Book, July 27, 2016). Katrina then placed a second excerpt on top of her other writing, disclosing that she would be pasting it on a page for *“Dislikes”* (Recording, July 27, 2016). Katrina didn’t bother reading from this excerpt. She said in a tone of disgust, *“Math is useless!”* (Recording, July 27, 2016). Reading her writing, I couldn’t help but inwardly smile at how Katrina equated learning Math to a form of depression. I wondered how her dislike of Math had shaped her understandings of herself as a student. I wondered how her love for Art shaped her identity as a student.

Thinking about Schools as Sites of Possibilities

Through their memory book artifacts, Katrina and Deepika had been able to represent their ideas around school subject matter and were able to use these representations as a means to discuss their thoughts about what makes a good/poor student, and additionally, how they felt their teachers thought of each of them. I fondly recollected Eisner’s (2002) contention, *“Representation stabilizes the idea or image in a material and makes possible a dialogue with it”* (p. 6). While, Caine and Steeves (2009) direct me to metaphorical representation, noting in their work, *“As we play with these metaphors we see how much our understanding of relationships shape our being and engagement with others and that imagination is inextricably intertwined within our lives and our relationships”* (p. 1). Using their memory book items as a metaphorical thinking point, Deepika and Katrina, were able to create and represent dialogue. Their talk reminded me that schools can be places where the interests of children are not often prioritized. Our ongoing conversations around subject matter cast light on several considerations for me. One, children, such as Katrina and Deepika are invested in what their teachers have to say about them. This did not come as a surprise to me. Two, Deepika and Katrina had a deep understanding

of which subject matter they were interested in and which subject matter they did not prefer. Three, assessment of their skills (as determined by themselves coupled with their understanding of how their teachers perceived them in terms of their skills) was closely linked to Katrina and Deepika's beliefs in *how good of a student* they felt they were. Following these thoughts, a query resurfaced in my thoughts. I wondered, what would happen if schools were structured differently?

Eisner (2002) explained the vital function that schools serve. He described:

Schools, I believe, like the larger society of which they are a part, function as cultures ... They make possible a shared way of life, a sense of belonging and community, and they are a medium for growing things, in this case children's minds. How schools are organized, what is taught in them, the kind of norms they embrace, and the relationships they foster among adults and children all matter, for they all shape the experiences that students are likely to have and in the process influence who children will become.

Experience is central to growth because experience is the medium of education. (p. 3)

Eisner's (2002) point here is not a moot one. Schools, microcosms of our myriad worlds can foster both healthy and unhealthy experiences and those experiences which fall within the two. If Deepika and Katrina were offered differing opportunities whereby they could choose for themselves what subject matter they could focus on, how would that alter their learning experiences? How might that selection enable them to be the creative cartographers of their own lives? In other words, how might such freedom at school help them to shape their identities? How might the stories they told of themselves be crafted? How might the stories others told of them be changed? What stories could be lived and shared amongst themselves and the people they would meet?

Clandinin (2010) reminds me too of the importance of thinking about the potential strength to be had in developing the quality of relationships that may emerge when attending schools. She explicates, “Drawing on a narrative inquiry into the experiences of 19 youth who left school without graduating, I raise questions about stories of school, the institutional narrative of schooling” (p. 15). In doing so, she powerfully asks:

What might happen if school was understood as a space where learning and living were intertwined? Attending to schooling in this way would allow us to pay attention to the particularities of each youth’s unfolding life. Thinking in this way we begin to see the importance of schools as sites of collaboration—sites where students interact with peers, with parents, with families, with teachers and principals, with counsellors and therapists, with nurses and speech language pathologists and other service providers. (p. 17)

Clandinin’s (2010) queries recall for me again the profound significance that relationships play in our lives. For young girls such as Katrina and Deepika, attempting to understand how we can go about shaping stronger and more meaningful relationships within their worlds of school is necessary and of vital importance. All children require love and care. Feeling that they are supported in schools can help elicit healthier expressions of identity and self-esteem and can shape communities where diverse individuals can come together in respect. “Schools as sites of collaboration” (Clandinin, 2010, p. 17) would be a means of bridging what might seem like insurmountable differences.

Memory Book Spaces as Canvases for Other Stories and Getting to Know One Another

bell hooks (1995) writes about the power pictures and images can hold for us. Images and

pictures have the ability to connect time, place, and people in deeply personal ways. In the following passage, hooks refers to a special photograph of her father which conveys very different meanings for herself and her sisters.

Although my sisters and I look at this snapshot and see the same man, we do not see him in the same way. Our “reading” and experience of this image is shaped by our relationship with him, with the world of childhood and the images that make our lives what they are now. I want to rescue and preserve this image of our father, not let it be forgotten. It allows me to understand him, provides a way for me to know him that makes it possible to love him again, despite all the other images, the ones that stand in the way of love. (p. 56)

As the girls shared with me and each other pictures and other images from their ever-changing memory books, I wondered if they, similar to hooks (1995), felt a sense of complexity in the stories associated with their memory work. Deepika and Katrina had chosen to include different images from one another. They chose to decorate and embellish their memory book pages in ways which resonated for them, ways in which they were able to understand the people, places, and artifacts they had chosen for their books. Each image they included between their pages was as unique as they were. Moreover, the images reflected their hopes, concerns, and creativity through relationships over shifting shades of time and place.

During our regular get-togethers, when Katrina and Deepika shared photographs, drawings, and additional images from their respective memory books, they sometimes, gifted me with their stories that were connected to their images. Thinking upon their willingness to let me

know them more deeply, I found myself considering Paley (1979/2000)'s words in her book, *White Teacher*:

Each child wants to know immediately if he is a worthy person in your eyes. You cannot pretend, because the child knows all the things about himself that worry him. If you act like you like him, but ignore the things he is anxious about, it doesn't count. The child is glad you are nice to him, but deep down he figures if you really knew what he was like, you'd hate him. So your liking him without knowing him just makes him feel guilty. (p. 28)

Paley (1979/2000) was speaking about wishing to know more specifically about black children in relation to her teaching and her classroom community. She wanted to know them in deep relational ways. I recognized these circumstances were different for Katrina, Deepika, and me. I was not their teacher. Our relationships were not that of students and teacher. We were engaging in a narrative inquiry together. Moreover, I was South Asian like both of them. Nevertheless, I found resonances in Paley's (1979/2000) observation. Deepika and Katrina wanted me to know them. They did not wish me to ignore the things that concerned them. However, I wondered if the girls understood that I, too, wanted them to know me. This mirror of images reflected both ways. I wanted Katrina and Deepika both to recognize that I wanted to know them as Paley said, and for them to know me. These two girls had taken up space in my thoughts and heart and as this narrative inquiry continued to enfold and unfold, I was becoming more aware of how our relationships were deepening with one another. This felt good. This was the complicated image I wanted them to have of our friendship.

Crafting Counternarratives through Adornment

Being Brown Means...

As the girls and I became closer, I became aware of a certain quality of elusiveness that would arise whenever I brought up the notion of being proud of one's culture. At different times, it seemed to me that Katrina and Deepika were doubtful as to whether being of South Asian heritage merited any positivity. In conversation, Deepika had made a comment that she wanted to change the colour of her skin because she didn't like it: "*Actually, people make the distinctions of skin colour like brown, black, and white. I don't like my skin colour*" (Recording, November 6, 2016). There was no misunderstanding that she felt her skin colour was too dark. I was further concerned to hear that Deepika had always wished for her hair to be blonde. Her meaning was not ambiguous. She was making comparisons to others and subsequently, making worrisome judgements. My forthright reply, "I love your skin colour! You both have beautiful skin!" (Recording, November 6, 2016) had Katrina jumping into the conversation. She piped up, "*One time my dad said, 'So many people want this colour. They want a tan!'*" (Recording, November 6, 2016). On the surface, it was a good response, but I could detect some anxiety in Katrina's voice. As well, Katrina's remark had me thinking that she had brought up a similar point to Deepika's when talking with her father. The girls' hesitation or even skepticism had me revisiting some of my childhood stories. One in particular, a storied image of my hands under running water, as I tried to wash off my "muddy" skin, made an unwelcome appearance in my thoughts. At the same time, I was reminded of my classroom experiences with elementary aged children over the years as a teacher. Much like Deepika and Katrina, some of the children I had the privilege of caring for and teaching, shared similar misgivings about their heritage. Drawing from these moments, I became determined that this narrative inquiry would be one in which Katrina and Deepika would be able to find spaces in which to narrate plotlines other than ones

which situated them as silenced characters in their own stories. I was heavily vested in creating experiences where their fear and anxiety of being Indian could be worked upon. And while it crossed my mind several times that I was very far away from the embodiment of the hypothetical objective researcher, I entertained no qualms for being so. Art making and children’s literature which had played pivotal roles in my life as a teacher were natural defaults for me as I considered how to help bring about opportunities to craft counternarratives to those deficit narratives that the girls had expressed together and individually over time. In what follows, I detail two of several artistically shaped experiences that Deepika, Katrina and I engaged in which were in part inspired by traditional South Asian plotlines of jewelry making and mehndi making.

Plotlines of Jewelry as Status and Talismans

Over a span of a couple weekends in November of 2016, Deepika, Katrina, and I experimented with jewelry making. Within India itself there is “a rich tradition of jewelry” and jewelry making (Vyas & Bapat, 2011, p. 766). And, according to Glyn (2019), there are some jewels which are favoured over others in Indian jewelry making.¹³⁸ This tradition of embedding stones within gold is an ancient one. Commenting on the movement of semi-precious and precious stones within India, Khalid (2015) intimated the “history of Indian gems and jewels is the history of India” (p. 35) and further observed, “These [stones] were not worn solely as [*sic*] for aesthetics but they conferred power and health on their owner” (p. 35). Jewelry, especially gold jewelry with precious and/or semi-precious stones holds great significance within Indian culture. Jewelry ownership—aside from protecting the wearer—can confer status across a

¹³⁸ Glyn (2019) contends, “While artisans and modern makers of Kundan jewelry experiment with diverse stones regularly, the most commonly seen gemstones in Kundan jewelry designs are pearls, diamonds, emeralds, sapphire, topaz, ruby, agate, garnet, crystal, amethyst and jade” (Gemstone section, para. 1).

variety of settings, from the everyday to special occasions, the amount of gold jewelry one wears, signifies position and status. Weddings, arguably one of the more widely recognized celebrations of auspiciousness are opportunities to show wealth. Draped around one's neck, gracing the lobes of one's ears, decorating nose, head, and wrists—gold glitters bright on a bride's person. The passing on of such jewelry is customary within Indian culture among families who are fortunate enough to have jewelry to pass on. When my mother and her twin sister were young, their mother had taken one of her necklaces to a jeweler and had this one gold strand fashioned into two separate necklaces for her daughters. And later upon their marriage, their parents gifted them with another necklace each. I had gleaned this much from my familial experiences but had some wonders. I wanted to learn more about this significance of jewelry—of it being worn, passed on, used for dowry and so forth—in my culture. I found myself (re)turning to certain authors.

Plotlines of Jewelry as Dowry

Renita D'Silva (2013), a diasporic South Asian author weaves this understanding throughout her novel, *Monsoon Memories*. In the following passage, the author's protagonist Shirin reflects on her early knowings of being a girl. When reprimanded by her mother for behaving in the same manner as twin boys the same age, young Shirin reflects, "Of course she knows she's a girl...That's why she has to wear the heavy gold earrings that her grandmother gifted her with when she was born even though they hurt her lobes" (p. 122). Young girls, often when they're babies have their ears pierced so that their tender lobes may wear gold. This too was similar to my upbringing. In another passage in the same book, Shirin thinks back to when she accompanies her mother, Jacinta to their bank in order to withdraw the gold her mother had saved for her daughters.

‘My gold.’ And for a brief moment, as so often was the case these days, she was transported. To Canara Bank, Taipur’s only bank. Smelling of money, gold, and old secrets—a dank wet smell. Jacinta, wringing hands in front of the portly, sweaty bank manager: her stoic mother nervous! ‘I would like to get my gold out of the safety-deposit box, what with my girls now approaching marriageable age.’ Gold twinkling up at them in myriad shapes: bangles bracelets, necklaces, earrings, tucked into her mother’s underskirt and transported carefully home. (p. 176)

In a third passage, an older Sherin whose home now in the United States, ponders how she might respond to guests at a dinner party who question her about her lifestyle and marriage. As she contemplates her answer, she thinks back to her life in India:

Where did she begin? How did she tell these people...about how things really worked in India, how you grew up watching your mother squirrel away bits and pieces of gold: ‘for your dowry’ and you knew what was coming... (p. 205)

Reading these passages, it would be easy to believe that jewelry as dowry payment is the singular reason as to why gold is important within many South Asian households. Yet, this conclusion is far from satisfying as many mothers love their daughters. Foregrounding South Asians, Narayan (1997) writes about the accusations of “backwardness” and “barbarity” (p. 122) that can be thrust upon those whose belonging and/or heritage link them to “immigrant communities of colour” (p. 121). She suggests:

Mainstream Western culture has not simply been inattentive to Other cultures, but has in fact been deeply historically involved in their *representations*, [original emphasis] representations that have often been replete with negative stereotypes and imputations of

cultural inferiority. (p. 122)

What other reason can be discerned in this traditional plotline of gold as dowry payment? I, myself, can lay claim to only a couple of authentic Indian gold pieces. Belonging to my mother and her mother before, the stories connecting us intergenerationally shape who I am. Argwal (2017) in her essay provocatively titled: *My 'Just In Case' Inheritance*, thoughtfully takes up her early experiences and understandings around dowry in her South Asian family.

I have a dowry and a small fortune of personal wealth because women before me didn't. My teenage rage over having a dowry has settled into a sort of ambivalent quiet....Putting on my baliyon [gold hoops] and nameplate [pendant] are consistent acts of validation. They pull together a lineage of women who are scattered across the world by preference and politics. They remind me that strength is imbued in everything. (para. 22)

Mothers will keep, safeguard, and then later bestow their gold pieces upon their daughters as a means of providing security and stability to their girl children. Argwal (2017) in her rumination, eventually arrives at a special understanding: "I hope there never comes a day when I'll need to dip into my gold savings, but I can't deny that it's comforting to know that it's there, just in case" (para. 23) These gifts of gold, collected, saved, and passed on by (grand)mothers can also serve as cherished gifts of the heart.

Stories of Gold Shared

Katrina and Deepika told me stories of attending South Asian weddings and the topic of gold jewelry emerged in some of these conversations. Both girls related moments where their mothers had allowed them to wear selected gold jewelry during these occasions and other times

as well. ¹³⁹ I wondered about these multi-faceted familial stories—when did they get to be taken out and polished? Gleaming with the brilliance of stories lived within home, community and cultural spaces, were they only permitted to be displayed during special occasions? Could there be spaces made within classroom curriculum making so that children alongside their teachers could learn from another beyond special occasions? If such stories were jewels to be treasured, how enriched each child and each teacher could be if time was consistently made available to invite for such jewels to be displayed and shared amongst one another? This research was helping to shape spaces for Katrina and Deepika’ stories to be heard.



47-Radiant Deepika ¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Deepika’s mother, Vam had shared her love for unique jewelry and Deepika had had repurposed one of her mother’s pendants into a bracelet for herself, which Vam had described as being a memory of her university days and now, “*It looks old and new at the same time!*” (Transcript, April 2, 2016). Vam had also observed, “*Indian jewelry is heavy, right? So, when Deepika was small, for weddings, I tried to put them in but her [ear] lobe was so delicate that it [the earring] hung too low. Now, it looks good!*” (Transcript, April 2, 2016).

¹⁴⁰ On October 19, 2017, Deepika’s mother, Vam texted me a picture of Deepika beautifully dressed and wearing her gold jewelry for a cultural event. I digitally (re)imagined the image in the form of a poster exemplifying Glamour.

These stories in turn, were helping me think about ways in which Deepika and Katrina could inquire into and explore unique facets of their identities while engaging in artistic ways of representing their identity-making. As the narrative inquirer of this research, I was learning that I had an agenda other than a mere highlighting of certain curriculum making moments to fill a gap within academic literature. My experiences alongside Katrina and Deepika and the other (mis)educative experiences layered betwixt and within our worlds of curriculum making were multifaceted as well. I wanted both girls to feel healthy about pushing against preconceived notions of who they ought to be and find value in inquiring into who they could be. To that end, I envisioned how employing our senses in various ways could open up possibilities.¹⁴¹ Deepika and Katrina, similar to many girls their age, enjoyed wearing fashion jewelry. As a means of inquiring into other plotlines of myself, I had been experimenting with clay jewelry making and when I brought the idea of possibly making some jewelry with the girls, they were enthusiastic to try their hand at it as well. While, I didn't have the availability of beautiful stones at my disposal, I knew that I could collect materials which would boast the same bright tone hues of precious jewels. Further, I would gather a selection of colourful glass beads, rainbow blocks of polymer clay, silver, gold, and copper bezels to house the girls' pendant designs, and other materials such as chord and rings for making bracelets and necklaces. I already had some of these items at my disposal. Thinking upon the stories the girls had shared with me, the ones I had been reading, and other stories that I had been living, I began to see jewelry making as a way in which we could

¹⁴¹ Use of our senses of seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and even to some extent, smell were collaged into our art-making experiences. For instance, when we engaged in the art of holiday baking, our senses of touch, sight, taste, and smell were tapped into and explored. Using cookie cutters of elephants and maple leaves in addition to traditional western holiday themed cookie cutters of trees, candy canes, reindeer, and snowflakes helped to push against monolithic plotlines of what it means to have holiday spirit in Canada and help us to enliven our borderland space (Menon & Saleh, 2018).

co-create (new) understandings of our selves.

A Heart-full Musing Interlude: Jewelry as Lived Experiences



48-Multifaceted Jewel Toned Stories and Wonders

The wonders I was experiencing around the differing stories I held of Indian jewelry and their possible significance to others both of a similar heritage and those of different backgrounds made their way into my research sketchbook of *heart*-full musings. The stories, I recognized were not necessarily taken up in the same way by all South Asians nor others. For instance, gold jewelry for the purpose of dowry could be understood as a safety net or security for the females involved. Another story could situate dowry as a means of positioning women as chattel. Even yet another story could hold that dowry was a means of ensuring a certain social standing. Gold jewelry did not even have to be a source of dowry. It could be simply a lived tale of adornment. Essentially, I was learning that there were myriad ways in which I could understand the meaning of these cultural and intergenerational stories and how these stories, in turn, were taken up in Western narratives of South Asians. The girls too had different understandings of the jewelry that they wore and made. Multifaceted, all these stories refracted a multiplicity of experiences belying a hegemonic narrative within and outside of diverse South Asian communities.

Deepika and Katrina: Traveling to India's Golden Temple¹⁴² through Story

Katrina, in a nostalgic voice: I remember when I was in India, I got to pet a baby cow!

Me: Oh cute!

Deepika interjecting: I got to ride a camel and an elephant!

Me: Wow!

Deepika, adopting a narrator's tone: In front of my house, there was a guy who would bring a camel around the neighbourhood and he would ask if you would want a ride on his camel. And I was like, "Yes!" Super fun!

¹⁴² *The Golden Temple*, a gurdwara, is located in Amritsar in the state of Punjab. It is a famous Sikh place of worship.

Me: Nice! That would be an adventure for sure!

Katrina, jumping back into the conversation: Before we left for India, I asked my dad if I could ride an elephant. And he was like, "Sure, you can do that!" And then my dad was like, "I can take you everywhere!" My dad loves the Golden Temple.

Me: Oh, you went to the Golden Temple?

Katrina: We went to the Golden Temple, but I didn't get to go to the Taj Mahal.

Deepika was quick to respond: I went to the Golden Temple. (Recording, November 6, 2016)

Both girls turned to me expectantly. We had stopped through a McDonalds' drive thru to pick up some chicken nuggets and a chicken burger for the two hungry girls and some apple pie turnovers for dessert. Now we were sitting in my living room chatting as we all ate. I was enjoying the guilty pleasure of my order of crispy fries. "You two are lucky! I haven't been to the Golden Temple yet" (Recording, November 6, 2016). I was a bit bemused by the direction of the conversation. It was usually me who was trying to steer our chats around topics of India. Did this mean that our get togethers and conversations we had over the past few months in classroom spaces and out of classroom spaces, were infusing their thoughts as they were mine? I couldn't know for sure, but I was eager to hear what the girls would share. Interrupting my thoughts, Katrina provided me with the sage advice of one in the know, "*But beware it's super crowded! It's full of people*" (Recording, November 6, 2016). Deepika agreed, adding, "*Every temple in India is super crowded!*" (Recording, November 6, 2016). I imagined marking a check into a waiting box. Yes, that had been my experience too and I nodded wryly in acknowledgement of their warnings. The stories of India and Canada, the girls were sharing in this conversation made their ways into their ideas of what they wanted to create for their jewelry pieces. The following is

an excerpt from our conversation as we sat around my dining table with the jewelry materials spread out in front of us. Paper plates were handy for keeping the polymer clay and glass beads separate until needed. Tools for sculpting clay were also on the table.

Katrina and Deepika: Creating Liminal Spaces with Peacocks, Elephants, and Snowmen

Me: Here's the polymer clay. There are many colours to choose from. These are the medallions [bevels] that you can use.

Katrina: Could I do my mom's first? I'm going to do a heart.

Deepika: Could I too? I'm going to do a star and a heart for her.

Me: You could use whatever you like.

Katrina: I never got to use these cool tools before.

Deepika: They look like make-up thingies.

Me: They kind of do, don't they? I'll show you how to use these tools in a moment.

Deepika: Sea green for me.

Katrina: Turquoise for me. (Recording, November 6, 2016)

It was exciting for me as well to be in this moment with Deepika and Katrina. I loved their enthusiasm for the project ahead. When I had picked up the girls from their homes, both of their mothers, Vam and Barb had shared the same enthusiasm asking me as to what the children and I had planned this time around. I deliberately made sure to keep my response vague, answering that we might experiment with colours. I didn't particularly enjoy being obscure, but the girls had already told me that they both wanted to make something for their mothers in

addition to something for themselves. Katrina and Deepika had relished keeping this a secret from their mothers.

In the following excerpt, Katrina, Deepika, and I discuss the possibilities of creating a peacock pendant. The choice of a peacock was one which had emerged from the readings of different children's books featuring South Asian characters and also, other conversations around the ideas of what symbols represented their lives in both Canada and India.

Me: And these are some stamps you can use to make details. See, how you can use just the tip of a stamp to make an imprint? If you want to do a peacock for instance, like I did, you can just press it down into the clay like this. I'm only stamping just a tiny part to make a peacock feathers or, even if you want to use it for the background, you can use it to make a big pattern on the clay.

Katrina: That's so cool! I'm going to try and make a peacock and use that for the feathers.

Me: You can use the teardrop shape for the body if you like. There are glass beads for added decoration.

Deepika: I'm going to make a peacock too because it's pretty. For myself, I'm going to do something else.

Me: You could even make charm bracelets for yourself afterwards.

Deepika: Yes, I love charm bracelets! They're magical!

Katrina: Whoo! Magical!

Deepika: Is this paint?

Me: That's varnish. We'll be using that later. (Recording, November 6, 2016)

The idea was to allow Katrina and Deepika to be able to explore freely with the materials

at hand and I was pleased to see how they were feeling comfortable doing so. Deepika decided on making a grove of Canadian winter trees for the pendant for herself. Katrina made the creative choice to fashion a second peacock for herself. As they worked with the clay, they



Deepika's Grove of Trees

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Katrina's Second Peacock

spoke aloud their thoughts and in doing so, described their understandings of their creations.

Below is a fragment of this conversation.

Katrina: I especially like this marbled one!

Me: It is lovely!

Katrina: It's like an Indian flower.

Deepika: I'm done making mine!

Me: Do you want to describe it to us then?

Deepika: This one is the rainforest canopy. This is the water.

Me: Beautiful description. That's the one you're showing me with the beautiful trees?

Deepika: Yeah, the tree leaves.

Me: Very cool!

Deepika: And um, this is the peacock, the bird on the branch. [Jingling some tiny bells attached to her bracelet]. This is so adorable!

Katrina picking up Deepika's bracelet singing: Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way... Hey this would be good for Christmas!

Deepika: My mom likes doing this kind of stuff, but she doesn't have time. I have lots of time, but not like I used to.

Katrina: Not like Grade Four! There's lots of homework. Deepika: Yeah. (Transcript, November 6, 2016)

The girls were immersed in making their pieces for their jewelry. They soon added to their collection, individual charms that they would be using for their bracelets. Deepika discovered inspiration in the winter season at hand and the joys of Christmas. Beneath her nimble fingers, a snowman with a jaunty top hat came to life alongside wrapped presents. Katrina, in contrast, chose to create some designs with an Indian flare. An elephant trumpeting good fortune and henna engraved flowers bloomed as Katrina worked her clay. I could see how the stories we had read and the ones which they experienced were shaping the girls' artistic works. Katrina, clearly astounded at her delightful creations announced, *"I've made a kijillion charms!"* (Transcript, November 6, 2016). And, I laughed at her query as to whether they would all fit in her charm bracelet. Painstakingly rummaging among the colourful glass beads, Deepika shared her snowman would have blue eyes because she wanted his eyes to pop and then looking at the pointed carrot she had affixed to the snowman's face, cheerfully observed, *"My snowman*

is like Pinocchio!” (Transcript, November 6, 2016). The jewelry pieces fashioned by the girls were plenty. They had yet to be baked, varnished, and dried. Much to the girls’ disappointment, they understood the whole process would take more time than this day would afford them. And, after a robust discussion, Katrina and Deepika decided that it would make best sense to not rush their work and inadvertently, ruin the lovely pieces they had created. On this occasion, it would be okay that they would be returning to their homes without their jewelry¹⁴³.



Deepika’s Charms



Katrina’s Charms

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Making Time and Marking Time: Recalling a Report Card Conversation with the Girls

Driving the girls home later in the day, I recognized while much of our conversation revolved around their work, the girls had made some interesting comments. I was intrigued by Katrina’s observation about homework being more of a factor for them in Grade Five than in Grade Four. Deepika’s remark about having more time to engage in artistic activities unlike her mother echoed a similar sentiment. It seemed, growing up meant that a person’s time became

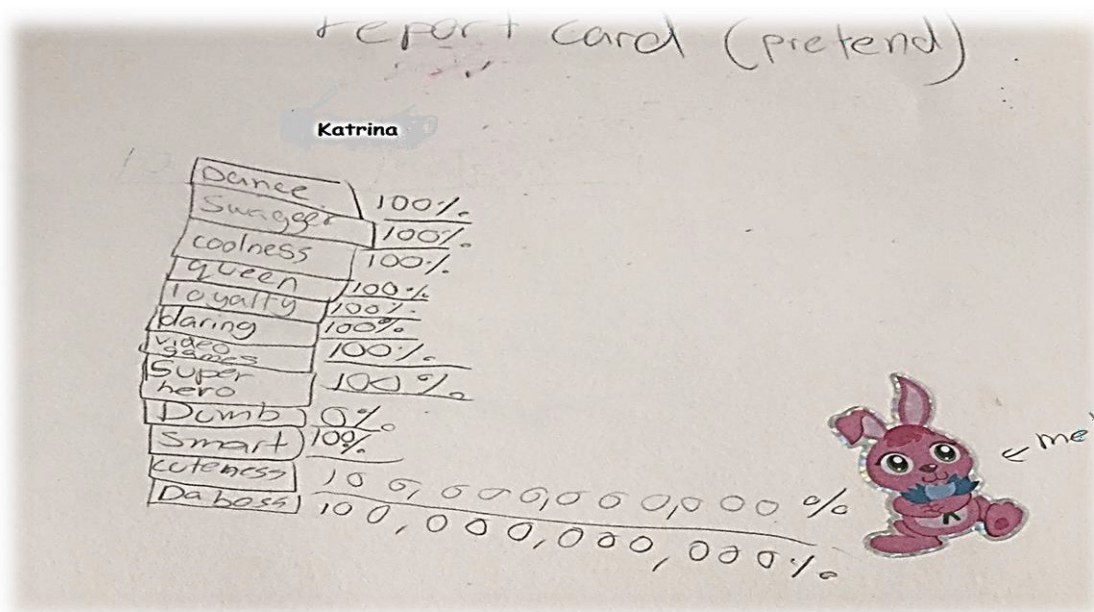
¹⁴³ Once the two girls understood why they were not able to take their pendants and charms home immediately, they were pleased to be continuing with their project at a later time.

occupied with pragmatic concerns leaving little time for other considerations. Both girls' insights struck me as portent. In my teaching practice with young and adult students alike, time had to be etched out for artistic endeavours. And it was only fairly recently I began to understand if I wanted to engage in any art making, I had to allow myself the freedom to believe that I, as an adult had the right to make time to do so. Might then, being the cartographers of our artistic lives call for a deliberate mapping of our experiences, where time could be carved out for us to pause and create in thoughtful ways?

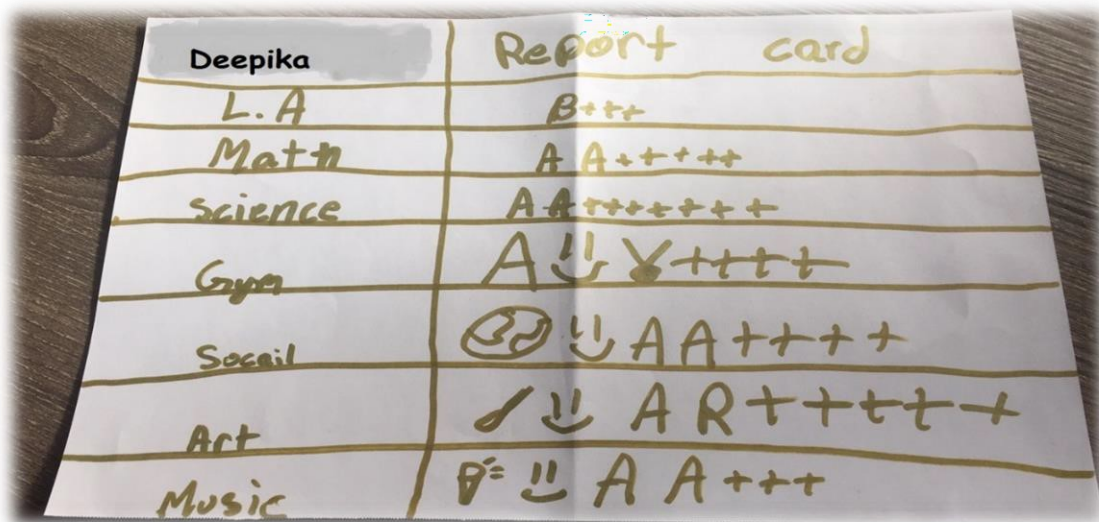
As I continued to consider what the girls shared with me, I found myself thinking about how the way things are done in school can impose restrictions or boundaries in thinking more creatively. I was reminded of an earlier time spent with Katrina and Deepika where I asked them both the same question. I presented them with the following scenario, "If you could create your own report card, how might it look like? What interests might you include?" The prompt had been made in part because I had been curious to see if the scripted template of a report card could be interrupted along more creative lines, where the girls could have the opportunity to welcome and represent their chosen stories of themselves that might not be made visible in a typical report card¹⁴⁴ format. In response to this query, Deepika and Katrina created very distinct pictorial representations of their report cards. On July 29, 2016, Katrina shared her report card which highlighted a range of traits and names which she felt best reflected her and additionally, spoke to traits which she believed did not reflect her. The report card was imaginative in that it deviated from typical school subject matters. The report card also reflected a positive self-image which I happily took to mean that Katrina was feeling good about herself in the moment she

¹⁴⁴In Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2011), Loyla, a young girl in kindergarten lovingly co-composes a home report card alongside her family and shares this report card with her kindergarten teacher. In his work alongside young students, their teacher, and fellow researchers, Murphy inquires into how children think of themselves in relation to report cards through the medium of found poetry (Clandinin, Huber, Huber, Murphy, Murray Orr, Pearce & Steeves, 2006).

created it. On a different occasion, October 9, 2016, Deepika shared her version of a report card with me. In Deepika's creation, the subjects which she felt she was strong in, were given a greater number of plus signs. On the report card, as a way of distinguishing which subjects she experienced as fun and enjoyable, Deepika had drawn little symbolic icons along with happy



51-Katrina's aka Da Boss's Report Card!



52-Deepika's Stellar Report Card!

faces. Deepika's report card too, reflected a positive self-image in the moment that she had created it and also, pointed to how she understood her identity.

As I attempted to figuratively lay these artifacts alongside our stories of artmaking we were inquiring into in this narrative inquiry, I realized that Deepika and Katrina had chosen to assign marks/grades in their representations. Katrina and Deepika had been shaped by a master storyline of what a school report card should contain even when encouraged to think otherwise. And, I wondered about this difficult-to-shift valuing of school curriculum over familial curriculum making that had made itself discernable in the girls' alternative report cards. Yet, Deepika's and Katrina's report cards were unique, shaped by their individual personalities and their curriculum-making experiences in their different worlds of home, school, and community.

Deepika and Katrina: Returning to the Girls' Jewelry Making

In these moments of jewelry making, Deepika and Katrina were thinking about their identities in tangible ways and their responses to the query of: "Who are we?" and "Who can we be?" could be discerned in their craft. The choices they made, the stories they shared, and the wonders they expressed pointed to this dynamic thinking and process of being. Were Katrina and Deepika beginning to see that their life canvases were painted in a multiplicity of hues? Could they see that possibility was a doorway which they could enter and perhaps more profoundly, had *every right* to enter? Did they recognize their actions were knocks of courage signaling a willingness to explore hitherto untraversed territory? I could sense in this activity—in this borderland space—Deepika and Katrina were artfully negotiating different stories of themselves and making sense of who they were and who they wished to be.

Were they now hearing what I heard? When I looked upon these two young faces, the haunting lines breathed into life by South Asian poet Pavana Reddy (2017) leapt to mind. These were the poetic lines that made it unequivocally known:

brown girl

you are lovely

in every shade (location 41, Kindle)

Katrina and Deepika: “We’re cool kids!”

The next time we met up, the charms and pendants had been baked and varnished to a shiny gloss. Katrina and Deepika evidenced great delight in their creations and eagerly strung their charms into bracelets and pendants into necklaces. As they worked, they spontaneously sang aloud a song which resonated loudly of pride and self-worth. Below is a fragment of our conversation.

Katrina: I’m going to wear this DIY necklace to school tomorrow.

Deepika: Me too! I’m going to wear my bracelet to school. Like, [now singing] we’re cool kids!

Katrina singing as well: We’re cool kids! We’re cool kids!

Me: What are you going to do with your elephant?

*Katrina: Mr. Elephant you can work your stuff! You deserve to be on your own!
[singing] Work it! Work it!*

Deepika: I’m going to wear this to school and people are going to be jealous.

Katrina: I have these charms for another necklace. I can’t wait to give this one to my mom when I get home!

Deepika: I'm going to give the circle one to my mom.

Katrina: But I think I'm going to let her choose between these ones and then I'll whisper choose this one.

Me: Really!

Deepika: I'm going to hold them up with my hand and let her choose.

Katrina happily: I made three necklaces today! (Recording, November 20, 2016)



Deepika's Baked Pendants



Katrina's Baked Pendants

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As the “cool kids” sang, I felt an echoing joy in my thoughts. In inviting the girls to create jewelry pieces of their own, I believed I was simultaneously helping them/me to shape those liminal (Heilbrun, 1999) and borderland spaces (Anzaldúa, 1987/1999; Menon & Saleh, 2018) to think and work with differing cultural and intergenerational plotlines. And, later after their pendants and charms had been baked, once they had been carefully strung onto cords

forming necklaces and bracelets and taken home and worn to school, both girls shared that their mothers and friends¹⁴⁵ loved their gifts of jewelry.



Katrina's Finished Jewelry Pieces



Deepika's Finished Jewelry Pieces

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Children's Day as a Reminder of the Importance of this Narrative Inquiry

"It's Children's Day! Did you know that?" Katrina asked me as she plopped herself next to Deepika on one of the two couches in my living room (Recording, November 20, 2016).

Delighted, I responded that I did. A brief conversation ensued where Katrina and Deepika took turns sharing with each other and me what they knew. Mainly, that Children's Day¹⁴⁶ was the

¹⁴⁵ Katrina and Deepika were very clear in letting me know they had kept the more detailed pendants and charm bracelets for themselves and their mothers and had also gifted some of their jewelry to their friends.

¹⁴⁶ According to the Government of Canada (2017):

By ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, Canada made a commitment to ensure that all children are treated with dignity and respect. This commitment includes the opportunity for children to have a voice, be protected from harm and be provided with their basic needs and every opportunity to reach their full potential. Celebrating National Child Day is about celebrating children as active participants in their own lives and in communities, as active citizens who can and should meaningfully contribute to decision-making. ("What is National Child Day?," para.2-3)

day where everyone could celebrate children and the rights of children all over the world. It never failed to astonish me the different pieces of knowledge the two girls possessed. It seemed fortuitous that all three of us were gathering together on this special day for the purposes of this narrative inquiry—in large part, a narrative inquiry into the curriculum making experiences of Deepika and Katrina. Placing some veggies and cheese snacks on the coffee table, I listened as the girls chattered amongst themselves and settled in for an afternoon of togetherness. As what had become a familiar pattern for us, we took our time looking through the pages of the girls' memory books. There was a sense of expectancy in the air between us. During the car ride over to my place, the girls had peppered me with questions. They wanted to know what the plan for the rest of the day was. That is, what would we be doing together. I didn't leave them guessing as I too, was feeling pretty excited about the day. We would look over their memory books if they wished and I had a story book that I wanted to share with them. And, because they had been wanting to, Deepika and Katrina would get to apply the finishing touches to their jewelry. Last time, we only had enough time to bake the charms and pendants. As well, Katrina and Deepika



Memory Books in Hand



Katrina and Deepika Munching Veggies

would also have the opportunity to engage in another artful activity which they had been at turns anxious and excited about when the topic came up between us.

Contemplating Cultural Patterns within Harrowing Hegemonic Patterns

Today, our big plan was to get our hands done—decorated in mehndi. This idea had been flitting through my mind for a long time¹⁴⁷ and I was excited to engage in this kind of cultural curriculum-making together. Deepika and Katrina were no strangers to the application of mehndi. Their mothers, Vam and Barb, had both told me individually that their daughters had experienced mehndi and had henna decorated upon their hands and feet for special occasions. However, I knew from previous conversations with the girls, Katrina and Deepika were not always appreciative of their living cultural legacies. Recognizing their reticence of being different from their peers, I quietly (and not so quietly) began a campaign to convince them of their right to be different and feel good about being different. This activity, I recognized, did not come without risk. The potential for it to backfire was present. The application of henna on skin can last for some weeks.¹⁴⁸ What if the girls hated their mehndi designs? What if the children in their classes made fun of them? What if they were singled out for being different but not in a way which honoured their uniqueness? What if these cultural stories of curriculum making ostensibly played up their ethnic heritage in a manner which paid lip service to diversity? And

¹⁴⁷ For as long as I can remember, I have been drawn to the elaborate swirls and graceful flourishes of henna designs. I love having my hands and feet done (the application of mehndi paste—a concoction created from the dried leaves of the henna plant, lemon juice, and different oils—in the form of stylistic patterns) whether it be for a bridal party, getting ready for a wedding ceremony as a guest, or other special occasions. I have used such patterns in my own art making and this love of these Indian inspired patterns—in the form of graphics and other imagery—spilled over into my doctoral proposal (Menon, 2015) and into the slides I had to prepare for the proposal presentation. As an elementary teacher, I had focused art classes on creating such patterns. The children had enjoyed those classes. It was with this abundance of happy memories that I imagined doing something with Katrina and Deepika involving henna designs.

¹⁴⁸ Once applied to the skin, henna paste grows darker and making the design more prominent over time. Mehndi patterns have been likened to temporary tattoos. However, unlike the peel and stick tattoos made to be applied with water, often geared for children, these mehndi designs called to the stories of our peoples and our culture. They would not be mistaken for cartoon figures or the like.

my biggest fear, what if engaging in this activity and inquiring into our stories of ourselves lead to them being dehumanized in more explicit ways? I was an adult holding many privileges they didn't and was better equipped to handle any of that kind of fall out but Deepika and Katrina were young girls attempting to negotiate their worlds in ways which felt safe to them. Was I doing right by Katrina and Deepika in steering them into this traditional activity? I was a person they trusted, a person their parents trusted. I did not want to betray their trust. These concerns weighed on me and I was seized at times with doubt but the desire for the girls to not miss out on something so special and meaningful proved to be stronger. I had the permission of Barb (Katrina's mother) and Vam (Deepika's mother) and the girls appeared more and more eager, demonstrating a gathering sense of anticipation as the day of our mehndi application approached.

Reading a Mehndi Story of Hands with Deepika and Katrina

The girls took turns reading the children's book, *Nadia's Hands* (1999) by Karen English and illustrated by Jonathan Weiner. The author's last name caught Deepika by surprise and she wondered aloud if it was "*because she speaks English?*" (Recording, November 20, 2016). I had just finished clearing up the misunderstanding when upon the heels of her previous thought, Deepika expressed curiously, "*I thought the girl was Indian*" (Recording, November 20, 2016). With Katrina listening as well, I explained that while much of the children's literature we had read and looked at showcased Indian stories and characters in the diaspora or within India, I had also wanted to share with them stories that were South Asian in nature.¹⁴⁹ I went on to share with the girls that this book was about a young American girl named Nadia whose family was from

¹⁴⁹ Katrina and Deepika were familiar with this identifier as their families had used it with them. Additionally, the girls had used the term themselves in their conversations with me. Children's books featuring South Asian themes were taken up in our conversations. There is a paucity of children's literature reflecting diasporic Indian characters. This niche becomes even more constricted when considering only picture books (Menon, 2014). The authors and illustrators of the books selected were not always of South Asian heritage and we talked about what this might mean in the stories we read together.

Pakistan. Nadia attended school in the United States. I accentuated these aspects of the story to help Deepika and Katrina visualize possible points of connection and possible resonances that they could entertain.¹⁵⁰ Nadia was a South Asian girl like Katrina and Deepika who was attending school and living with unique stories bespeaking of culture, heritage, and tradition. She, akin to them, had worries about how these stories would shape her stories of herself and the stories others had of her or would compose of her.

I found myself holding my breath when we came to the following passage in the book. This is the juncture in the story where Nadia finds out from her aunt, the bride that another aunt would be coming for a visit to do mehndi in preparation for the upcoming wedding. Katrina read slowly aloud:

“Auntie Amina’s coming Saturday to put the mehndi on your hands.” Auntie Laila’s eyes danced and sparkled. “Just you wait.” Nadia’s smile made her face feel stiff. She didn’t want the *mehndi* [original emphasis]. It would make her hands orange, it wouldn’t wash off, and she didn’t want to go to school like that on Monday. She was worried.

(English, 1999, p. 4)

I couldn’t help myself and asked Katrina and Deepika, “Are you worried now?” (Recording, November 20, 2016). The lady I had asked to come to my place to do the mehndi was due to arrive shortly and I found myself hopeful. A friend of mine, a mehndi artist, had initially agreed

¹⁵⁰ Sims Bishop in a video recording, (2015) articulated,

Children need to see themselves reflected, but books can also be windows and so you can look through and see other worlds and see how they match up or don’t match up to your own, but the sliding glass door allows you to enter that world.

She further suggested that it’s not only marginalized children who require such books but also other children who are privileged to see their representations in books in order to gain a better understanding of the diversity of our worlds. Likewise, children ought to be able to see themselves reflected in the curriculum as planned (Styles, 1988; 1996) and in a curriculum as lived (Aoki, 1993) which is shaped by a curriculum of lives (Downey & Clandinin, 2010; Huber & Clandinin, 2005).

to come and do the henna for the girls but her schedule had altered, and I had to find someone else. Thankfully, I had been able to schedule someone else in her stead. Of the two girls, Katrina had seemed more excited about the whole experience and so, I was very pleased when the two of them exclaimed loudly in unison, “*No!*” (Recording, November 20, 2016). And thinking back to when I picked the girls up earlier from their homes, both had been full of questions: “*Was today the day? When would the lady arrive? Could they choose their own designs?*” (Voice Notes, November 20, 2016). Perhaps, I did not need to worry on this front. I began to believe Deepika and Katrina were similar to Nadia who “on Saturday...forgot her worry and woke up filled with anticipation” (English, 1999, p. 5). The girls were looking forward to getting their hands done just like I was. And, when Deepika went on to add, “*I want that design*” indicating a pattern illustrated in the storybook, I felt myself relax more deeply into the moment.

Katrina, who had been listening, suddenly piped up.

There was this mehndi artist who came to our house in India when I was eight. There was my massi¹⁵¹, my cousin, my younger cousin, my mom... My little sister was too little, so she didn't get it done. She would rub it off before it was time... The reason we got the mehndi in India was because it was my cousin's wedding. (Recording, November 20, 2016)

The application of mehndi is more than mere decoration as this ritual of adornment in a very real way marks different rites of passage such as marriage and invites blessings upon the bride and family members. Wearing mehndi is symbolic for courting good fortune and warding off negative forces in ones' life. Having henna done in meaningful ways, metaphorically serves as bridges which bring the stories of our past into the present. In this fashion, the experiences of

¹⁵¹ *Massi*, is the Punjabi honorific title for aunt—more specifically, mother's sister.

mehndi provide physical and emotional spaces in which family and community members may gather to commemorate auspicious events. Katrina was able to reach back in her memories and think of a moment spent with close and extended members of her family in India. This was promising to me as Katrina did not very often speak of anything she thought of as culturally related. She had happy memories associated with having mehndi done. Katrina sharing her story of mehndi meant she felt safe with us and also indicated that she was shaping positive ways in which to view and (re)experience her intergenerational and cultural stories.¹⁵²

In the story, Nadia eventually comes to love how her hands look with mehndi. I asked the girls what they thought about Nadia's feelings earlier on in the book when she did not like the idea of getting her hands decorated in that manner. The following excerpt of our conversation shows that Deepika still held mixed feelings as to getting mehndi done. Keeping the story of Nadia in mind, it was Katrina who was able to help Deepika feel more self-assured and once again feel free to be excited about the mehndi being applied today.

Deepika: I don't want anyone to make fun of me. I've had people make fun of me before and I don't like it.

Me: I can see why you wouldn't like that. Nobody would. But hopefully, your friends are going to think this is cool.

Katrina: Yeah!

Me: What do you think, Katrina? What do you think about Nadia?

Katrina: She shouldn't be worried about her hands. She should be proud that she has

¹⁵² The following year in May of 2017, Katrina's mother, Barb, recalling earlier times, would share with me:

We did henna not just for marriages but also for different festivals. Here too. It's not only for marriage. In the springtime, we did it. Here, people may not know that it's not just for marriage. I can do beautiful designs. Like Katrina, who is artistic, I was too. I helped out the school at their booth during Cultural Days and did the designs so fast (Voice Recording, May 7, 2017).

beautiful hands. She should show them off.

Me: Looks like Katrina is giving some good advice.

Katrina, in an enthused voice: Rock it!

Deepika echoing Katrina: Yeah, rock it! (Recording, November 20, 2016)

Silently, I wished for an amazing experience for both children. Sometimes, I recognized, it was necessary to craft and build upon heart-full ways of being in order to smudge and expand hegemonic plotlines.

The Application of Mehndi with Katrina and Deepika

It wasn't too much later after reading the book that the Mehndi Artist arrived. It was none too soon as I had sensed the girls were more than ready for her arrival. Settling at the dining table, the young lady placed the mehndi cones on the surface before turning to the girls to ask what designs they would like on their hands. It was fun for me to watch as the girls swiped through an assortment of images on her phone and my laptop to see what they would like depicted for themselves. Katrina's awed murmur of, "*So many intricate mehndi designs to choose from!*" (Recording, November 20, 2016) and Deepika's agreement of "*Too bad we can't have them all!*" (Recording, November 20, 2016) had me smiling. I wondered which designs they would gravitate towards. Would they choose unique designs or opt for similar ones amongst themselves? My mind was a swirling canvas of classic Indian patterns. Mango leafed paisleys, climbing, graceful vines, henna shaped flowers including the gorgeous Indian lotus, intricate mandalas, arching, detailed domes reminiscent of the famous Taj Mahal, and preening peacocks known for mating for life and also being India's national bird, were some of the henna motifs that cavorted through my thoughts. I already knew what kind of design I wanted for myself.

Although, I was tempted by some of the more religious designs featuring Ganapathy, Radha and Krishna, I hoped for a floral depiction this time. Not wishing to unduly influence Deepika and Katrina's choice of design, I kept silent about mine until it was my turn to be decorated.

The girls decided amongst themselves who would be first to have their mehndi done. I could not but help and admire how respectful they were with each other. I could sense their anticipation and yet, they did not bicker who would be the first to go. I filed this information away as I knew this would be something, I would have to share with their mothers later. They would be so proud. Katrina had discovered a design which was luxurious in its detail. With a mandala in the middle and two elaborate domes on either side of it, I could see excitement light up her face. Below is an excerpt of the conversation that occurred while mehndi was being applied to Katrina's hand.

Mehndi Artist: So, I'm going to have to change the design a little because your hand is smaller than the one in the picture, but I will try to keep the style similar.

Katrina: That's okay.

Me, as the design is being applied: Oh, it looks so nice, Katrina!

Katrina, musing: It reminds me of fireworks!

Me: You're right! It does look like fireworks! It reminds me of the fireworks that are done for Diwali.

Katrina: Yeah!

Me to the Henna Artist: The gold will be applied later, after this mehndi has dried?

Mehndi Artist: Yes, I think that would work better.

Katrina: Gold is really pretty.

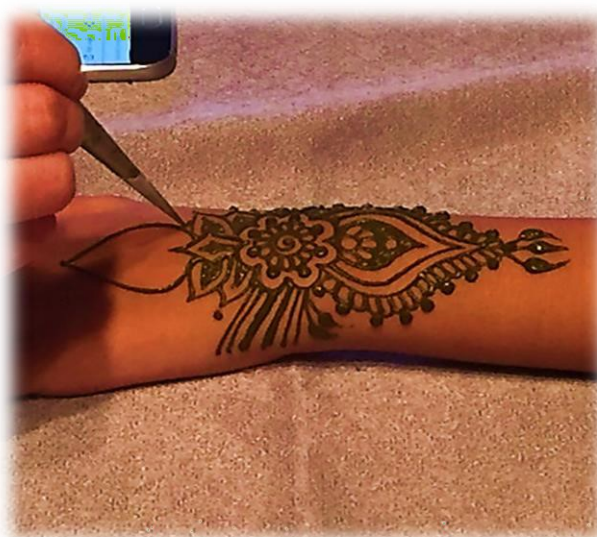
Me: Yes, it'll look great.

Katrina: Yeah!

Henna Artist: Do you get henna done often? Katrina: No, only twice. (Recording, November 20, 2016)



A Mandala as a Starting Point



-56- Adding Final Details to a Dome



57-Katrina Loving her Design!

Deepika had decided upon an entirely different design from Katrina, one with pretty petals and leaves. Her mehndi pattern was equally lovely while taking up less space on the surface of the skin. Below is an excerpt from the conversation that occurred as Deepika was having mehndi applied to her hand.

Deepika: This is better than my aunty does it!

Mehndi Artist: I will pretty much try anything. I'm pretty confident.

Deepika: This is like drawing. It's very cool!

Mehndi Artist: Or maybe like painting?

Me: I think your moms are going to be surprised—

Deepika interjecting excitedly: My mom already knows I like this kind of stuff!

Me: I like the leaves. They are very pretty. It looks like you're wearing a bracelet. Very nice!

Deepika: Yeah, that's why I picked it! [referring to the design she chose online from the images she viewed]

Me: Are you finding it hard to keep your hand up, Deepika?

Deepika: It's not bad. I can do it for a little while. (Recording, November 20, 2016)

Watching as the swirling patterns were applied to the girl's hands, I was reminded of a story shared by my mother. When she was young, she and her twin sister and their cousin would pluck the mehndi leaves from the plant in my mother's family garden and then proceed to grind them on a slab of stone using a large pestle. Next, they would make a red paste and use that mixture to draw small circles on the palms of their hands as a form of decoration. They would do

this during the first harvest of the year called, *Sankranti* where they lived in India. I wondered if the girls, too, in adulthood, would recall this moment of choosing their mehndi designs.



Beginning with a Flower



Intertwining Petals and Leaves

-58-



59-Deepika Gives a Thumb's Up for her Design!

Textured Imprints of Mehndi

The girls and I had mehndi applied to our hands and it was wonderful. The Mehndi Artist had left and as the dark reddish-brown stain of the mehndi design deepened in colour making the gold lines more pronounced, I saw happiness flush Deepika and Katrina's cheeks. Excitedly, they discussed showing their hands off to their family members. Like the gold which glittered on the beautiful designs depicted on their skin, their eyes glittered with pride in the designs they chose and yes, even pride for the loveliness of this storied cultural artform. Looking at the pictures of our decorated hands that I had taken throughout the process, Deepika commented seriously, *"The next time we do this, let's get the white henna. I'm going to paint my nails white. Because I enjoyed that very much"* (Recording, November 20, 2016). Katrina was swift to agree.



60-Our Mehndi Decorated Hands

While I was grateful that both girls had an enjoyable experience with mehndi, I was still cautious in my optimism. I wondered with concern, would the two girls still be this gleeful in

showing off their imprinted hands to their classmates, their teachers? I was mindful of how mehndi decorations have been taken up by certain people. My own experiences were not always of the positive kind. Puwar (2002) spoke of the often, negative consequences of mehndi adornment, that is made visible—in particular, mehndi applied during the festivities surrounding weddings—in worlds outside of home and community. She elucidated:

Today mendhie¹⁵³ is paraded on white bodies as a form of bodily decoration in fashion-conscious clubs as well as children's fetes and parties. Asian girls have a long experience of being taunted at school for having mendhie on their hands. The creativity and joy of applying mendhie in the lead up to a wedding has no place at school, where it becomes a tribal mess on the hands. The very hands they proudly spread out in anticipation of admiration of the deep redness of their mendhie in the company of family and friends at the moment of celebration are more inclined to be covered inwards under the pressures of assimilation at school. (p. 75)

I didn't want either of the girls to feel bad about celebrating their heritage stories in this deeply cultural manner. The very idea of Katrina or Deepika hiding their hennaed hands in fear or cowering as Puwar suggested, made me feel ill. Moreover, the exoticism of which Puwar scathingly described, was also something that I did not want Deepika or Katrina to experience. I very much wished that these specific textured imprints of mehndi would be ones that would call forth happy memories for Katrina and Deepika. I wanted the imprints to be ones which reverberated with vibrance, confidence, and pride for these two young girls.

Later that night, I received a text message from Katrina's mom which went a long way in

¹⁵³ Puwar (2002) uses a different spelling of mehndi.

helping me think about the necessity of helping to make space for certain curriculum making encounters. In her message, Barb spoke of the jewelry making Katrina and Deepika had engaged in and as well, the application of the mehndi designs on the girls' hands. Barb's kind message buoyed me up. What follows is a brief excerpt of our text conversation.

Barb: Thank you! Love those peacock designs! [heart emoji]

Me: Yes, Katrina is so talented! Both girls are!

Barb: I'm sure going to wear one! Beautiful henna design!

Me: The designs were awesome! [thumb's up emoji]

Barb: Thanks once again for everything you're doing for the kids (Text message, November 20, 2016)

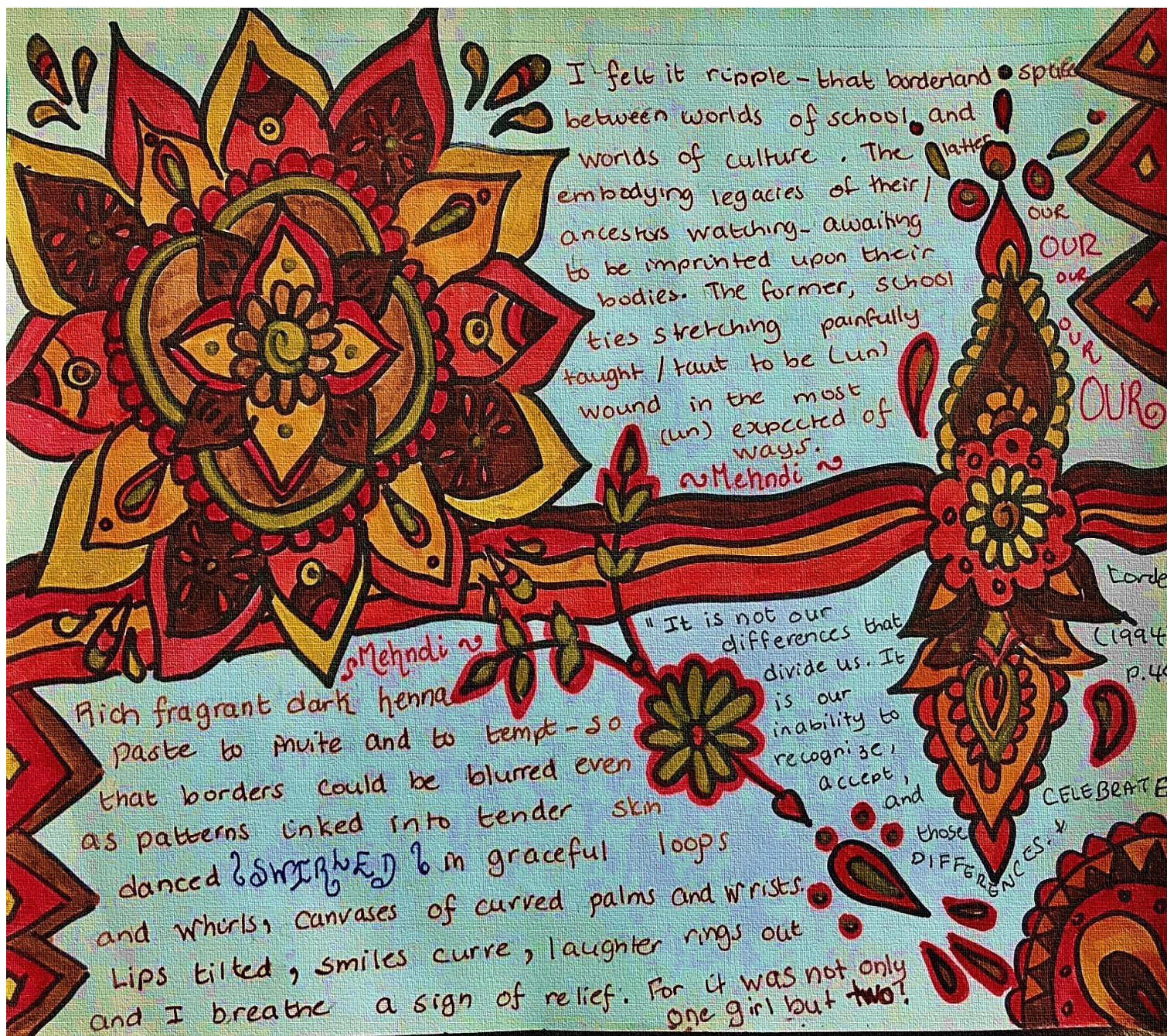
I felt my heart expand with hope. These artful encounters were rich with curriculum making, allowing for creative spaces in which Deepika, Katrina¹⁵⁴, and I could learn from one another and explore more freely unique ways of being as South Asians.

A Heart-full Musing Interlude: Mehndi Stories

This heart-full musing is rendered in traditional mehndi hues of dark browns, oranges, and reds. Moving in swirls, loops, and arcs, I found myself (un)consciously trying to replicate the landscape of my inner thoughts. This physical and mental act of musing reflects how I attempted to think through not only the tensions I felt when I had been contemplating whether we should have mehndi applied but also, the complicated palette of stories I was hearing from Katrina and Deepika. I visualized movements within borderland spaces (Menon & Saleh, 2018) between and betwixt

¹⁵⁴ In May of 2017, during one of our conversations as Katrina shared her ever-changing memory book, she pointed out a new page where she had included carefully cut out photographs she had taken with one of the disposable cameras I had given her. These particular photos were of Deepika's and Katrina's own mehndied hands.

worlds of school, home, and culture. And finally, when I saw the girls smile and their joy, I tried to also convey the feelings of hope, elation, and promise which danced in my thoughts, wondering all the while if this is what world building could look like. The promise of other stories where recognition of difference could shift tolerance to an honouring of identity-making...



An Emerging Knowing

I had not expected the degree to which I was being moved by what was unfolding in this research venture. This feeling I was experiencing was accentuated further when I met up with the girls later in December and asked them about their friends and teachers' reactions to their mehndi applications and I was pleased to hear that the girls had encountered no problems and that even, some of their friends had thought the designs were "*cool*" (Voice Notes, December 9, 2016). And I was happy to see that Katrina had started a page in her memory book which she had entitled, "*Charms, Bracelets, and Mehndi*". She shared with Deepika and me that she was merely waiting for some pictures of our hands to put in her book to complete the page. Some time had passed since our mehndi application and there, fortuitously, seemed to be no negativity associated with this traditional pastime. I was quite relieved as there had been a lot of thought that had gone into shaping this mehndi experience. I wanted this to be one of many self-affirming experiences for Deepika and Katrina, allowing for the nuance and texture of intergenerational and cultural stories to be positively imprinted through henna. I was beginning to understand I had placed a lot of emphasis on the experiences of the mothers, the girls' teachers, and the girls themselves when thinking about this research but now, I was better appreciating my role as a South Asian narrative inquirer who could help to create shape changes in perspective amongst each of us.

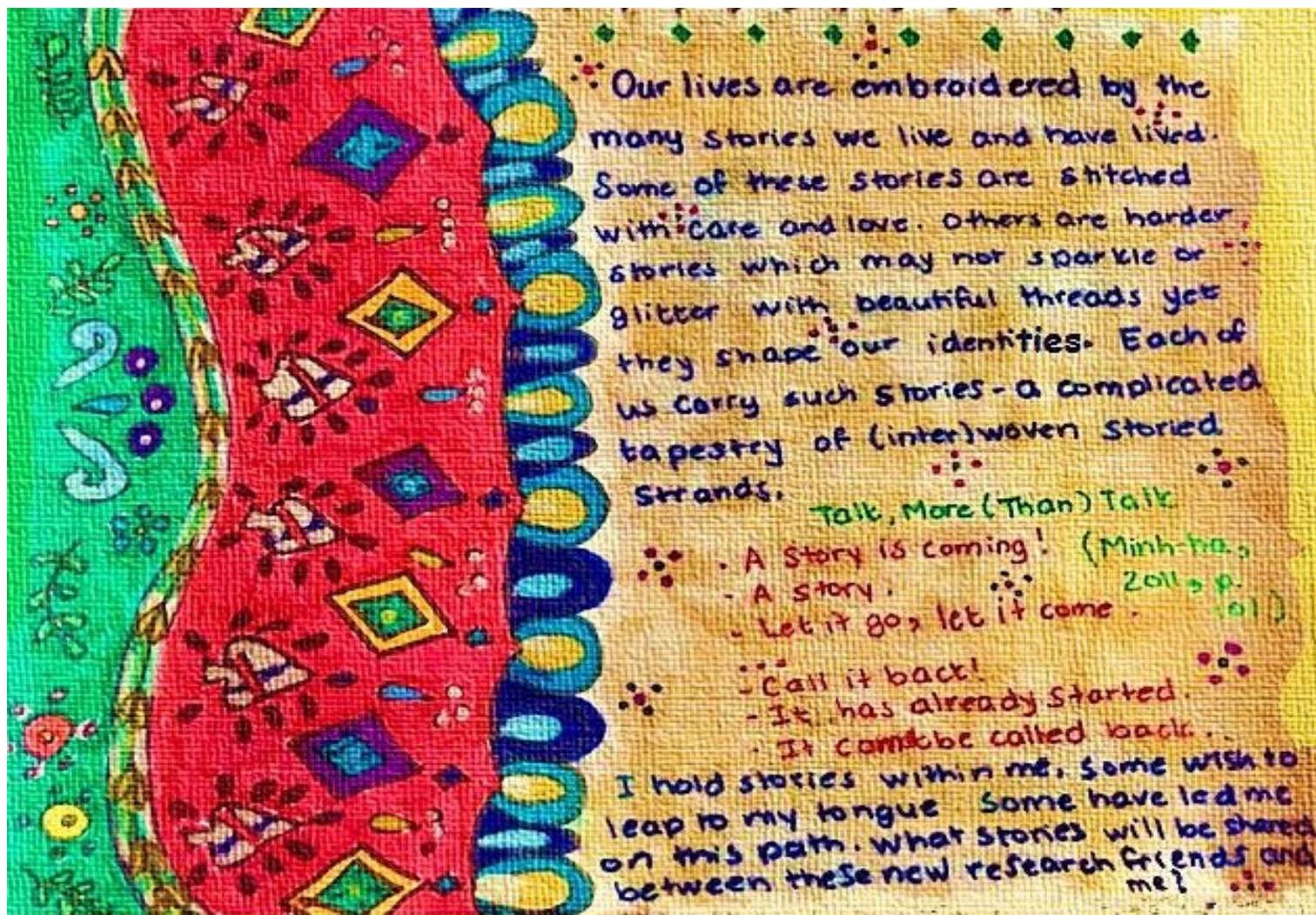
Storied Lives as Artistic Works in Progress

Composing meaning in aesthetic and artful ways (Clandinin & Huber, 2002), at times with(in) metaphor (Caine & Steeves, 2009) Katrina and Deepika, refute simplistic caricatures of their individual South Asian girlhood experiences. Their identities do not serve as mere decoration to be discarded at will but instead as considerations within an intricate palette of plotlines of who

they are now, who they were before, and who they wish to be. This narrative account of Deepika and Katrina illuminates several of their identity shaping endeavors, over time, place, and through various relationships (Clandinin 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as they attempted and negotiated, traversed and crossed borders (Menon & Saleh, 2018) within (their) unique curriculum-making worlds (Clandinin, 2020; Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011; Lugones, 1987). Through creatively imagining, thinking, working, and playing alongside their families, their teachers, each other, and other friends, Deepika and Katrina (and me who had the wonderful opportunity to come alongside all of them) continue to sketch, re-sketch, and (in)scribe, in myriad ways, a multilayered and multitextured piquancy to the perpetually shifting, storied canvases of their lives.

Chapter Six: Coming to Know Barb Alongside Katrina

A Heart-full Musing Interlude: Embroidered Stories Stitched and to be Stitched



62-(Inter)woven Storied Strands

In this heart-full musing, I wonder about the different stories that will be shared between Katrina's and Deepika's mothers and myself. Understanding that there are stories which I probably wish to share and ones which I will need to hold close, I think about the stories that will be woven betwixt us. My relationships with the two girls had been shaped by our experiences shared in their classroom and school worlds. Now I would be getting to know them alongside

their mothers. The mothers, I hoped, would become new research friends. I dreamed of stories being embroidered with care, overlapping in friendship and mutual respect.

A Preamble: Preparing the Canvas of Barb's Narrative Account

In what follows, I share a narrative account of Barb and her stories in relation to her eldest daughter, Katrina. I had the opportunity to initially meet Katrina in her worlds of school as both a researcher and a classroom volunteer in her Grade Four classroom. With the invaluable assistance of Katrina's teacher, Anne who conveyed my hopes of this research with her students, I was then able to make contact with Barb, first over the phone and then in person. Over the course of this narrative inquiry, I was fortunate to meet Barb on many occasions, in school and outside of school, within several community spaces and most often, in her home. During the many times in which she invited me into the warmth of her home, I also came to know the other immediate members of Katrina's family: Katrina's father and Katrina's younger sister. Over the span of this multiperspectival narrative inquiry, we lived, told, retold and relived stories, and many conversations were had. Yet, for the purposes of this dissertation, I had to be selective about which research conversations and/or accompanying stories could be brought to the foreground and which by unfortunate, pragmatic reasons, had to be relegated to the background. In this tension filled space, I felt myself resonating with hooks' (1996) wish, which she poignantly articulated as: "I want there to be a place in the world where people can engage in one another's differences in a way that is redemptive, full of hope, and possibility" (p. 122). Though hooks (1996) speaks about a type of redemptive love, a love which she suggests is not often made visible on the silver screen, I believe it is an emotion which is not typically discussed in relation to academic research and I am uncertain as to why that has to be the case. As such, moving away from what could be a black and white rendering or a structured polarity of this

research, I choose to take up this more nuanced notion of engagement between people. Keeping hooks' (1996) words tucked close, it is my hope that the voices amplified in this space help to shape, much like a mixed-media artform, a collaged¹⁵⁵ rendering of Barb and Katrina's storied experiences alongside one another, their family members, and to a lesser degree myself as researcher friend who too, narratively inquires¹⁵⁶ into her own experiences.

A Field Trip to an Old Schoolhouse

Anne, Katrina's and Deepika's Grade Four teacher had asked me if I could come to help out during a class fieldtrip to an old schoolhouse. I had cheerfully agreed. A fieldtrip outside of the school would provide a different community space in which to interact with the two girls, their teacher, and classmates. In addition, I would be able to once more intertwine myself in a familiar textured fabric of a class outing. That Wednesday morning as I gathered the students up in a line to ready them for departure to the bus, I saw Barb, Katrina's mother in the coatroom. I was surprised because Katrina had told me that her mother wouldn't be able to come on the fieldtrip due to a broken nose given to her inadvertently by her youngest daughter when they bumped heads (Research Notes, March 2, 2016). There hadn't been too many other parents present and I had seen pleasure and pride light up Katrina's face when she sat beside her mother on the yellow bus both to and from the old schoolhouse.

The first part of the fieldtrip invited the students to take a step back in time. They had the opportunity to role play students attending a one room schoolhouse where their teacher was a male who was brisk with a no-nonsense manner. He instructed the class that the adults present

¹⁵⁵ I use the artform of collage as a means of metaphorically representing this narrative account because the storied experiences shared and images considered were not necessarily complete nor did they fall into neat, discrete categories when imparted. They were messy, complex, and overlapped and intersected in some ways and diverged in others.

¹⁵⁶ As another means of mediating and crafting deeper conversation with research friends and other readers, I apply another textured layer to this collage by sharing what I call *heart-full* musings I engaged in during this research.

were poor students who needed extra help and they could provide it by demonstrating what it meant to be a good student. The children and the adults both found this amusing and we could not help but laugh when the schoolhouse teacher reprimanded the adult students for chatting amongst themselves! Asked to take their seats and sit with their little slates at the ready for “Paper is far too expensive! Memorize the answers” (Research Notes, March 2, 2016), Katrina was confident in responding to the questions thrown out by the schoolhouse teacher. Responding clearly to the prompt of “What does it mean to be patriotic?” (Research Notes, March 2, 2016), Katrina announced, “*It means being a kind and good citizen*” (Research Notes, March 2, 2016). Later, Katrina and a few other students volunteered to come to the front of the classroom to answer more questions. In my observations of that day, I had written the following:

It was good to see Barb today. And it was good to see that her nose looked ok! Katrina beamed with joy to have her mom with her for the day. I think she radiated with a confidence that was helped by her mom. She was a true leader, raising her hand and answering questions asked by the schoolhouse teacher in a calm manner as her mom watched lovingly. (Research Notes, March 2, 2016)

There was no doubt in my mind that having her mother present had enabled Katrina to feel more assured of herself. Her mom was watching and that meant the world. Looking at Barb’s beaming face, I could sense how proud she was of Katrina.

“She was like the leader of the class!”

Later discussing the fieldtrip with me, Barb joyfully shared her impressions of Katrina in those moments.

Barb proudly sharing: I came and told my husband that she was like the leader of the

class! She was putting her hand up. And I have never seen her like that before. I was talking to my husband. She wants to be a part of that! She's very social and active.

Right?

Me, affirming: Yes, you're absolutely right!

Barb musing: Sometimes she gets an A and sometimes she gets angry or something at home. In school she's different. I feel she sometimes has totally different personalities!

Me: Katrina's doing well! Her teacher [Anne] told me that she's a very good student.

Barb: Her new teacher, Miss. ____ [Anne], I love her! I love how she teaches her. She's calm and nice. The last teacher, the man teacher, I forgot his name... (Transcript, March 19, 2016)

Revisiting this part of our conversation, I understood that Barb had been happily surprised by Katrina's confidence in demonstrating her strengths as a student. Barb had recognized that there was a distinction in how Katrina acted in her worlds of school and home. At home, Katrina might show anger when her marks were not what she hoped for and in doing so, demonstrated a deep vulnerability with her mother. This vulnerability was something that she might have felt uncomfortable revealing during school. I thought it was wonderful that Barb had the opportunity to see her daughter in this particular world of school as shaped by this fieldtrip. This glimpse, I felt helped to alleviate her worries that Katrina might have been unhappy at school.

Lindemann (2019) suggests that our "identities consist of a tissue of stories that represent who the person is over time" (p. 7) and that it is moreover:

[the] *depiction* of you that you and other people use to make sense of who you are. And because what needs to be made sense of is your life over time, the depiction can't be

thought of as a snapshot that shows who you are only in a given moment. Instead, the depiction is narrative—an identity consisting of stories that weave together one moment with the next moment and the moment after that, capturing the ways you change, as well as the ways you stay the same. (p. 7)

I sensed other identity-making stories of Katrina were being shaped by Katrina herself in this curriculum-making moment. I also intuited that Barb’s stories of Katrina too were being (re)written. I wondered how these (new) stories would shape their understandings of each other.



63-Katrina and Barb at the Old Schoolhouse

Empowered World Travelling, Barb Travels Alongside Katrina

Clandinin, Huber, and Murphy (2011) elucidate as narrative inquirers “We see the necessity of honouring two worlds of curriculum making, the familial and the school worlds and the importance of dialogue between the worlds” (p.149). In doing so, they draw upon Lugones’s

(1987/2003) understandings of worlds and the constructions of self and/or personhood that can be made. Lugones (1987/2003) explicates:

In a “world,” 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. (p. 87)

Thinking upon Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin’s (2011) and Lugones’ (1987/2003) powerful words alongside Barb’s comments, I wondered if Katrina’s construction of self in that fieldtrip moment situated in a world of school, had become one in which she understood herself as an agentic being. Certainly, I had seen her in her classroom amongst her peers and she had appeared comfortable, but this particular construction of Katrina appeared to be animated (Lugones, 1987/2003) and even emboldened in part by her mother, Barb. For Barb, the experience might have situated her daughter in relation to her peers and teacher in a fashion that Barb had not seen before. Taking up the invitation by Anne, Katrina’s teacher, to participate as a parent volunteer during this fieldtrip, might have afforded Barb the first occasion to see Katrina, as a vibrant student in her world of school.

Lugones (1987/2003) speaks to this idea of being able to travel to different worlds with varying degrees of ease. She illuminates:

One can travel between these “worlds” and one can inhabit more than one of these “worlds” at the same time. I think most of us who are outside the mainstream of, for example, the United States dominant construction or organization of life are “world travelers” as a matter of necessity and of survival. (p. 88)

Whereas Lugones (1987/2003) does not qualify what may happen during a world traveling experience if one has a caring person along for the journey, I felt that Barb coming alongside Katrina in this moment, had an incredible impact. It seemed to me that Barb's loving presence helped to shape a different quality of travel between Katrina's worlds of school. Perhaps Katrina, in having her mother alongside her as she shaped her fieldtrip experience in this specific world of school, empowered Katrina to traverse beyond her comfort zones. Katrina's shyness was not in view during this fieldtrip day and both Barb and I had noticed this. Barb, thinking upon this experience expressed her gladness that Katrina had a teacher [Anne] who was helping Katrina to flourish. Barb reflected, "*So far, she's doing okay. She improved quite a bit this year. She has a shy personality. I hope she gets a teacher like [Anne] next year*" (Transcript, March 19, 2016). As Barb reflected on the old schoolhouse experience, it appeared that she was giving credit to Anne for helping Katrina to move beyond her comfort zones. This consideration is helpful in thinking about Katrina's identity-making. Yet, in this particular moment, I think it was Barb's world traveling alongside Katrina which gave Katrina the impetus to publicly display her courage within this world of school. As I continued to ruminate upon this fieldtrip experience in relation to Lugones' understanding of world traveling for people of colour, I wondered if the journey becomes less of a hardship if a friendly presence comes alongside. In this instance, it seemed a likely scenario for Katrina. And I as considered some of my more recent experiences in negotiating certain academic worlds, I had felt that the presence of certain people went a long way in easing my comfort (Kubota, Saleh, & Menon, 2020) and perhaps, helped in animating more positive constructions of myself than otherwise may have occurred if I had been alone. I couldn't help but think about the delightful ways in which Katrina's plotline for herself would continue to be shaped and how Barb's plotline for Katrina would be shaped for her daughter.

Returning to Barb's assertion of Katrina that: "*She was like the leader of the class!*" (Transcript, March 19, 2016) ameliorated some of her worry about Katrina's shyness. Indeed, this new story of Katrina which emerged in Barb's world travels alongside Katrina seemed to assist in transitioning other stories into the background.

The Recreation Center

The Recreation Center was crowded when I entered the building in the late afternoon. Families were bustling about and as I sat at the bench waiting for Barb, I marveled at the cacophony of laughter and chatter. Exuding an atmosphere of energy, this was a place which projected a sense of fun. Coming through a pair of swinging doors, I caught sight of a shyly smiling Katrina and her beaming mother, Barb. Exchanging quick hugs, Barb speedily ushered her daughter and me along back through the doors and down a long hallway, "*We have to hurry*" (Voice Notes, March 19, 2016). In the malodourous confines of the girls' locker room, I watched as Barb quickly and efficiently laced up Katrina's skates and then helped Katrina with her helmet. I gained a strong sense of the loving familial curriculum making¹⁵⁷ between this mother and daughter. I knew from our previous talks that skating, swimming, and dance were opportunities made available for Katrina to grow. This was a familiar routine, a scene that had been painted several times over and looking about the room, I saw other family members doing the same with their children. By way of explanation, Barb let me know that Katrina's skating lesson was about to start. I trailed along as Barb quickly led Katrina onto the ice. However, before releasing her onto the round of white, Barb urged Katrina to take a few sips from her water bottle. It was a pleasure to see the obvious care and love between the two of them.

¹⁵⁷ Clandinin, Murphy, and Huber (2011) explain, "Familial curriculum making is the curriculum making in which children engage with members of their families and communities" (p. 9).



64-Barb Helping Katrina with her Skates

As I followed Barb out of the locker room and onto the bleachers, I was reminded that while I had seen Katrina at school often, the last time I had seen Katrina and Barb together had been during the class fieldtrip on March 2, 2016 to an old schoolhouse. The music was blaring as we climbed to an area where there were no people and where we would have a good view of Katrina. I also had the sense that Barb too, wished for privacy and a spot where we could hear one another. We watched as Katrina joined a small group of similarly aged girls on the side. An instructor had the children start with some cross-over practice. As the music grew in volume and beat, it was a joy to see Katrina unconsciously bop to the music. Catching sight of my delighted expression, Barb shared Katrina enjoyed skating and that she was improving in this recreational sport. I knew from chatting with Katrina that she preferred skating over the ballet lessons. Both mother and daughter had agreed this was a better sport for Katrina. On the ice below, the

instructor gathered the girls together on their designated area and arranged them into groups in preparation for a relay race. Barb and I cheered when it was Katrina's turn to skate down the row of pylons with her spoon and egg. Looking up, she tossed us a joyous grin. Around us we could hear other people do the same.

“She gets too attached!”

As the relay race continued, Barb began to speak about Katrina.

Barb: In our old neighbourhood, there weren't many kids. Here, there are more kids.

Me: Yes, Katrina was telling me about her last school and her best friend there and how sad it was for her because she had to leave her behind.

Barb, reflecting: Yeah, she used to cry, She gets very emotional about things and attached. I tell her it will be okay, there will be new kids in your life. She gets too attached. I told her there will be new friends, new students in your life. I know at some point in my life I was like her. And I don't want her to be like that. I don't want her to get hurt. Don't attach yourself to somebody is what I want to tell her. But I know she'll learn from her own experiences.

Me: I get that. You want to protect her.

Barb: Yes. (Transcript, March 19, 2016)

I thought back to some of my conversations with Katrina. She had been demonstrably upset when we spoke about her former best friend. She had missed her when they had moved to this part of the city and she continued to miss her when she spoke about her current friends in Grade Four. But Barb's words gave me pause. What had happened to Barb to make her speak so passionately? Was there a friendship she was thinking about in particular? I remembered my own moments of misery when I was a young child and my cousin who was a couple months older than me moved away and began to attend another elementary school. My world of school had

become very dark indeed. Was Barb speaking from a similar experience? Was that why she could relate to her daughter's anguish about her first best friend?

Me: When I was younger, when I was in elementary in Kindergarten, my cousin was with me. In Grade One, she was in a different class but still in the same school.¹⁵⁸ Then in Grade Two, she moved [to a different part of the city] and then I had nobody. (Transcript, March 19, 2016)

Barb nodded and continued to speak...

Barb: For me, the same thing happened to me too. I stayed in one place from my childhood to Grade Nine. All of a sudden, my parents decided to go to another place. Oh my! That was a big tragedy for me! I couldn't take that. I was in Grade Ten and during my Grade Ten level courses, I couldn't study. Nothing.

Me: Yes, you get depressed.

Barb: Yes, depressed. The whole day long I cried, cried, cried. It stayed with me for a couple of years. Then I had to decide, "No, I was going back, meeting my friends." But after how long, I put my foot down. I had to do it! I had to take the half cup for myself. Otherwise, I would keep looking back. I wasn't going forward in my life.

Me: Did your parents help you with that?

Barb: They were not thinking that I was hurt.

Me: They didn't know.

Barb agreeing: They didn't know what I was going through. They didn't know. Yeah, my sister knew that I was crying but then she got mad.

Me: Aww, that makes it harder... (Transcript, March 19, 2016)

¹⁵⁸ It bears mentioning that the school I attended when I was young had very few children of colour. In these early grades, there might have been four children including my cousin and myself. This was not necessarily the case for Katrina.

Barb's story, what she named as a "*big tragedy*" (Transcript, March 19, 2016) for her struck a resonant chord with me. How often does it happen that when we are young, our parents or those who care for us do not know what is going on in our different worlds? Barb, when she spoke about being apart from her close friends, shared that her parents did not know of her despair. She had cried and her parents hadn't known of the many tears shed. And while Barb's sister had been supportive, it had been up to a point. She couldn't understand the deep havoc that had been wrecked upon her younger sister's life. As Barb put it, "*Now I think about my sister and parents, they don't think the way I do. This was not their way*" (Transcript, March 19, 2016). The move to a different part of the country was made in good faith by Barb's parents with the hopes of a better life for their family. Yet, they did not know of their daughter's sadness. Would their knowing have made it easier on Barb to make the transition to a new place and exposure to new people and relationships? This story of a "*big tragedy*" (Transcript, March 19, 2016) had reverberated over the years in Barb's life. This embodied sense of knowing—of what it means to be attached to someone with the possibility of being hurt—profoundly shaped her hopes and wishes for Katrina to not become too attached, to prevent her from being hurt.

"You meet people and you stay with them and then you move..."

As Barb continued to share more deeply about her experience as a young teen, the storied threads from her past knotted themselves more visibly in the tapestry of experiences shared between herself and Katrina. Similar to her daughter, Barb had forged strong relationships with her friends, but it was one very special friendship which caused her the most anguish. When Barb had been required to move to a different place, her world of friends had been drastically altered. She was unable to understand why she had to leave her close circle of friends and especially her best friend. The sadness of the move and the subsequent physical and emotional

distance took a toll on her. She suffered tremendously. And when she spoke, it was as if she were seeing into the very heart of her daughter, Katrina. Like Katrina, Barb understood what it meant to lose those loving ties that bind one person to another. She could relate to Katrina's feelings of reverberating loss. As we sat up high in the bleachers with the music continuing to blare on the speakers, I leaned closer to Barb to better hear how she had come to a decision. It was a contentious decision for Barb, but she understood that if she was to live a healthy life, she had to learn to look ahead. Barb described the moment as abrupt and distinct.

Barb: All of a sudden, the responsibility came to me. I knew I couldn't keep looking back and I knew I had to look forward now. So, I had to involve myself with new friends now or nothing. [She paused before continuing.] One friend of mine was special, and I stopped making friends. I didn't want to make new friends.

Me: You were scared of losing them?

Barb agreed: Yeah. But now living the life, I understand you meet people and you stay with them and then you move, and you meet new people. But these things, they take time to learn. (Transcript, March 19, 2016)

Barb revealed how her experiences had shaped her knowing of relationships. She spoke of relationships as being composed of transitory moments where “*you meet people and you stay with them and then you move, and you meet new people*” (Transcript, March 19, 2016). These moments in relationships were what Barb had learned from the different friendships she had over her lifetime. Barb's knowing that the relationships we hold close to us can be shaped by uncontrollable circumstances became even more pronounced as we continued to talk and watch Katrina gliding on the ice. Barb expressed this knowing as a wisdom shaped by time and experience, suggesting:

It doesn't come right away. It takes experience. So yeah, now I meet people and talk to them and I know they might move on. I'm an emotional person and that's my thinking and I don't know if anyone else thinks like this. Everybody doesn't care in the same way. (Transcript, March 19, 2016)

I wondered at Barb's embodied knowing of herself and her maternal knowing of her daughter, Katrina. Barb believed not all individuals felt relational connections to the same depth of attachment as Katrina and she did. She didn't want Katrina to have the same kind of experiences she had when she was young. Nevertheless, Barb recognized her desire to keep her daughter from harm was tempered with the knowledge Katrina would have her own experiences. As Barb reflected, "*It doesn't come right away*" (Transcript, March 19, 2016). These would be experiences of which Barb would have no control over. I sensed within Barb a deep desire for her eldest daughter to have the same quality of resiliency Barb had learned albeit at a huge cost to herself. She wished for Katrina to have the ability to make connections with people but not allow these connections to hurt her if they were severed by circumstance and/or chance. Barb also wished for herself as a mother to have a relationship where Katrina could share her feelings openly with her rather than suffering in silence like Barb had when she was younger. Barb's words had me understanding that she wanted to continue to hold Katrina close to herself; to have a mother-daughter relationship shaped by trust and care. Touching upon how challenging it had been for her as a young mom with a second baby, Barb movingly shared why it was so important for her to have such a deep attachment with Katrina.

Katrina and I got a little separated. I was not feeling good. You know when you first have a baby, and how things get busy in the world one day. I think she felt a little lonely. I couldn't do much. I was stuck by myself. (Transcript, March 19, 2016).

She also spoke about how her relationship with Katrina had changed over time:¹⁵⁹

It took me a year. But now we are getting back again together. We are getting back. I felt so bad when I couldn't look after her as much as I was supposed to be with her. We just got separated and she got more attached to her dad at that time. But now she's come back to me. I know she's growing. I will keep an eye of her. She will get more of my attention. Yeah, I will try to be as involved with her as much as I can. (Transcript, March 19, 2016).

Barb understood if Katrina felt that her mother was approachable, Katrina would not feel like she was alone in her feelings. Katrina would instead feel that her mother was a person she could come to in times of crisis but also during other times. To be able to talk and communicate in meaningful ways with Katrina were qualities Barb prized. The connection between mother and daughter was an attachment that I recognized Barb held dear.

“My parents never had that problem...”

“So, how’s your work going with the other mother and daughter?” Barb suddenly asked (Transcript, March 19, 2016). I was caught off-guard by Barb’s query. And it took me a moment to gather my thoughts before I responded:

It’s really interesting to me because there’s this excitement about going to school and also worry about going into Grade Five. And now there’s interest in having creativity and fun as ways of learning. Both Katrina and Deepika talk about their goals and how you, their parents want them to do well in school. And like I shared with you before,

¹⁵⁹ Barb had shared stories of taking a baby Katrina on the bus to the recreation facility and how she cherished these special moments between mother and daughter.

there's not much research for and about our communities. If children, their families, and teachers can contribute to that, I think it can be very good because sometimes, in some spaces, they don't promote girl education. (Transcript, March 19, 2016)

Barb was swift to reply, and I was somewhat taken aback by the strength of her response. In an adamant voice, she articulated, “*My parents never had that problem!*” (Transcript, March 19, 2016). I haltingly shared with her some of the stories I had of the different South Asian girls I had taught who had then left for India to complete the rest of their schooling. But I knew it was important to share that this was not the only familial curriculum making¹⁶⁰ I had noticed. Below is a fragment of our conversation.

Me: There are lots of positive stories too. That's the thing too, if there is any research, it often seems to be negative. So, it's not all negative—just like your story.

Barb: No, I'm very happy that I have two girls. Sometimes parents say that they want a boy but I'm not into that. I am blessed to have girls. My husband never ever said a single word that he had a girl and doesn't have a boy. He never EVER [strongly emphasized] said that! Never!

Me: That's so good!

Barb emphatically: No never! I'm very happy that I'm blessed with girls. I love them!

Me attempting to clarify: Yes! There are some cases like that. But there are also the beautiful stories too we need to hear. I want to show there are these stories too. Plus, if

¹⁶⁰ Directing attention to a lovely familial curriculum making shaped by her parents, Khatau (2016) autobiographically shares that her parents supported her acting career to the astonishment of many in the Indian community and additionally, amongst non-Indians. She reflects:

Young Indian Americans constantly assert that getting support from their parents for a career like mine would be out of the question...It turns out that non-Indians I meet are certain that my parents loathe my career. They assume that my parents and I have a strained relationship. (pp. 91-92).

there are more people sharing their good stories, then hopefully, they can create change for other girls who might not be so lucky... I hope. (Transcript, March 19, 2016)

I found myself struggling with some of my emotions as I heard Barb speak. It felt so good to hear her stance articulated so beautifully. Barb was sharing a positive plotline for her girls that differed from some of the distressing ones that I had experienced, witnessed, and heard throughout my lifetime (Menon, 2018) and even some of the ones reflected in the academic literature. The devaluation of South Asian girls has deep cultural roots which has shaped intergenerational stories¹⁶¹. At the same time, alongside these harsh narratives, there exist uplifting storylines—which infrequently are made visible in scholarly works. Shifting attention away from a monolithic understanding of South Asian girls and women and moving towards a more intricate appreciation, I inquired into differing stories in my narrative beginnings and elsewhere in this dissertation, using various academic and other literature as possible points of connection.

An Inward Turn...

As I turned inward, my own school experiences became painfully more visible. Allowing my thoughts to take me back in time, I recall how a particular high school experience highlighted for me a story that was constructed *of* and *for* me. Grounded in gross hyperbole and misinformation, a school administrator conjured a plotline of and for me which cast me as a minor character with no power in my own life story. It was a time in my life where I had been seeking assistance. I wanted to think about doing an undergraduate degree. I wanted to know if I

¹⁶¹ Heir (2016) writes of a storied moment when her father asks her to help cook and in doing so, highlights a plotline of son preference, recalling:

Scrambled eggs were actually one of my favo[u]rite meals and I enjoyed making them, but I hated it when my dad insisted I help him. He rarely asked the boys to help around the house, but I still had to rake leaves and pick up sticks. (p. 75)

could enter a different world of school. A colleague had invited me to write a book review and I found myself inquiring into this storied moment alongside the words of Canadian South Asian poet Rupi Kaur (2017). I wrote:

Gathering my courage, I walked into the counsellor's office and tentatively expressed my hope of applying to university. I was in the midst of soliciting his advice, when he interrupted me. In a tone redolent with disparagement, he spoke, "You don't really need to worry about that do you? You're going to get married soon and you will be too busy." "Busy?" I had queried, bewildered. I understood I was being talked down to, but I was uncertain of the counsellor's meaning. All I knew was, the door to his office was closed and I wished I had never entered the room. His mock-sympathetic response, "Busy with babies," had my shy 16-year-old self, beating a hasty exit, my face tight with embarrassment. With the hindsight of experience, I recognize this man used his influence as a school official to belittle me. (Menon, 2018b, pp. 144-145)

This man, he had power and I was young. And even then, I was cognizant that he held stories of me that were not flattering. In this moment, he had constructed a storied image of me that bore no resemblance to the ones I held of myself. He did so with arrogance and no permission from me. In his narrative of me, this man had reproduced stereotypical depictions of Canadian-ness, that is, who can be Canadian, and what it means to be a South Asian female. If this administrator had been a female, Minh-ha (1989) might have suggested a feeling of ill-will in the frame of "I-who-have-made-it and You-who-cannot-make-it" (p. 86) might be at play. But what could be said about a man who holds authority over a younger person, a female of colour? As Williams Crenshaw (1994) notes, in comparison to racially privileged women, women of colour "are differently situated in the economic, social, and political worlds" (p. 96). Taking these

differences into consideration, I wondered further what could be said about a man who opts for a binary framework of compartmentalizing identity, where there is no room for the understanding of the nature of intersectionality¹⁶², complexity, and nuance in shaping lives. Could he even have fathomed the stories that my parents gave up in coming to Canada? Could he have understood the stories, they sought to narrate themselves in attempting to make a life in Canada? Kaur's (2017) words evocatively paints a scape that calls to me.

they have no idea what it is like
 to lose home at the risk of
 never finding home again
 to have your entire life
 split between two lands and
 become the bridge between two countries
-immigrant (p. 119)

I could not know then or now what his thoughts were of my parents or their upbringing of me, but I could posit a guess and it would not be encouraging. Dalmia (2003), a professor in South Asian Studies, reflecting upon her relationships with colleagues, comments on the ubiquitous nature of power in all encounters, noting, "Then as now, there have always been keepers of knowledge, sometimes self-appointed, from whom it had to be wrested and this itself was a never-ending exercise" (p. 75). For this white male administrator, education was not something

¹⁶² Crenshaw (1994) powerfully contends:

Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when the practices expound identity as "woman" or "person of colo[u]r" as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of colo[u]r to a location that resists telling. . . . Contemporary feminist and antiracist discourses have failed to consider the intersections of racism and patriarchy. (p. 93)

for the likes of me. Knowledge in his vernacular, I suspect, was something that could only be conferred on certain people. He had no idea that his words were echoing some of the familial curriculum making that had been shaping my young life. Thus, in this moment, listening to Barb speak about the love she and her husband had for their daughters, I felt elated. Akin to many of the parents I had encountered in my teaching of South Asian children, they loved their girls and wanted them to be uplifted. At the same time, in contrast to several South Asian parents I knew in my teaching practice, they were involved in curriculum making that positioned themselves *alongside* their girl children and not diametrically opposed to their daughters.

“I want her to be well-educated.”

The music had switched tempo and now it was the sound of ivories being tickled—happy notes made on a piano—that floated out into the bleachers. Down below, Katrina was making slow turns on the ice while Barb explained to me in more detail how she and her husband engaged in familial curriculum making which allowed for Katrina to experiment and move beyond rigid tropes of South Asian girls. Barb spoke about the parenting style she and her husband used with their girls. She imparted:

Look, I'm not very strict. Not like too strict parents. I want them [both her daughters] to enjoy their lives. My husband is like that too. I want Katrina to be well-educated. Then she will be able to make good decisions. We will let her make any decision she wants to make. It's not like we are going to put our thoughts on her. We will not do that. We will at least show her a path, a good path for her. You know, so many kids I see, they don't study. They just go on drugs and I don't want her to have problems like that. I want her to be well-educated, meet her boyfriend, get married or don't. She can do it. We are very, very open-minded. (Transcript, March 19, 2016)

I thought about the metaphor of the “*good path*” (Transcript, March 19, 2016) Barb had employed. She had indicated that both she and her husband would guide Katrina and again I was reminded that world travelling (Lugones, 1987) can be eased when there are loving people present. Barb placed a high value on education and by doing so, directed attention to the significance that worlds of school had and would have upon Katrina. “*The good path*” (Transcript, March 19, 2016) would be a means by which Barb and her husband could assist Katrina’s travels to her worlds of school. I was reminded of Clandinin, Murphy, and Huber’s (2011) insight that “familial curriculum making, is also shaping children’s identity-making, their writing of a curriculum of their life” (p. 9). Barb’s idea of curriculum making emphasized in part, the need for a good education in the formal sense, a need that could be fostered and nurtured in her daughter, Katrina. As she elaborated, “*I will make sure she gets a good education and that she will get a good life in her hands*” (Transcript, March 19, 2016).

For Barb, such an education involved being able to attend university. Essentially, work for Barb meant a movement away from the physically intensive labour often associated with low pay. Barb linked the idea of Katrina eventually “*getting good work*” (Transcript, March 19, 2016) with a formal education “*because education is important*” (Transcript, March 19, 2016). Laughing, as I had intended, at my joke that I could be considered a professional learner, Barb remarked more seriously “*Not everybody has that chance in their lives*” (Transcript, March 19, 2016). Continuing, she talked about her own career aspirations, “*I really wanted to go for nursing*” but the length of the program, “*four years*” was a challenge (Transcript, March 19, 2016). I nodded, recognizing that with Barb’s current familial responsibilities and intense work schedule, that taking time to study at this juncture in her life would be fraught with difficulty. As if in confirmation with my inner voice, Barb commented in a rueful tone, “*I will think in the*

future, if after three, four, or five years I'm still interested" (Transcript, March 19, 2016).

Turning our conversation back to Katrina, Barb expressed her dearest wish for her eldest daughter to have access to higher education, suggesting, "*Especially university, I would like that for her*" (Transcript, March 19, 2016). Barb's stories about herself echoed this hope. Formal education could serve as bridge to better employment opportunities for Katrina, a gateway to different worlds of a "*good life*" (Transcript, March 19, 2016).

A Hopeful Plotline in the Face of a Model Minority Perspective

Such a hopeful plotline matched what I had heard from several of the South Asian families I had encountered in school and community settings. Speaking about the same demographic albeit in an American context, Saran (2016) contends, "The prevalent belief of Asian Indian immigrants is that with hard work they can achieve high educational [levels] and gain economic success" (p. 27). This sentiment is congruent with the problematic ideas expressed within a model minority perspective. That is, South Asians living and educated in North America (due to their high achiever status) are able to do well in school and secure high paying employment.¹⁶³ This can be thought of as a taken-for-granted assumption that does little to trouble such a master narrative. Moreover, such a perspective is faulty in that it neglects the dynamic interaction of various factors such as socio-economic status, marital status, gender, sex, class, citizenship, immigration, ethnicity, and so forth, that may work upon and further, shape a person.¹⁶⁴ Barb's lived experiences give a sense of this complexity at play. As we watched

¹⁶³ I have frequently encountered this particular perspective and bumping up once more against this plotline during a graduate led student conference, I inquire into this storied moment of tension alongside wondering, what it means to be a South Asian narrative inquirer (Menon, 2018a).

¹⁶⁴ In the model minority discourse, racial inequality is de-emphasized while a simplistic correlation between a strong work ethic and economic mobility is upheld. In such a discourse, more complex and nuanced understandings

Katrina skate from where we sat on the bleachers, we continued to talk. Below is a picture of Katrina skating taken during another research visit (October 1, 2016) with Barb and Katrina.



65-Katrina Gliding by in Skates

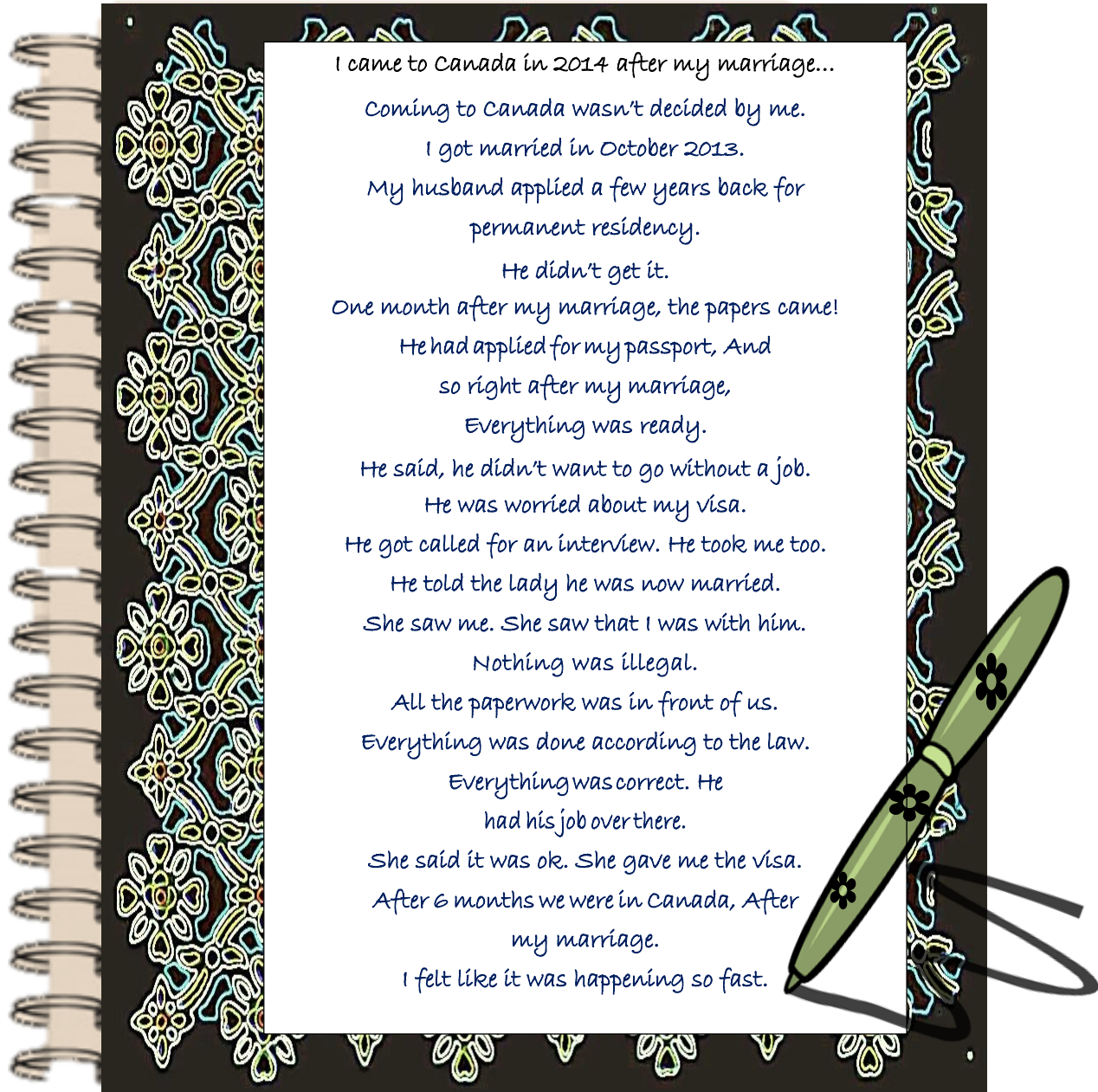
Musing nostalgically, Barb vocalized her thoughts about her move to Canada in relation to her then recent nuptials. Her words paint a poetic picture of how such considerations can craft a life

of South Asians as individuals and their curriculum making inside and outside of school settings are ignored. Rupam Saran (2016) elucidates:

The notion of the positive stereotype and model minority implies that the positive stereotype is prestigious, and that Asian Americans are immune to discrimination and do not face racism and marginalization like other negatively stereotyped ethnic groups. (p. 9)

In line with this viewpoint, the diversity inherent amongst the educational and economic experiences of South Asians is not afforded value or credence.

of experiences. Below is a found poetry piece—a collaged composition¹⁶⁵ of Barb sharing her story in her own words (Transcript, March 19, 2016).



In Barb's retelling of this special story of moving from one homeland to another, she

¹⁶⁵ This particular sharing of one of Barb's stories, I understood was another way of composing her annal.

foregrounds the multiplicity of her identity-making in relation to her new status as a married woman and Indian citizen who moves to Canada. She speaks of how quickly she experienced these events. Additionally, in this retelling of this storied moment, Barb brings to the forefront her understandings of the official process of immigrating to another country and the power dynamics which undergirded every step of the process. Listening to her words, there was no doubt in my mind that Barb was likewise awake to the complexity of being South Asian in a North American context—the differing, insidious, and at times, actively constraining forces operating against South Asians. Writing autobiographically, Badruddoja (2011) touches upon these issues from another (dis)similar perspective. She recounts:

I am often asked where my homeland is, where I learned to speak English (without an accent or an American accent), and when I “arrived” in this country. It is often unfathomable to many Americans...that my homeland is in the United States; it is even harder to comprehend that I did not arrive here. At times when gender is highlighted, I receive questions such as, “Was your marriage arranged?” Clearly the categories that I understand myself to belong in and the ways in which others see me carry social meaning. Power continues to cluster around certain (socially constructed) categories while exercising against others. (p. 6)

In voicing her hope for access to higher education for Katrina, Barb was not ignoring the existence of these complexities nor was she being idealistic and naive. Instead, she was breathing a fiery life into her hope *despite* these shaping forces. In this manner, I could sense that Barb was co-composing a counterstory (Lindemann Nelson, 1995) of, and for, Katrina. During a recorded public event, Lindemann Nelson (2014/2016) explicated what a counterstory is:

a counterstory is a story that's told for the purposes of resisting a socially shared narrative that's used to justify the oppression of a social group. The socially shared story enters the tissue of stories that constitute the group's identity and that in that way they damage the identity and so constrict group members access to the goods that are on offer in that society.

Understanding the repercussions of being storied in unrealistic and unidirectional ways accompanied by the denial of access to certain opportunities, I knew Barb wished to co-construct a different plotline for Katrina. She wished to help compose a counterstory which took into consideration the complexity of lives lived *alongside* a hopeful storyline of education. I took Barb's words as a powerful, rallying cry of resistance and resilience to an overarching hegemonic narrative of power differentials.

“Get married or don't. She can do it.”

Synchronously, Barb's curriculum making alongside Katrina emboldens a necessity of freedom and choice. Barb's indication that Katrina could choose for herself whether she would like to be married troubles a static image of South Asian girls having no choice in their marital status. Barb's decision arose from her contemplation of her own experiences. Yet, as Clandinin, Murphy, and Huber (2011) illuminate, it is not often that we purposefully attend to considerations of “relationality and multiperspectivity” (p. 12) when we consider the mixed-matched moments of our storied lives.

As we humans go about our days it is not usual that we are consciously reflecting on ways in which the personal and social, the past, present, and future, and place or places thread within, between, and across our experiences as we compose our

lives. (p. 12)

Barb, reflecting and learning from her experiences of growing up in India and shaped by a certain familial curriculum making in her world of home, informed me that she had made a definitive choice to educate Katrina differently. Being awake to the reverberations of these intergenerational stories within her familial curriculum making with her own children in turn shaped Barb's maternal pedagogy.¹⁶⁶ Barb's maternal pedagogy, as shared in her comments, "*I want her to be well-educated, meet her boyfriend, get married or don't. She can do it. We are very, very open-minded*" (Transcript, March 19, 2016), embodies a belief that girl children have value. I considered what this meant for Katrina. Given the opportunity of both a formal education and an education tempered with love at home, Katrina would grow into a confident and healthy adult who could make life decisions for herself. Barb's articulation of such a pedagogy refutes a 'Good Girl' story that can be thrust upon South Asian girls.

Bhattacharya (2016) explicates one version of such a story, a version which newer generations in the diaspora may experience:

Success is a funny thing for us Good Girls. Most of us have been schooled by our parents and communities since we were children not only to strive for but also to desire a certain kind of life: academic rigor, followed by a well-respected job, but within a career which might allow us to stay at home and raise our children once we marry a hard-working, respectful, and high-earning Desi¹⁶⁷ man. (p. vi)

¹⁶⁶ Holmes and Bond (2011) in their work with mothers, noted "women's epistemologies shape their conceptions about how children learn and develop, and these ideas, in turn, significantly influence maternal pedagogies" (p.102).

¹⁶⁷ *Desi*, as mentioned earlier in this dissertation, refers to people who are typically South Asian and who embody a blend of east and west values. Conferring belonging to a certain nation, it is a term whose origins are Sanskrit. For some, the term is innocuous. For others, it can be a label which is derogatory to those who are being labeled.

Bhattacharya's (2016) depiction of a 'Good Girl' might be viewed in a positive light in that it differs from other more seemingly restrictive 'Good Girl' images, possibly images shaped generations before. This modern depiction *allows* for South Asian girls the luxury of a formal education. Nevertheless, when scrutinized further, the image of this 'Good Girl' bears a striking similarity to ones shaped before it (and besides, and afterwards) as it continues to deny a girl her personhood. Effectively, choice is eliminated in each of these portrayals of a 'Good Girl'. For instance, in this reproduction, there still exists an expectation to marry and not only to marry but marry well. There is an unspoken understanding that males will be the main or sole breadwinner for the family—which comes to my next point. Children¹⁶⁸ are a natural expectation in this iteration of a 'Good Girl'. Further insult is apparent when we ascertain that to fall in line with this specific 'Good Girl' is to devalue a career which may distance a woman from her home. Freedom of choice is not made available in this variation of a 'Good South Asian Girl'.

Barb's comments very much focus upon the need for choice in Katrina's life and agitates even this arguably (at first glance) rosier and more modern¹⁶⁹ depiction of a 'Good Girl' for South Asian females. Barb's maternal pedagogy also repudiates other 'Good Girl' plotlines which all serve to flatten the possibilities of who a South Asian girl can be by attempting to superimpose an image of who a South Asian girl ought to be. Marriage, in Barb's view, is only one of many possibilities that can be accorded to Katrina. Education, through Barb's eyes, provides opportunities for personal and professional growth. Katrina has choice. Katrina has

¹⁶⁸ This image of a 'Good Girl' fails to honour the many-hued splendor of a diversity of relationships and families. As we know, children can be cherished in relationships between consenting adults, in single parent families, and in fact, in a multiplicity of family configurations. My hope is that freedom of choice should be prioritized when possible.

¹⁶⁹ Gandhi (2016) shines a light on the complexities of navigating contesting expectations for South Asian girls. She writes about the tensions she experienced growing up in the United States with visits to India during her summers. Attending an American graduate school, she divulged, "I had to prove to my family and myself that being born and raised in America did not make me any less Indian, any less Hindu or any less obedient" (p. 68).

freedom to choose who she wants to be and who she can be.

A Heart-full Musing Interlude: (im)Possible Images and Relationships



66-Wonders around (im)Possible Images and Relationships

In conversation with each of the co-participants in this narrative inquiry, I entertained wonders as to what storied images came to their minds when they thought about relationships especially with respect to their understandings of South Asians. Thinking with Barb's stories of relationships, connection, and choice, I decided to include this *heart*-full musing, sharing some of my wonders around western narratives and familial and cultural stories. I thought about how possibilities (as echoed in Barb's comments) could emerge within narratives aiming to confine.

“It’s changing. I feel so hopeful how things are changing so fast.”

Recognizing the hold of certain ‘Good Girl’ images, Barb noted that time could act as a shaping force. Barb reflected upon the power of time and change on attitudes and behaviour in India, more specifically Delhi where she was raised.

I think things have changed over there. Even my brother’s kids, now, they’re having grand adventures. They go everywhere. They do their own thing. Within one generation, things have changed a lot. My niece and nephew, now there’s a totally new generation! If they want to get married, they do it themselves. My eldest sister she found a boyfriend for herself. She married the boyfriend she wanted to marry. A lot has changed. (Transcript, March 19, 2016)

Barb's voice was upbeat and indicated a strong appreciation in the passage of time which she believed allowed for positive changes to occur. She viewed the freedoms of mobility and choice of whether to marry or not as important signifiers in progress. I understood that Katrina having access to these freedoms would not be a problem for her. Barb very much valued the possibility of choice.

Thinking about this freedom of choice, I wondered about Barb's own experiences with

her parents. While Barb was a passionate advocate for opportunities of education, mobility, employment, and marital status, I found myself thinking about Barb's childhood and her upbringing. I asked Barb as to whether her parents had embodied similar sentiments for her when she was young. Choosing her words with care, Barb was contemplative in her response:

I was born in Punjab, but brought up in Delhi.... They were thinking—they didn't do anything bad. But they acted according to their society, their environment. But now, this [educating her daughters] is something in my hands! [Laughing] I want to do it my way! It's not the same over there as it was back then. It's changing. I feel so hopeful how things are changing so fast. It's modern. (Transcript, March 19, 2016)

Barb's insight into the actions and mindset of her parents with respect to formal educational experiences brought into focus her understanding that her parents' upbringing played a critical shaping role in their familial curriculum making. Barb's respect and love for her parents was easy to discern. Referencing "society" and "environment", the role of home too, becomes visible in Barb's response. Home can be a space replicating the values of "society" and "environment" and perhaps, counterintuitively be perceived as also a site for change. Thinking about the latter consideration, Mohanty (1993) mulls home for her, and by extension other South Asian women in the diaspora, may not be

a comfortable, stable, inherited and familiar space, but instead [can be perceived] as an imaginative, politically charged space where the familiarity and sense of affection and commitment lay in the shared collective analysis of social justice, as well as a vision of radical transformation (p. 353)

Barb's idea of home seemed to be leaning more towards this kind of idea of home where

love shaped forward looking stories embroidered with consideration of the complexities of the past and present but with a hopeful vision for the future. For Katrina's sake and that of her younger sister, Barb made visible, home was a place of sustenance and hope and to borrow Mohanty's (1993) words, a source of "radical transformation" (p. 353). Citing a temporal distinction between *now* and *then* in India, Barb made it clear that she felt there was an onus on her part to act and think differently than her parents. This passage in time, equated to an opportunity for Barb to advocate for Katrina an education in a formal sense and an education in a more robust sense, shaped around choice. Allowing Barb's words to wash over me, I admired that she had taken on the responsibility and identity of being a change-maker, a responsibility that she did not shirk but seemed to embrace wholeheartedly.

"I want to keep her active!"

Around 9:30 in the morning, I eagerly jumped in my car and made my way to Katrina's house.¹⁷⁰ The sun was a welcome companion as I fiddled with my phone and pulled up the most comfortable set of directions for me on my Google Maps App. I was impatient to see Katrina and knew from Barb that she was looking forward to us spending the day together. I made good time on the roads and as I parked, Barb opened the front door of her house and welcomed me in. While Katrina got ready, Barb warmly directed me to a seat beside her on the family couch. Katrina's little sister was away at daycare and Barb had the next couple of days off from work. In response to my question as to where her husband was, Barb let me know that he was still recovering from an injury to his leg and was resting upstairs. I was disappointed to hear that he was still in pain, but it was good to be back in conversation with Barb. It had felt far too long since I had seen her. I listened avidly as she shared with me that Katrina had been involved in a

¹⁷⁰ Deepika had been unable to meet up with Katrina and myself this day.

summer school camp where she had been undertaking Indian dance lessons. *“This is Katrina dancing”* (Research Notes, Friday, July 29, 2016) Barb proudly announced and proceeded to show me a video clip on her phone. I watched as Katrina moved rhythmically with a group of girls, dancing in tandem to the accompaniment of music. Dressed in a purple and green outfit, her lips curved in a wide grin, Katrina was style personified. The clip carried me back in time as I recalled the different dances and varied performances, I had helped children learn for the many concerts and shows put on throughout the academic year. This was a nice memory for me, and I could not help but smile along with Barb in pleasure. Katrina was having fun and though she had not performed for the school Talent Show, she had done so in another venue. Katrina had taken ballet lessons for three years and Barb had wanted Katrina to try something different, frankly remarking, *“I want to keep her active! I don’t want her sitting down and doing nothing”* (Research Notes, Friday, July 29, 2016). Katrina herself had mentioned, she had become *“bored”* with ballet, suggesting that *“it was getting tiring”* (Transcript, Friday, July 29, 2016). I recognized this was not the first time I had heard Barb speak about wanting her eldest daughter to be active in both mind, body and spirit. I recognized that for Barb, spending time swimming, skating, and dancing were ways in which she was encouraging Katrina to be a strong and healthy person. It was not too far removed for me to understand that Barb’s permission of allowing Katrina to spend time with me in and outside of school was of similar curriculum making. Activities which engaged the heart, mind, and body which offered Katrina opportunities to grow were welcomed if not actively pursued by Barb for her daughter. Chung and Clandinin (2010) once carefully observed, *“Family stories appear to be so deeply and tightly woven that, even when we try to loosen the strands, each story in the web continues to reverberate through each curriculum of life”* (p. 192). I thought about Barb’s story of opportunity that she wished for her

daughter and her glowing pride in Katrina's captivating performance and Katrina's subsequent delight in being able to perform—in this instance, such reverberations were most welcome.

Pump it: A Maternal Pedagogy at Play

I was stunned by how much Katrina had changed in a matter of weeks. Barb pointed to Katrina and asked with no little maternal pride, “*What do you think of Katrina's hair?*” (Research Notes, Friday, July 29, 2016). Katrina's hair had been recently cut and flatteringly shaped around her pretty face with her bangs swept off to the side. Her summer dress boasted a black top and a narrow skirt composed of a pleasing mix of greens, blues and pinks. “You look so grown up Katrina! I love your new hair style!” (Research Notes, Friday, July 29, 2016), I told her even as I went to hug her. The suggestion of shyness I caught sight of, disappeared from her face and she returned my hug easily. “*My hair's shorter now!*” (Research Notes, Friday, July 29, 2016). Barb, in the meanwhile had tugged out a pair of runners from the closet for Katrina and I was touched when she asked Katrina if she had remembered to pack her memory book in her knapsack. Barb had already asked what our plans for the day were. Katrina had indicated she wanted to watch the movie, *The Secret Lives of Pets* which wasn't playing until later that afternoon. So, we decided prior to the movie we could have lunch and take that time to catch-up. Barb let me know that Katrina was excited to see how the pictures she had taken earlier had turned out.

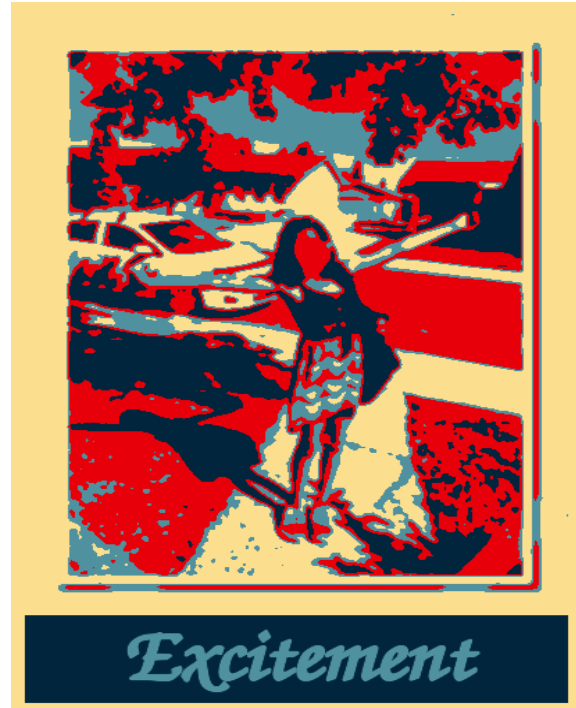
Not too much later, I started the car and The Black Eyed Peas' catchy tune *Pump it* filled the confines of my car. I glanced over at Katrina, caught off guard when she began to sing along. The song was not very new and I wouldn't have thought she would know it. For me, it brought back memories of a Grade Six graduation ceremony in which the song played as background as the children made their way past family and friends to the stage. Soon we both were loudly

singing the chorus, *Pump it! Louder!* and happily humming along to the popular song. And in this cheerful fashion, we journeyed to my place singing to lyrics of various songs we both knew and didn't know. Later at my house, between bites of a cinnamon bun and sips of lemonade, Katrina shared that taking part in the dance lessons during the summer had not been something she had initially been keen to do. I listened bemused as Katrina explained to me how she became involved in the summer dance program largely because of her mother's persuasion.

My mom asks me a question and she's like, "Do you want to do this? and then I'm like, "No," and then she's like, "Do you want to do this?" and then I'm like, "No," and she's like, "Do it! You have to!" And I'm like, "But it's a question. There's no right or wrong in your answer!" (Transcript, Friday, July 29, 2016)

I was struck by how Katrina might have missed out on an opportunity to develop her skill and talent if Barb had not encouraged her daughter to try something different. Katrina had been initially reluctant to engage in learning Indian dance this summer. Yet, having watched the video clip of her engaging performance, I understood that this young girl had a change of heart. Inwardly, I mused thinking upon Tico¹⁷¹ once more and the unique qualities of Katrina, perhaps one's golden feathers had to be burnished before one could take flight? So, who could do the burnishing if children found themselves unable to do so for whatsoever reason? The Black Eyed Peas song, *Pump It*, which Katrina and I had been singing along to earlier was still running through my mind. Maybe, I thought with additional whimsy, it takes at least one special person in a child's life to help "pump" that validating message of *You are deserving, you are special* "louder" so that it can drown out the other voices real and imagined which make it all the more

¹⁷¹ Tico, who happens to be a bird, is the main character in the children's story, *Tico and the Golden Wings*, by Leo Lionni. I speak of this book in more detail in my narrative account alongside Katrina and Deepika.



67-An Exuberant Katrina¹⁷²

challenging for a young person to be who she wants to be in a given moment. Barb was a superstar in my mind. She had pumped the message “louder” so Katrina could join the dance group. I wondered if this could be in some way a type of maternal pedagogy at play. The pleasure which had suffused Katrina’s face as she danced, and later when Katrina shared with me privately “*So we went up on stage for the dance. Then after, everyone got on the stage altogether to show the certificate that was given to us*” (Transcript, Friday, July 29, 2016) was wonderful to behold. Additionally, Barb’s pleasure in her daughter as she played the clip helped me to see the possibilities made tangible when a child hears this quality of amplified message—one which is conveyed by a trusted individual. This affirmation may be what is needed to move beyond doubt generated by others and self-doubt. As I reread passages of the transcript of the recording taken

¹⁷² Seeing Katrina after what seemed a long time, I was thrilled to see her once more, and I believe she was equally excited. I took a picture of her with my phone and have digitally (re)imagined the image in the form of a poster exemplifying Excitement.

later that day, I continued to think about what it means to hold a sense of pride for one's culture and how Katrina was understanding herself in relation to the cultural and intergenerational stories she was living with and within. Below is a fragment of our conversation:

Me: Do you feel proud of your culture?

Katrina, in a matter of fact voice: Yes.

Me: Why?

Katrina: It's like we're different and have so many cool ways of having a lifestyle.

Me, faltering, while trying to find the right words in which to ask: Do you think it makes you uh, um, special?

Katrina: Yeah, it does. [Long Pause] Everyone is different in their own ways.

(Transcript, Friday, July 29, 2016)

Within the family world of curriculum making, I understood Katrina was receiving messages from Barb and her husband that activities and events which foregrounded these rich cultural and affirmational narratives were worthy of honouring. They were ways in which family members could come together to support one another and to also live out positive plotlines within community worlds of curriculum making as well. Unlike the school curriculum which could make it challenging for children of colour to share their talents in safe ways—ways which could exoticize them or render them different (in a pejorative sense) from the rest of their peers, Barb alongside her husband, was making it possible for Katrina to live out difference as a true celebration of home and community, within a storyline of acceptance and love.

“Aunty! Aunty Jinny! We're here!”

I was seated in the corner of the coffee shop and was looking out the window, appreciating the sun that had come out of the clouds. It was a blustery day and the wind had

caught several plastic bags up in its arms and proceeded to toss them about the parking lot. A sudden tug on my sleeve had me looking away from the expansive pane of glass into the bright, twinkling gaze of Katrina's little sister, Ashi¹⁷³. "*Aunty! Aunty Jinny! We're here!*" (Research Notes, May 7, 2017) she cried brightly, delighted to make her announcement to the indulgent pleasure of families seated nearby. I smiled in response as much to the little girl's exuberance as to the honourific title that she had cast upon me. Katrina and her father, Ron¹⁷⁴ were not too far behind. I waved a hand to catch their attention and after a flurry of hugs, Katrina's sister, Ashi and Ron sat down while Katrina and I made our way to the front of the shop to order some snacks and drinks. I had already learned that Barb would be joining us a little later because she had an appointment nearby. As we stood in line, Katrina's initial shyness gave away to her natural enthusiasm as she eagerly shared that her Grade Five class was busy growing crystals in the classroom. As I listened to her excitedly speak, I felt myself tugged back in time to when I was a Grade Five teacher. That too, had been one of my favourite projects to do in Science alongside the students and I was pleased to share this with Katrina, adding that each student had the opportunity to grow their own coloured crystals. I paused when I saw a look of consternation cross Katrina's face. She shook her head setting rich dark brown strands of hair dancing as she let me know that things were different in her class, "*We have to work in groups*" (Research Notes, May 7, 2017). A funny feeling came over me and I recognized wryly, I was feeling envious of both Katrina and Deepika's teachers who could spend more time with them. Ordering some pastries that we could all share and some cold chocolate milk for Katrina's little sister, some hot chocolate for Katrina, a double tea for Barb (with Katrina's advice), and some coffees for Katrina's father and myself, we meandered back to the corner table.

¹⁷³ Ashi, is the name, Katrina lovingly conferred on her sister as a moniker for this dissertation.

¹⁷⁴ Ron, is a pseudonym for Barb's husband.

Barb arrived not too long after we had taken our seats explaining that she had been with her physiotherapist whose office was not too far from here. Barb reminded me she had some issues with her back, adding in commiseration, “*I know your back has been hurting too*” (Voice Notes, May 7, 2017). I understood that each of us, Barb and her family, and myself did not exist in a vacuum. Our lives were in perpetual motion. Clandinin (2013) illuminates beautifully that we as participants and researchers live our lives in the midst. She makes visible:

As participants’ and researchers’ lives meet in the midst of each of our unfolding complex and multiple experiences, we begin to shape time, places, and spaces where we come together and negotiate ways of being together and ways of giving accounts of our work together. What we need to think about here is the sense that it is not only the participants’ and researchers’ lives in the midst but also the nested set of lives in which each of us live. (p. 44)

Within the midst of our unfolding lives, Barb and I had exchanged text messages. During the lull between my get togethers with both Katrina and Deepika, Barb was privy to some of the challenges I had been experiencing as I was also with her. However, in this moment, not wishing to go down that particular memory path, I lightly quipped, “*It must be contagious!*” (Voice Notes, May 7, 2017) and felt simultaneously relieved and pleased when the adults at the table laughed in response (Research Notes, May 7, 2017). They too, understood that sometimes it’s enough to show empathy followed by a deliberate looking away. Such a purposeful silence can be imbued with care.

A Heart-full Musing Interlude: Reflecting on Being in the Midst



68-Being in the Midst

Throughout this narrative inquiry, I have (re)turned to this idea of being in the midst. The complexity of lives being lived were qualities I could see might not be attended to in other kinds of qualitative research. I was gaining a deeper appreciation as to how being a narrative inquirer was helping me to become more wakeful (Greene, 1995) to how people's lives unfold in all their messiness. In this heart-full musing I give shape to some of my feelings of worry that I was not where I had hoped to be in terms of the research. Weighing me down was the idea that I was letting so many people down—the girls (Katrina and Deepika) and their mothers (Barb and

Vam), the teacher (Anne), my supervisor and friend, Jean, my family, and myself as well. Intellectually, I understood that events had occurred in my life (and continued to occur) which had not been easily negotiated and may require ongoing time to navigate. Emotionally, was another story. I had storied myself as not being responsible or capable. In this *heart-full* musing, I also share how my thinking was slowly changing in response to being in community. I was beginning to understand that being in the midst was not necessarily comfortable and that it was more than okay to feel as such. The books are representative of the stories of participants, me as a narrative inquirer, and others too. The tea pot and accompanying teacups were decorated with a peacock motif in a way to visually depict this narrative inquiry. The warmth of tea, in this case, my favourite chai, symbolized the warmth of being in community.

Shaping Family Moments in the Midst of “Rush, rush, rush!”

Watching as the girls dug eagerly into the sweet confections, I wondered if everyone would like something else to eat. Asking the family if they wished for something more substantial to eat, Ron interjected, “*No, we got up a little late today but had a lot of leftovers*” (Voice Notes, May 7, 2017). As I listened, I learned that this family often tried to make time to have breakfast together over the weekends. As the conversation continued, both Barb and her husband explained why leisurely breakfasts were not possible during the week.

Ron: On Sundays, I cook breakfast for everyone. Sausage and eggs and stuff like that.

Me: That sounds like a nice breakfast!

Barb: I don't get any time during the whole week to make a breakfast like that!

Ron: I'm gone at 5:00 in the morning, every morning.

Barb laughing: And, I don't ever have time in the morning! I have to get ready this one and this one [indicating her daughters] and I need to go to work too. We go together. So, then it's rush, rush, rush!

Me: Sounds so busy! What time do you come home?

Ron: Sometimes 6:00, sometimes later.

Barb: I come home after 4:00 sometime. 4:30 sometimes (Recording, May 7, 2017).

It was clear to me from previous chats and visits that Barb and her husband greatly valued their time together as a family. I knew this was not easy for them to accomplish as the work schedules of husband and wife were quite hectic. Also, Barb's recent shift into a new position at her place of work, a change though she had indicated was positive, also necessitated additional attention. I recollected how both parents' strong work ethic, especially that of her mother's, was a pronounced story echoed in some of the stories Katrina had shared with me. Time was precious. Work played an important role in shaping Barb and Ron's lives. However, another storyline of needing to be present and there for family was equally prominent. The following found poems (Recording May 7, 2017), weaving across time forward and backwards, inwards and outwards, spanning geography, and people embody these plotlines in unique ways.

A Retelling in Barb's Words of Family and Home

I was born in Punjab but raised in Delhi
I have two sisters and two brothers
I'm the youngest one in the family
My eldest sister,
I didn't spend too much time with her.
We had too much of an age gap
She wasn't staying with us.
Had another sister, there's a big age gap.

We fought at times, she gave me advice.
My brother, I was close to.
Distance- He's there, I'm here.
Things change...I'm the only one here I
have two kids. Life is busy is here.
Every week, I called my mom.
Now, just the weekend. There's no time.
She is always waiting for my call.

Woven Retellings: Barb's Blue Strands, Ron's Green Strands, and Katrina's Purple Strands

I had applied to come to Canada.
 I applied two or three years before marriage.
 Within 6 months of that we were here. Our first anniversary was here.
 Yes, here. We were preparing all that time to come here.
 My parents didn't think we would be going to Canada.
 Yes, because I had applied so long ago.
 I think we received the letter for the interview on December 25
 February was the interview.
 Basically, they asked you about your work qualifications and details of your education.
 There can't be any fraud.
 They check for that. I had worked, so I was good.
 We were just married. Sometimes they don't accept you. So, I was lucky.
 But they told us to get our medical tests ready and submit our passports.
 Wow! I didn't know that.
 You both are lucky, you didn't have to spend years in 50 degree weather! Laughing...
 Laughing...
 Two years we spent in Ontario. It was very hard to survive there.
 In my new job, they got me a new apartment here and paid the damage deposit.
 I got twice as much here for the same job. It was good.

Listening to Barb and Ron speak with interjections from Katrina, Barb's earlier retellings became more rich and colourful with detail and expression. The textures of stories overlapped and intermingled drawing forth resonances as I, alongside Katrina, learned more about Barb and Ron's early beginnings as a married couple leaving India for Canada. Echoing a sense of home, family, and work, these storylines stitched themselves into pictured view.

Stories of Caste, Naming, and (Be)Longing: “We’re carrying it forward...”

Several times in this narrative inquiry (and beforehand), I have found my thoughts travelling to hard stories and lingering within and amidst them. Here, I am thinking specifically of experiences which have been knotted by storied threads of caste, naming, and (be)longing. Using Indian household survey data, Desai and Dubey (2011) found “a continued persistence of caste disparities in education, income and social networks” (p. 40). The authors contend:

While caste affiliations remain ubiquitous in modern India with surnames, marriage arrangements, dress and food habits often characterizing caste distinctions, the extent to which caste defines the fundamental structure of social stratification in India has become a subject of contentious debates. (p. 40)

Rohinton Mistry (1995), author of *Fine Balance*, helps me to think about the persistence of caste as narrative threads in peoples’ lives. Through his character, Parther Chatterjee, Mistry reveals the working cogs within the ugly machinery of caste.

The essence of caste, we may say, requires that the labouring bodies of the impure castes be reproduced in order that they can be subordinated to the need to maintain the bodies of the pure castes in their state of purity. (p. 194)

Outside of Mistry’s (1995) work of fiction, such claims of purity attempt to subvert ongoing efforts to create new realities, new storylines. As Barb and Ron began to shade in the silences in the stories that they had begun to share with me in broad strokes earlier within the busy little coffee shop, I was reminded that stories of caste, naming, and (be)longing continue to be lived outside of India as well. Ron and Barb spoke of troubling times shaped by Punjabi community members. The found poem which follows helps to illuminate their experiences.

Even our own people can treat us poorly.

So, if you look at a name, you can tell which state he belongs to. They can look at our full name and tell which caste you belong to.

If you belong to a certain caste, they won't talk with you.

They don't want to do anything with you.

Yes, that really happens.

Out of 100 people of our own country, only 10 of them will talk to us properly. 90 of them would be, "Okay, I'm not going to carry a conversation with you." Let's just get it over with and go on our own way. That's the way it is over there.

It is what it is. Our country has been like that for ages.

It's the older people from India who are the hardliners.

They brought that culture with them. This is the main reason why people act poorly.

We experienced this a lot.

We were told that you will experience this.

"So, don't be alarmed about it. Don't care about it."

And even when we faced those kinds of people, we didn't care about it.

Our Punjabi people will ask, "Which state do you come from?" You say,

"Delhi..." and that's the end of the conversation.

We didn't care because we didn't want to hang out with these kinds of people.

It's their loss. Not ours.

The first generation to come over here, they brought this over here.

But we're not teaching this to our kids.

So, the second generation living here won't know about this.

Yes...yes...

So, they won't think of this as a hinderance to hang out with people of different castes.

The third generation will completely forget about this kind of thing.

We brought that thing from India And

we are carrying it forward... It's not

our choice.

As Katrina's little sister happily coloured away on some paper with markers I had on hand, Katrina quietly listened. I wondered what thoughts were going through her head as her parents spoke. What was she learning from these stories of caste, naming, and (be)longing? They were perturbing for me as an adult and I wondered how her stories to live by would be shaped by her parents' experiences. I wondered at the reverberations experienced by Ron and Barb, moving forward. Hearing Barb and Ron speak about their community experiences, I recollected that caste which refers to a hereditary privilege, is typically (and incorrectly) seen as only a Hindu proclivity. Barb and Ron showed it is not. Their stories and other stories I have heard from family and community members remind me not only do these (un)comfortable¹⁷⁵ plotlines stretch across time, place, and people, they continue to reverberate in (un)subtle and (un)healthy ways in our lives.

Voices vibrating with anguish, Barb and Ron spoke about unyielding borders (Menon & Saleh, 2018) that sought to confine in the form of caste and name. When Ron talked about his experiences with other members in his community and commented, "*They can look at our full name and tell which caste you belong to*" (Recording, May 7, 2020), I returned once more to Mistry's (1995) *Fine Balance*. Even while recognizing Mistry is primarily vested in composing a harrowing portrait of the repercussions of practicing caste within Hindu communities to the exclusion of other communities, I could discern spaces of overlap. The authority wielded through names and naming and the privilege associated with names and naming is conveyed masterfully in the sage advice given by a father to his two sons. Dukhi had made the courageous decision to alter his children's paths and made it possible for them to take up the trade of tailor—a move

¹⁷⁵ I use the descriptor of (un)comfortable to better reflect the different range of feelings experienced by diverse South Asians familiar with caste. For me, caste brings home the horror of people's experiences and the terrible disparities in the lives lived by Indians within India and abroad in the diaspora.

away from the trade of cobbler which they had been assigned at birth. Dukhi advises, “If someone asks your name, don’t say Ishvar Mochi or Narayan Mochi. From now on you are Ishvar Darji and Narayan Darji” (p. 115). Barb’s and Ron’s experiences reveal a similar bravery. They came to Canada and defiantly eschewed a storyline which demarks people away from people. They are using their wisdom to teach their young family “*so, they won’t think of this as a hinderance to hang out with people of different castes*” and to make it so that “*the third generation will completely forget about this kind of thing*” (Recording, May 7, 2017).

(Re)Visiting our First Conversation: Touching on the Experiences of Missing Women

As a means of contextualizing this section and the subsequent one, I draw upon the work of Gill and Mitra-Khan (2008; 2009), who make devastating clear:

Women in South Asia have a biologically abnormal chance of mortality from conception until their mid-30s. This phenomenon (known as ‘missing women’) is related to son preference and daughter devaluation, which manifests itself in sex-selective abortions and gender-biased allocations of health care and nutrition. (p. 1)

Gill and Mitra-Khan (2008; 2009) make visible the practices of son preference and daughter devaluation which also contribute to the repeated occurrence of missing women present in diasporic Indian communities. During our very first meeting when Barb asked me why I was engaging in this research, among other considerations, we had touched upon the practices of daughter devaluation alongside son preference. Unsure of how what I said would be received, I tried to gather my thoughts and in doing so, found myself thinking about the stories that had reverberated (in multifarious ways) across and within generations in my family. Yet, I did not begin with these familial stories. Instead, I began with different ones which had recently pushed

me into taking a visible stance. I spoke about my dissertation proposal presentation where I had shared a slide I had created in remembrance of South Asian women who were missing or who had died due to violence against them, one of whom I had known personally. I spoke of the need for different stories to be shared. I spoke of children's books which could be a site for change (Menon, 2014). I spoke of my hope that this research could amplify diverse perspectives. Barb nodded throughout and I recollect coming to a stumbling halt wondering how I could explain the pain I felt about these narratives which persisted and the lack of recognition for other ones which too existed. I spoke about a recent trip to India as part of a group of academics and organizations advocating for the rights for girls to have an education. I spoke about my experiences as an elementary teacher working alongside South Asian girls. As I paused with my thoughts scattered, Barb spoke. She spoke and I listened. Barb was vehement in her disavowal of practices of daughter devaluation and son preference. Over the two hours as we got to know one another better, I understood Barb's reasoning for ultimately agreeing to be a partner in this research and moreover, for acquiescing to her daughter's desire to be a partner in this research, was because Barb wanted to share other mother and girlhood stories to live by. In this manner, we recognized one another as proponents for fostering healthy South Asian girlhood experiences and furthermore, as advocates wishing to foreground the diverse experiences of South Asian women.

Countering a Narrative of Son Preference and Daughter Devaluation

Barb and Ron were unrepentant in disrupting an intergenerational and cultural tale of old, one whose plotlines continue to echo in upsetting ways in the here and now. This was a story which venerates a preference for sons over girls within certain Indian communities. Their abhorrence of such a narrative became more prominent as they shared. Employing the structure of a found poem, Barb's (blue) and Ron's (green) narrativizing illuminate their perspectives.

Safety is so important for my kids.
 I have some concerns for them there.
 When I'm with my girls,
 Sometimes, I feel
 It's not safe for them down there.
 This is the best place.
 My mom has favoured boys.
 My dad did too.
 Not from my family!
 And we have never cared about that!
 Ron never pushed me that way.
 We don't think about that they're girls.
 We think of them as our kids.
 The community pushes you this way.
 Everybody gets into your brain...
 Trying to put something in your head.
 That thing is wrong. It exists here.
 People did say things about having boys,
 But I didn't listen to anyone.
 The community pushes...
 I just wanted kids.

I felt bad about how the girls were treated
 when they were born.
 They were crying at the hospital.
 They didn't give them a hug. I felt so bad. I
 was going through so much.
 I even had a c-section.
 My husband was never negative. "We
 have a baby girl! We have two!" Even
 before, they were born,
 I was buying baby girl clothes.
 There has always been a difference
 For girls and boys.
 We didn't have that many rights.
 Even when I go home,
 I get treated differently...
 I really hated that! I hated that...
 My mom though,
 She was very, very good to me.
 Later, I never ever said
 That I wanted a boy or a girl. I
 just wanted... a healthy child

Slipping back in time to bring forward their familial stories of their daughters' births, Barb and Ron brought to vibrant life their conviction that daughter devaluation has no place in their hearts and ought not find succor in others'. Having daughters were true gifts in the eyes of Barb and Ron. While, the presence of certain stories carried a heavy weight which both parents recognized and even bore uneasily, Ron and Barb had received each of their daughters in love. I

understood with deepening appreciation that Barb and Ron in making a deliberate choice to turn away from such stories were making an equally purposeful decision to craft their own familial stories to live by. These stories would be shaped in a different home from where Ron and Barb had been born, a place they deemed more “safe” (Recording, May 7, 2017) for their daughters. Such safety, I understood, was of paramount importance to these parents as they sought to lovingly paint different possibilities for their girls.



69-Family at the Coffee Shop

A Nested Story of Katrina’s Name

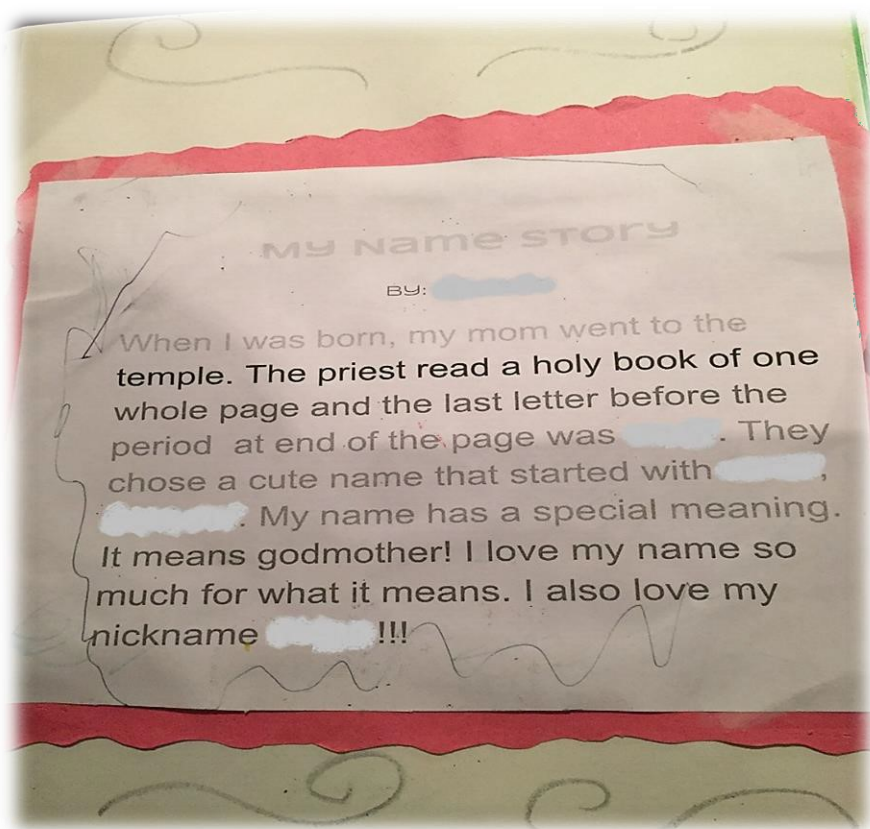
Continuing to sit with Barb’s family in the busy warmth of a lazy afternoon unfolding, I wondered aloud about what Ron and Barb thought about their names. Nested one within another, Barb, Ron, and Katrina shared stories around their names. A found poem serves to bring their voices (Barb’s represented in blue, Ron’s in green, and Katrina’s in purple), in arresting view.

If people can't say my name. I don't mind it.
 It's ok with me. They can use this name.
 They can't say my name. They shortened it.
 Some people shorten my name. I don't like it.
 They compared me to a _____.
 For a period of time, They started calling me this, _____.
 What?!
 We already tried to give you a short name.

There's a story behind her name.
 We picked out three names.
 I used to work in a small town and there was not a single brown person there. I asked everyone, a hundred people to pronounce all three of the names
 And this one was the only one they pronounced properly-
 Ninety-nine out of a hundred people

I didn't know that!
 Yes... But first we used the book,
 We looked up the letter and picked two to four names.
 Somebody put my name on the board,
 You know for heating up your food in the microwave.
 And one guy, he spelled my name in the WORST WAY possible!
 It looked like _____!
 I didn't like it...

Thinking with these naming stories and stories of being named, I was reminded of Katrina's Grade Four teacher, Anne's assignment around names. Unlike her friend, Deepika who had chosen to include this writing in her memory book fairly early on, Katrina had chosen to do so later and did not show me her school writing around her name until December 11, 2016 during one of get togethers (see: following page). Sitting with Barb, Ron, Katrina and her sister, Ashi, I felt that this occasion might have been one of the very first times, that such a frank discussion about their names had been introduced. I learned that for Barb, the way in which her birth name was taken up by people was not something she worried about. Barb had shared this same sentiment with me during our very first meeting together and so, her feelings felt familiar to me.



*My Name Story
by Katrina*

When I was born, my mom went to the temple. The priest read a holy book of one whole page and the last letter before the period at the end of the page was _____ [letter of alphabet]. They chose a cute name that started with _____ [letter of alphabet], _____ [birth name]. My name has a special meaning. It means godmother. I love my name so much for what it means. I also love my nickname _____ [nickname]!!!

70-Katrina's Stories of her Names: Writing Composed within School World

Her husband, Ron seemed a little less disinterested, noting that his birth name was typically shortened arbitrarily by other people. And hearing him speak, I understood that this action was not something he necessarily condoned. Instead, both Barb and Ron appeared resigned to having their names articulated by others in different ways than originally intended. Thus, learning that Katrina's name had been chosen with care had not come as a complete surprise to me. However, hearing that Katrina's name had been thoroughly vetted before being gifted upon her, caught me unawares even as the reasoning behind such strong measures made sense to me. As I metaphorically rested one school story of Katrina's name (see picture above) alongside the story she shared during this conversation and additionally, within the stories her parents retold and relived, I nodded inwardly. Katrina's name was truly a gift of love in that her parents wished for

her name to be something that would not be a cause for pain. Barb's dismay in hearing that Katrina's name had, despite every precaution, been shortened in this fashion, was not welcome news. As we continued to chat in this little coffee place, Katrina had made visible for her parents that she had gone through some of the same experiences as they had. Katrina's disclosure that she had not liked her name being misspoken and misspelled was a story which I feared might be repeated through her lifetime. I had such experiences (Menon, 2015; Saleh, Menon, & Kubota, 2018). Nonetheless, I gathered that Katrina would be better equipped to handle these naming challenges than perhaps, other children living similar experiences. Katrina had her parents' support and their shared understandings of personal naming stories and being named in stories.

Barb's Shakti: "I still fight...I will never give up!"

As the door swung open and closed, signaling the entrance and departure of customers in the little coffee shop, we continued our conversation at our table. A cozy and comfortable atmosphere suffused with the smell of warm baked goods and aromatic coffee helped to ease our talk back and forth into difficult matters. Work, was a topic which each of us adults discussed with varying degrees of dis/ease. In previous chats, Barb and I had shared some of our experiences around work. In this conversation, Barb took time to explain though she had lived some positive early working experiences, she also had lived some challenging work experiences. Barb noted that when she first came to Canada, the young people she worked alongside were welcoming and went out of their way to help her acclimatize to a new culture, a new working environment, and the new land which she was coming to view as another shape of home. In contrast, when discussing her current work situation, Barb's experiences were not as pleasant and her dealings with her management were complex. There was a quiet ferocity to her words when Barb voiced the challenges she faced in being recognized for the work she was doing,

noting that employees who did less, fared better than she did in this area—that is, certain individuals received recognition for doing very little. This was a sentiment that Barb had brought up before with me and I could sense her frustration at this unequal treatment. At the same time, in previous conversations with Barb and in the midst of this one, I was humbled by Barb’s determination to not let the racism she encountered dissuade her from trying her best. This conviction was evidenced in Barb’s knowing that she wanted her daughters to both understand that it was important to take a stance and fight for what you wanted and what you believed in. Barb voiced this as a “*pushing past*” (Recording, May 7, 2017) the racism she faced regularly and an unshakable faith in herself to make herself be seen and heard. As she passionately articulated, “*I still fight!*” and “*I will never give up!*” (Recording, May 7, 2017). I quietly came to call Barb’s determination, her *shakti*. Indians define *shakti* differently often emphasizing strength, power, and/or creative energy. I saw all of these qualities in Barb. Her earlier comments relating to Katrina, “*I want to keep her active! I don’t want her sitting down and doing nothing*” (Research Notes, Friday, July 29, 2016) abruptly took on other layered shades of meaning. I understood that there were powerful undercurrents to this seemingly innocuous statement. Here, I could better sense the reasons why Barb wished Katrina to have a strong work ethic in whatever she chose to do. Aside from this, Barb wanted her girls to be raised with a resiliency to grapple with any untoward situation they came across. What is more, Ron wholeheartedly agreed with Barb’s message and in doing so showed a united front to Katrina who was listening with vivid attention as Barb spoke. In the composition of a found poem, Barb’s words (in yellow) illuminate her experiences and her *shakti* to fighting racism. Her husband’s words (in green) reflect his stance alongside her. I understood that such stories to live by were certainly not comfortable ones to embody but nevertheless, were vital in living Barb’s resistance to racism.

“I STILL FIGHT ...

I started at _____. They were

VERY NICE.

They were young.

None of them were from my community!

None of them were South Asian!

~LAUGHING~

I sometimes feel the YOUNG PEOPLE,

DON'T CARE about skin colour.

They knew that I had just recently come from India.

Even the manager was very good with all the people there.

I know in my recent company...

I do feel it...

Some people, even though they don't do much, they get lots of appreciation.

I do more and I get less appreciation.

The thing is, they can't IGNORE what I do.

They can't hold me back for too long—

I push past it!

I continue to build myself up slowly.

They can't ignore me FOREVER.

I TEACH MY GIRLS THIS

One day they will

RECOGNIZE ME...

They will
SEE ME.

They will know my work.

Slowly, you
make your place...

Every day,
I *push* back.

If every day, you're in their faces, they can't keep ignoring you.

They have to recognize your worth.

Even my manager before,

She NEVER had a GOOD THING to say about me
with the big boss during the meetings.

Every three months they do a review, and she couldn't say a bad thing about me!

Not one bad thing!

It does hurt,
but I don't give up...

So, there's both kinds of people.

The ones who appreciate you
And the ones who put you down.

Pushing through...

Slowly you make your way.

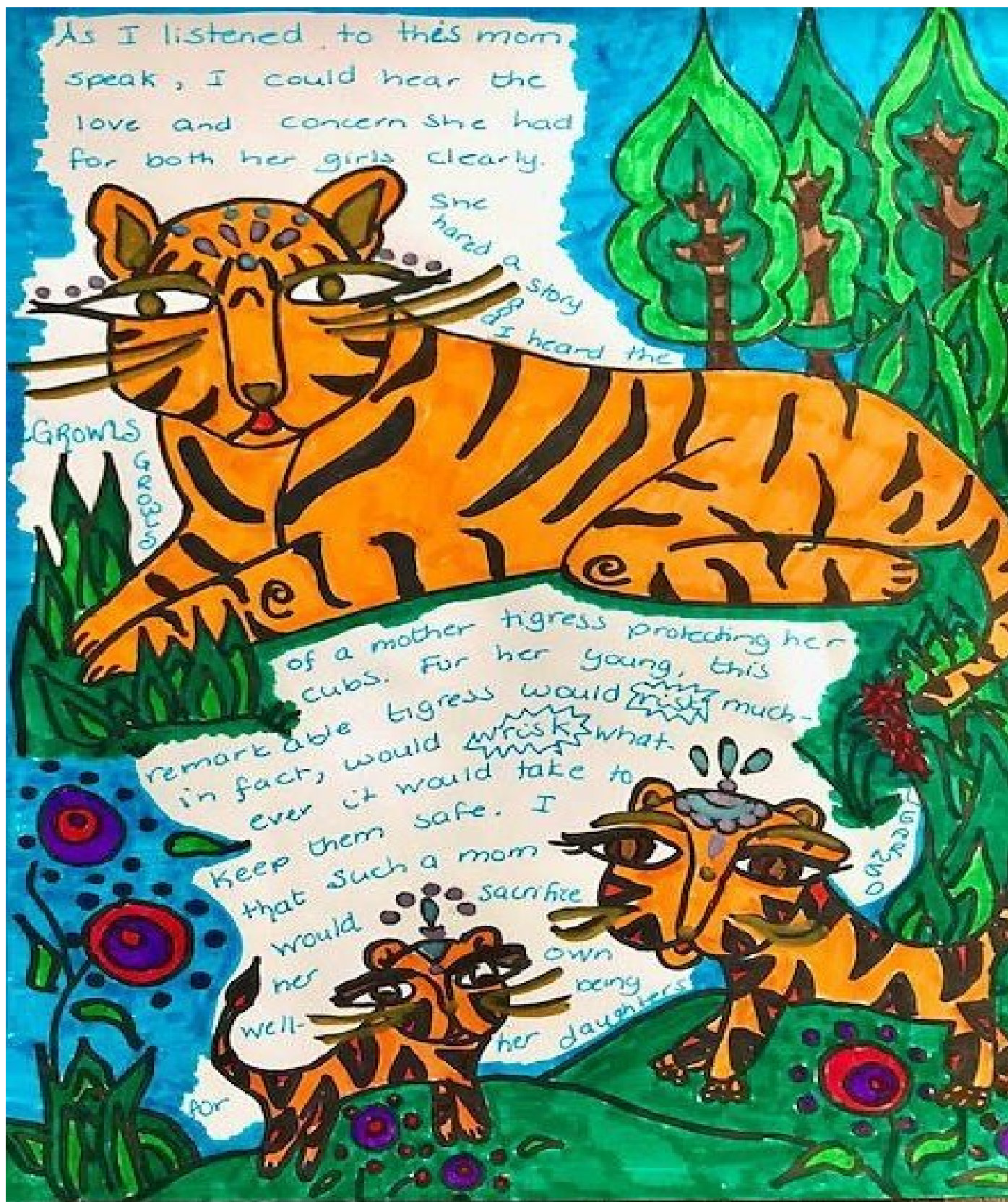
I'm making my spot.

I have never given up.

... I WILL NEVER GIVE UP!

A Heart-full Musing Interlude: The Roar of a Tigress

Listening and sitting with Barb's stories to live by—the ones she has shaped as a young woman first coming to Canada, as a young wife, and then as young mom—by herself and alongside her husband, Ron and their two daughters—illuminated the love she had for her children. Reverberating in her thoughts, words, and actions, I could see Barb's need to protect her children match her desire to allow them to grow. Believing choice was vital, Barb wanted to equip her daughters with the tools needed not merely to survive in their different worlds of home, school, and community but instead, to thrive with creativity and intelligence in these worlds. I sensed in Barb a fiery hope that her girls would grow to be strong, healthy, and resilient women. She wished for them to be proud of their South Asian heritage and draw sustenance from the promising stories. Barb understood the importance of providing Katrina and Ashi with a good formal education. She also understood the significance of creating a familial curriculum which honoured their experiences, their hopes, and their dreams. When Barb shared stories where Katrina had come to her feeling bullied or when Katrina felt as if her friendships were unraveling, I felt the warmth of the tigress in Barb roar. She roared in protection for her cubs and she roared in warning to those who would dare to harm them. I heard the roar when Barb shared her stories of courage and bravery in the face of racism she encountered at different points in her life. Each time, she made the choice to not succumb to such imposed plotlines, I understood Barb was drawing on her shakti. She was showing her girls how to live their lives with honour even when others had no honour of their own. This *heart-full* musing depicts a protective and loving tigress and her cubs who are at complete and wonderful ease with one another's company. It is a symbolic representation of the love and protection I heard echoing in Barb's stories for her family and the love and pride I heard shared by Katrina in her own stories of her mother, Barb.



71-Tigress Burning Bright

A Living Curriculum of Continuously Unfolding Moments

Walking into the living room, I recall the room had undergone a bit of a transformation on one of my former visits. On that occasion, Deepika, who I had picked up first, stood by my side as Barb ushered us warmly into the living room area. New drapes and a sumptuous sofa and loveseat in chocolatey browns told me that time has once more passed. I recollect commenting on the new décor even as Barb and I exchanged hugs. Ron, who too had been present on that occasion, let me know that they had purchased some new furniture mainly out of comfort while Barb had laughingly rejoined, she wanted the new furniture to make the living room more pretty. I remember Deepika plopping down on the new sofa, asking “*Where’s Katrina?*” (Research Notes, May 19, 2018). Katrina’s little sister, Ashi had looked up from where she had been playing on the rug with two other girls announcing, “*She’s coming!*” (Research Notes, May 19, 2018). In response to Ron and Barb’s comments, I smiled as I sat down on the couch, making a show of getting comfortable before saying, “I think your furniture is both lovely and comfortable!” (Voice Notes, May 19, 2018). In the midst of our laughter, during that day in May, Katrina had bounded down the stairs. She raced over to me and gave me a huge hug before grabbing Deepika by the hand and leading her upstairs, eagerly prompting, “*Let’s go to my room first. They’re going to talk for a bit*” (Research Notes, May 19, 2018).

I then recall how Barb let out a sigh before sharing, “*Katrina’s growing up. This year was hard for her*” (Research Notes, May 19, 2018). Ron, agreed, adding “*Two schools in one year*” (Research Notes, May 19, 2018). They were both referring to the fact that Katrina and Deepika among other students had to leave their former elementary school to join a new school. However, the new school was not built before the transfer of the children. This meant that another school acted as an interim school before the girls and other children could move to the

new school. In this moment of remembrance, I am reminded of Katrina's once fervent wish for her friends from Borderlands School to be a part of her new homeroom. She had said to me then, "*Hope they will be there. They will keep me sane!*" (Voice Recording, May 7, 2017). Katrina's wish for keeping connected with her friends echoes my wish to continue to be in conversation and in relation with my (research) friends.

Today, no parents are present when I pick up Katrina. Katrina's sister is in daycare. I have texted Barb beforehand to let her know I am on the way and then once more I text her when I reach the house. It is August 28, 2018 and I am astonished by this. It only seems a little while ago that I was first meeting a once shy Katrina in her Grade Four classroom. It doesn't seem long ago that I was nervously meeting Barb for the first time. Yet so much has happened in their lives, in my life, and in the spaces between us. Katrina hugs me happily and I respond in turn, aware that she has grown so much. Katrina is 12 years of age now! Almost my height, she beams as I admire her cute hoody paired with black and white patterned leggings. We are going out for Katrina's birthday celebration—to watch a movie of her choice and to grab a bite to eat while we talk. Barb had happily agreed to my suggestion texting me back, "*Yes, that would be awesome!*" (Text Message, August 22, 2018). I think about this research and I think about a life of curriculum-making moments and I chastise myself for worrying—for some part of me feels like when the research ends, my relationship with my (research) friends will end. I listen as Katrina chatters eagerly in my ear. She is sharing a story about her birthday. She and her friends had enjoyed a *Hunger Games*¹⁷⁶ themed party. I can sense the familial curriculum making in her home world bridging her school worlds. The car is moving and the music is playing. I find

¹⁷⁶ *The Hunger Games* is a book written by Suzanne Collins that was released in 2008, dealing with a dystopian future. The protagonist is a teenaged girl who learns to grow up quickly in the face of many challenges.

myself emerging in the moment. I will enjoy the here and the now I vow.

Chapter Seven: Coming to Know Vam Alongside Deepika

A Heart-full Musing Interlude: Seeing the Flowers within the Bouquet



72-Foreign Flowers

In conversation with Vam and Barb, Deepika's and Katrina's mothers, I found myself wanting to move past a simple acknowledgement of their stories. I did not wish to merely listen

with my ears but with my entire being. I believed this meant I had to be willing to learn and grow through an active sharing of stories and experiences. In this research, I did not wish to hold myself aloof even if it meant that I would be safe. Sometimes, I understood, there is a need to move beyond those (self) imposed borders of safety so that I could truly honour what was being shared and how it was being shared. Reddy's (2017) analogy of South Asian culture as foreign flowers that are often plucked for decorative purposes reverberated in my thoughts. Forget the bouquet for the moment, I thought, as I sank a little deeper into Reddy's metaphor. I wanted to see the flowers in their individual and intricate forms—roots, stems, petals, and so forth as within and separately, a garden of growing things. Moreover, I wished to understand how these flowers opened for the sun and water to receive sustenance. What I wanted was the garden of stories and not the foreign bouquet. For me, this meant I had to be open to uncertainty, tensions, and complexity in each of our lived experiences. I had to be willing to see myself as (a)part of the garden. I had to be willing to see my research friends in the same way.

A Preamble: Preparing the Canvas of Vam's Narrative Account

In what follows, I share a narrative account of Vam and her stories in relation to her daughter Deepika. I first met Deepika in her worlds of school as both a narrative inquirer and also as a classroom volunteer in Deepika's Grade Four classroom community. Deepika's teacher, Anne helped to situate my position with the children in her care. She shared with her students my hopes of engaging in this research and in this manner helped me to locate research friends who too wanted to be a part of this journey. Deepika was one of the students who indicated interest. Through Anne as a point of initial contact, I was then able to chat with Vam, Deepika's mother, first over the phone and then in person. Throughout the course of this multiperspectival research, I was fortuitous to meet Vam on many occasions in locations outside of Deepika's school. I met

with Vam within different community spaces but most often, in her home. During the numerous times in which she invited me into the warmth of her home, I also came to know the other immediate members of Deepika's family: Deepika's father, Kade¹⁷⁷ and Deepika's younger brother, Aari¹⁷⁸. Over the span of several years of this narrative inquiry, we lived, told, retold and relived stories, and many conversations were shared. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this dissertation, I had to be selective in which research conversations and/or accompanying stories could be brought to the foreground and which by regrettable, pragmatic reasons, had to be relegated to the background. In this tension filled space, I felt myself resonating with Minh-Ha's (1989) contemplative knowing that "you and I are close, we intertwine; you may stand on the other side of the hill once in a while, but you may also be me while remaining what you are and what I am not (p. 90). In this passage, for me, Minh-ha (1989) gives voice to an insight that while differences do exist within and between people, there too, exist spaces of commonality. What is needed is our willingness to try and see from another's perspective. In our honouring of each other's uniqueness and within the recognition of our overlapping experiences, our lives may intertwine. Thinking with this wisdom, it is my hope that the voices amplified in this space help to shape, much like a mixed-media artform, a collaged¹⁷⁹ rendering of Vam and Deepika's storied experiences alongside one another, their family members, and to a lesser degree myself as researcher friend who too, narratively inquires¹⁸⁰ into her own experiences.

¹⁷⁷ This is a pseudonym for Deepika's father.

¹⁷⁸ This is a pseudonym for Deepika's younger brother.

¹⁷⁹ I use the artform of collage as a means of metaphorically representing this narrative account because the storied experiences shared, and images considered were not necessarily complete nor did they fall into neat, discrete categories when imparted. They were messy, complex, and overlapped and intersected in some ways and diverged in others.

¹⁸⁰ As another means of mediating and crafting deeper conversation with research friends and other readers, I apply another textured layer to this collage by sharing what I call *heart-full* musings I engaged in during this research.

(Comfort) Food for Thought

The April sun was shining when I set out to meet Vam and Deepika at our agreed upon spot of a popular restaurant chain for a conversation over lunch. The restaurant had been chosen for its close vicinity to where Deepika and her family lived but now I wondered if Vam might have been more comfortable eating at a local Indian restaurant. Mentally shrugging off my worry, I climbed out of my car and headed inside. Taking advantage of being early, I asked if it would be possible to be seated in a booth that was in a more quiet area than the one I had been led towards. "Give me five minutes!" the waitress seating me suggested and hastily cleared a table off for me. Expressing my thanks in words and by smile, I sat down and automatically checked my phone for the time. I saw that a message had been sent by Vam that she and Deepika would be running about twenty minutes late. As I waited, I pulled out my notebook, pen, and my digital recorder. My gaze travelled over the other patrons in the family friendly restaurant. This Saturday afternoon, the place was unsurprisingly busy with the sounds of people chatting and eating. As I was writing my impressions down in my notebook, I spotted Vam and Deepika at the entrance and waved them over. I got up to give Deepika a hug and commented on her lovely outfit. Sporting a creamy coloured hat with a pink ribbon, a matching pink top and shorts, Deepika looked especially fetching in her spring ready clothing. Vam looked equally charming in a lightweight gray sweater and jeans. Returning my hug with a delightful wide smile, Vam let me know that Deepika had chosen these clothes specially to wear to today's lunch. "*You look so cute! And, I love the hat!*" (Voice Notes, April 2, 2016) I reiterated, directing my comments to Deepika as both mom and daughter took a seat across from me.

Recognizing that it might take time for our orders to be made, I suggested to Vam and



73-Deepika and Vam at the Pizzeria Restaurant

Deepika that we should make our selections now. The restaurant appeared to be busier than before and I was not certain how much time Vam and Deepika would have for this luncheon. Deepika, happily reached for her menu while Vam turned to me.

Vam: This is the first time I'm going to_____. Usually, I prefer going to Indian restaurants.

Me: I was thinking about that on the drive, that perhaps you two might like an Indian restaurant to go to.

Vam: That's okay. Deepika likes such things. She enjoys this.

Me, turning to Deepika: Do you?

Deepika, eagerly: Yeah!

Waitress: Do you guys still need a few more minutes?

Me to the waitress: Yes, please.

Deepika, astonished: The menu is like a book!

Me to Deepika: It is! It totally is! Yes, there's quite a lot to choose from. I hope you're hungry! (Transcript, April 2, 2016)

Learning that this was the first time that Vam and Deepika had eaten at this restaurant¹⁸¹ I understood this moment of getting together might prove to be a culinary adventure for both mother and daughter. Before Vam and I had made plans, I had wondered if an Indian restaurant might have been more comfortable for Vam. I understood food can be a way of thinking of home. It can be as much the heart's song of home, land, and culture as it can be a source of nourishment. I had envisioned having conversations over Indian comfort food but for this meeting, I had been persuaded by Deepika. When I had spoken to Deepika beforehand, she had been keen to try food at a different restaurant and her enthusiasm had helped to convince me to offer this restaurant as an option to meet. The short commute also had appeared to be attractive to Vam. Now as I thought about embarking on this joint research and taking these beginning steps together, I hoped that this restaurant would serve to open up the sharing spaces between us. Comfort food, I bracingly reminded myself, can come in many forms. As we looked over our menus, I learned that Deepika's adventurous spirit that she had shown me on different occasions carried over into this particular world of food. Discovering that she could choose her own ingredients from a list to create her own pasta dish, Deepika announced gleefully, "*I'm going to make my own!*" before asking Vam, "*Are you going to create your own?*" (Transcript, April 2, 2016). Vam's reply, "*I don't want to try*" had Deepika in turn asking her mother curiously, "*Why?*" (Transcript, April 2, 2016). This restaurant had been chosen because it had a wide selection of vegetarian options. I wanted this second conversation with both mother and daughter to be as comfortable and pleasant as possible. I found myself trying to help.

¹⁸¹ At this point in time, Vam's family had not lived in Canada for very long—two years.

Vam: Everything has bacon?

Me: No, you can just ask the waitress to not include it in your item. You can try this one or you can make your own and that way you won't have anything you don't wish to have. Yes, just ask her when she comes. It's not a big deal for them.

Vam under her breath reading: Chicken roast...

Me: There's a mushroom one if you like mushrooms.

Vam: Okay. Chicken mushroom. Maybe we'll try this.

[Sounds of conversations and cutlery being used in the background.] (Transcript, April 2, 2016)

I knew from our lunchtime conversations Deepika ate chicken, but I could not recall if all her family members did. Food, I knew from experience could help to set a mood, a tone and can figuratively extend a hand in friendship. What we eat can (re)call us to the stories we hold of ourselves and the stories we dream of, and for, ourselves. In the following fragment of our conversation, I found myself wondering if my choice of pasta with sausage was painting a story of me as a not very orthodox Hindu female. I worried, if I was making a poor impression on Vam even as I listened to Vam share why she did not choose a menu item with pork.

Vam: Because pork I don't like it. They [Deepika and Aari] haven't had and so I don't want them to start. And beef is a strict no-no because um, we get milk from the cow. The cow is like a mother.

Me, uncomfortable, thinking about myself as a Hindu: Yes, cows are holy.

Vam laughing: I will control them [Deepika and Aari] as long as I can. After that I don't know!

Me laughing: And then who knows!

Vam: She doesn't usually even like chicken. She's very picky!

Me to Deepika, laughing: You're very picky?

Deepika, laughing: No, I am! [Pause] I like chicken on pizza.

Vam, explaining: She shouldn't feel it is chicken.

Me: Oh, I get what you mean!

Vam: Deepika can eat nuggets. She knows that it's chicken, but she doesn't want to see them as pieces and bones.

Deepika: It's so disgusting.

Vam: Her brother. He's a fan of non-veg. If you don't serve him non-veg like for three days, then he's missing something. One or three meals, I make them on the weekend and give them to him during the week.

Me: Really? How about your husband?

Vam: He's okay with anything.

Me to Deepika, joking: So you're the high maintenance one in the family, eh?

Deepika: I just don't like- I think it's gross!

Vam and I laugh. (Transcript, April 2, 2016)

Hearing Vam speak about the differences in taste amongst her family members helped me to get a sense of the complexities of her familial curriculum making alongside Deepika, her son, Aari, and her husband, Kade. Her choices in the food she ate and additionally, made visible to people outside of her family, showed me one way in which she practiced her Hindu faith. In this early moment of connection in our relationship, I found myself troubled about whether she was disquieted about what I was eating and indirectly thinking about my identity as a Hindu. It was a little discomforting for me in this moment to be faced with these tensions and I was reminded of other times with family and community members, who held strict understandings of what it meant to be Hindu. From our previous chats, I knew Vam to be open-minded in her opinions and

that had been a quality which drew me to her yet, I also understood that we all carry stories of ourselves and others which shape our perceptions. In other conversations, Deepika had already asked me about what types of meat I ate and I had been truthful, all the while recognizing that these stories of me would make their way into her household in some form or another. I already knew Deepika had a close relationship with her family and especially, her mother, Vam. It was therefore with a considerable amount of relief, I learned that each member of the family had their own preferences to what they ate. Nobody else at the table had known that I had given myself the freedom to choose from the menu. I realized later that I had done so because I did not want to begin this relationship with a suggestion of misrepresenting myself. If this research was to be truly a multiperspectival narrative inquiry where everyone's voices were valued, then I had to honour my own. I needed to be able to set a precedent of how I hoped we could proceed. That is, with a certain amount of openness and candour, without fearing there would be dire reprisals in our conversations with one another.

Vam's humorous comments of, "*I will control them as long as I can. After that I don't know!*" (Transcript, April 2, 2016) spoke to Vam's knowledge that her influence on her children's food choices might be thwarted by the intervention of time. Vam's comments also tugged me back into my childhood. Brought up in a Hindu household, when I was young, I too, had listened to my mother about what foods were proper for me to eat. I wondered about Deepika and her navigation of her home and school worlds. I was aware there were times when these worlds could collide. Yet, Deepika, herself had repeatedly showed me her great strength of character. During our lunches together, she had brought rice and other Indian dishes. Deepika had not evidenced discomfort in doing so, which I loved seeing. Such food border-crossings can be challenging, and it seemed to me that Vam's unapologetic way of talking and living provided

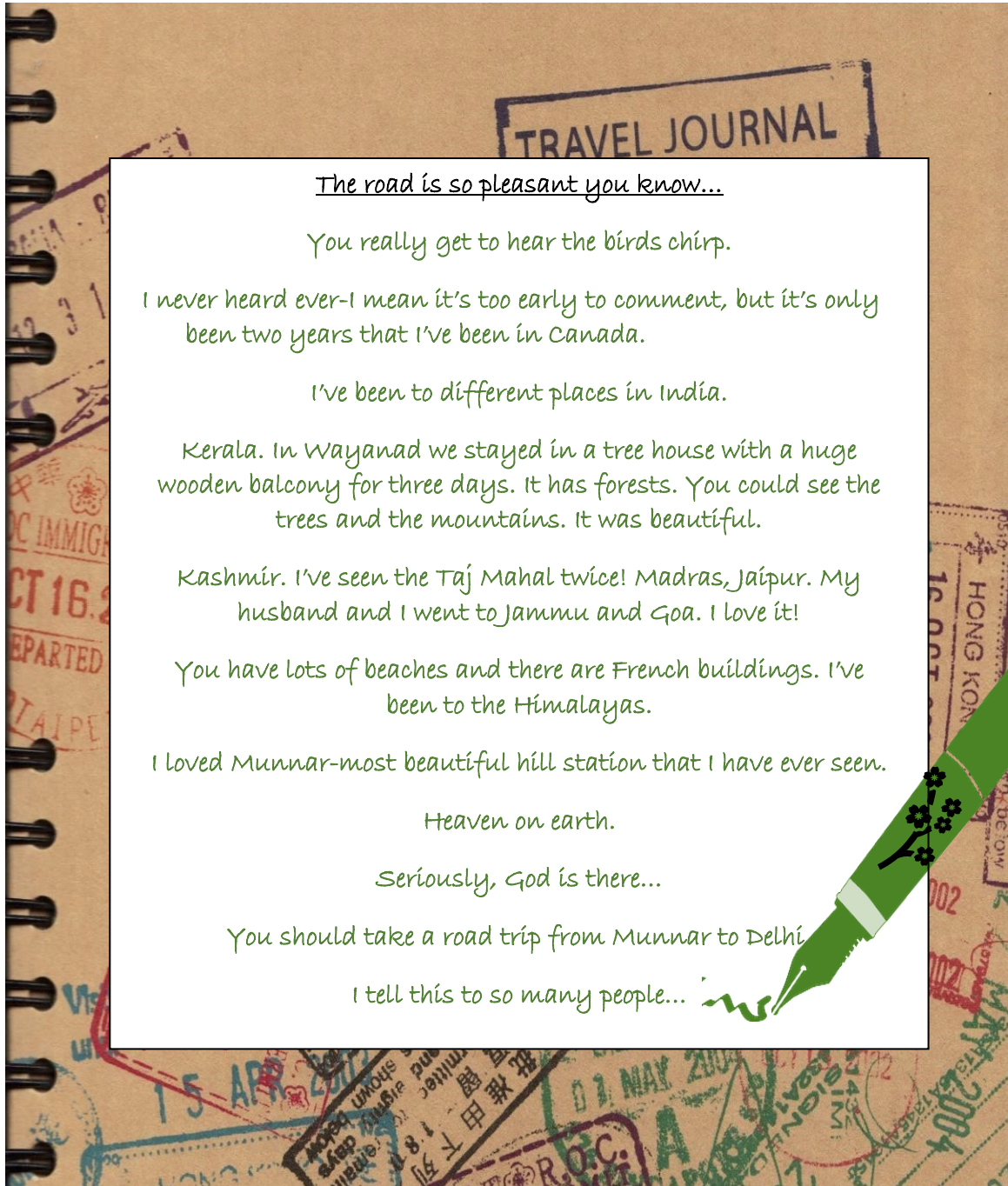
Deepika with a wonderful template to work with.¹⁸² Vam's maternal knowing of her daughter was very much in show when Vam related to me Deepika's (dis)like of chicken, "*She knows that it's chicken, but she doesn't want to see them as pieces and bones*" (Transcript, April 2, 2016). Thinking about Deepika and her aversion to seeing chicken as a real animal also brought home memories of being squeamish about eating chicken after seeing firsthand a chicken's head being lopped off. Then, I had been visiting India and my brother and I had accompanied my uncle to the small market where he had purchased a "fresh" chicken for our dinner. The disparity of store-bought frozen meat packaged neatly and the reality of witnessing the demise of a live chicken was immense. Seeing the poor decapitated chicken run had made me see the eating of chicken in a whole new light. Suffice to say, I could relate on some level with Deepika's discomfort. Chicken nuggets—boneless bites of chicken covered in a crispy coating accompanied by a dipping sauce—provided a good cover story in proffering distance away from thinking about the realities of how a chicken as a bird, became a meal for human consumption. Vam, clearly understood Deepika's tensions with eating chicken and tried to help to negotiate these tensions in the foods prepared for both of her children.

An Adventure to Live by: "The road is so pleasant you know."

As we continued to talk, my earlier impressions of Vam as a seasoned traveler were reinforced. I recalled how even in our first face-to-face conversation, she had shared that she had been to many places before her marriage and then afterwards, and also accompanied by her children. There is an image of South Asians that is sometimes held which depict us as less-travelled, less knowing, and even backwards in our thinking. Hearing Vam's stories of her

¹⁸² I also understood that Anne, Deepika's teacher would not be pleased if a child's lunch became an object of ridicule. Certain expectations were to be upheld in the classroom community.

travels had me smiling in deep appreciation. Below is an artful arrangement—a found poem of Vam sharing stories of her travels in her own words (Transcript, April 2, 2016). Seeing Deepika’s reactions to her mother’s stories was good to behold as well. Fairly vibrating with excitement, Deepika’s young face had lit up with admiration as she exclaimed, “Really?!”



You never told me about that before! So cool!” (Transcript, April 2, 2016). I was certain my expression was not any less enthused.

Later, Vam would express to me the wonders of travelling,

We used to take road trips. From Bangalore to Kerala. We used to pass through remote villages. I usually like taking pictures and stuff like that. I like to stop and have roadside chai¹⁸³. Fun stuff like that! More relaxing and I like the ambiance. (Transcript, April 2, 2016).

Her excitement was contagious and when Vam urged me, “Next time, you go to places when you go to India. See different parts of India” (Transcript, April 2, 2016), I nodded. As we spoke, Vam journeyed metaphorically back to an earlier time period in her childhood, sharing how she used to travel on a bike. “*I learned it by myself [Vam learned how to ride a bike on her own]. We were crazy to learn new things! We used to go to the village. We used to rent it for one rupee for one hour!*” (Transcript, April 2, 2016). Recollecting my times as a young girl learning to ride a bike and then later as a teacher travelling back and forth to the train station in a small town in Japan, I felt an answering joy. A bike provided freedom. It provided a sense of independence. Turning to Deepika, I asked, “*Do you have a bike?*” (Transcript, April 2, 2016). Deepika pulled a disappointed expression, “*No, I don’t. My parents haven’t got it yet*” (Transcript, April 2, 2016). Vam’s response, “*We were living in an apartment*” (Transcript, April 2, 2016) was self-explanatory. In an apartment, space would be a much-valued commodity. Vam added, much to Deepika’s obvious pleasure, “*So, this year, I am planning to. I told Deepika and Aari, I’ll buy one bike for both of you. Once you learn, then, I will get two.*” (Transcript, April 2, 2016). I

¹⁸³ *Chai* is a black Indian tea infused with milk and made with a rich composition of spices and flavours.

could sense for Vam that her appreciation of adventure and her love of travel, one of her stories to live by, were passions that she shared with her children.

“Pack your bags and get up and start!”

Thinking upon Vam’s earlier comments that her family had not moved to Canada until fairly recently, I found myself wanting to know more even as I happily noted Deepika tucking into her food with relish. I smiled recalling how Deepika had been a picture of dismay after taking her first morsel of pasta *“Yay! It looks soooooo good. Uh, I just ruined it!”* (Transcript, April 2, 2016). Worried that something was wrong, I cautiously asked, “How did you ruin it?” and Deepika clarified for me, *“It looked so good and I just yanked it [her neatly arranged pasta with her fork]!”* (Transcript, April 2, 2016). Relieved, my reply was probably not what Deepika had been expecting. “Ahh, that’s okay, it’ll look good in your stomach,” (Transcript, April 2, 2016), had Vam and I laughing and Deepika mulling over my words. In this moment, glancing at Vam, I was relieved to see she was enjoying her meal as well.

Me: I’m surprised you said you’ve only been here for two years! You seem so very comfortable and so do you, Deepika!

Deepika: I get used to places very well!

Me: I can see that!

Vam: The reason is, we have been moving places. It’s not like we never have. Back and forth. All of us like travelling and we are not too choosy about airlines. We are able to travel by bus or train. Maybe that’s the reason why I made them [Deepika and her brother, Aari] so used to it. “Pack your bags and get up and start!” (Transcript, April 2, 2016).

Moving to different places and homes was clearly a plotline the family was used to living. Vam’s maternal pedagogy was shaped around a sense of willingness to embrace (un)certainty. There

was fortitude to be had in knowing that such movements were being done together as a family and that the unexpected would be met together as a family. A caring family could better negotiate the (un)known, I reflected. Swallowing a sip of water, Deepika interrupted the little lull that had fallen over us to share her knowing.

Deepika, matter of fact: I mean, I have lost lots of friends, and basically, I'm used to that.

Vam: Frankly speaking, till now, every year, she had been in one school.

Deepika, dejectedly: Every year we move.

Vam: Last year she was in Evergreen School¹⁸⁴. This year, she's here in Borderlands School.

Me, slowly: So, are you thinking of moving again?

Vam: No, because I like this school a lot! The other school didn't have any exams and it was just a place—

Deepika, interjecting in shock: We didn't have exams?

Vam: No, you had them, but it was not like this. Let's say maybe she moved to Grade Four and that's the reason, she liked it. My son, he's still in Grade Two. Compared to Grade Two there and what they expect here, it is different.

Me: It was a big difference?

Vam: Yeah. Even in the public school, you find so much different. That's what I told Deepika's teacher [Anne]. Because the way she explains and the way she treats the kids, I like it.

Deepika, in agreement: I like our teacher!

Vam: She's very strict. I mean strict in the case that she knows where to draw the line.

¹⁸⁴ *Evergreen* is a pseudonym for Deepika's school that she attended in her Grade 3 year. *Borderlands* is the name of the school she subsequently transferred to and which is the school site of this narrative inquiry where I came alongside Anne, Deepika, and Katrina in their classroom as a teacher volunteer.

Me: Yes, I'm trying to get a sense of what it was you specifically didn't like. Was it the instruction?

Deepika, piping in: The things they taught!

Me to Deepika: What do you mean?

Deepika, earnestly: It was really easy. It was really different. (Transcript, April 2, 2016).

As our conversation unfolded, I began to understand that Deepika's knowing of moving and Vam's knowing of moving differed. For Deepika, moving to a new home meant going through a process of finding new friends and losing others. Deepika's response, "*I mean, I have lost lots of friends, and basically, I'm used to that,*" spoken calmly implied that Deepika had grown accustomed to picking up and leaving. Deepika's words belied a sense that this nine-year-old was concerned about moving to a new school, a new home. Yet, I knew from my interactions with Deepika that she was very much invested in her friendships and I suspected Vam, as Deepika's mother, had a stronger understanding of Deepika's concerns. Vam spoke openly about her disapproval for Deepika's previous school and indicated that the transition into this current school was an improvement for both of her children. Vam's sentiment, "*Pack your bags and get up and start!*" (Transcript, April 2, 2016) appeared to echo her belief that certain actions are necessary and must be done with a positive attitude.

In the following conversational fragment, Deepika provides a deeper sense of the importance of friendships for her in her school worlds. She once more re-tells a story she shared earlier with me. It was one that her mother, Vam was familiar with also.

Me: It's nice that you've found a school which you like and are comfortable with.

Deepika: I like this school! But my friends were nice there [previous school] and I really liked my friends. Two of my best friends are still there.

Me: I remember you telling me that you had called one of them?

Deepika: I called one of them, Emily¹⁸⁵ a lot of times. She was actually pretty nice! I didn't give her my number, but she gave me her number. I still have it. But Maggie,¹⁸⁶ I gave her my number and she never calls. So basically, she's not my friend.

Me, attempting to comfort Deepika: It's sad. Sometimes that happens when friends move. It's hard to stay in touch. But moving gives you a chance to meet new people and make new friends.

Vam, attempting to comfort Deepika: Maybe you will meet somewhere in university.

Me: That's true. And, you've made new friends here! You have a lot of friends in class!

Deepika, more cheerfully: Yeah! (Transcript, April 2, 2016).

In Deepika's retelling, it became more clear to me that her friendships, the ones she had made at her earlier school, were relationships she still held close in her heart. These friends had not vanished from her thoughts. Far from it. Her friends and her stories of her friends continued to reverberate and make their presence known in the stories she was living. Vam, too understood this about her daughter and attempted to provide Deepika with a layered forward-looking story. She let Deepika know that attending university was a goal that Deepika could strive for, that Deepika had the opportunity to pursue higher education. At the same, Vam also provided Deepika with another plotline of possibility. Deepika could maybe see her friends in university when she attended. Combined, these two plotlines shaped a complex image of possibility for both Deepika and Vam. Vam's curriculum making embodied the hope that Deepika could have a positive story that she could imagine and work towards. Vam wanted Deepika to make friends but she also wanted Deepika to feel that she could rely on herself. She wished to help Deepika

¹⁸⁵ This is a pseudonym.

¹⁸⁶ This is a pseudonym.

develop her sense of independence and sense of inner strength. Watching Deepika's young animated face, I felt that Deepika was learning much *from* her mother and *about* her mother in this moment.

“What am I doing? I’m working all the time!”

Vam's background in ayurvedic medicine had been shaped through dedication and concentrated study over time. In Canada, she was finding it challenging to pursue her interests. Accreditation¹⁸⁷ here was not the same as in India. She understood the significance of building dreams. Even now I knew that Vam was in the midst of making a big decision that would ripple in different ways in her life and that of her family. Vam shared that she alongside her husband, Kade, were thinking about what was best for their family. Vam had to decide whether she should enter a new technical program or remain in the medical office she was currently working in. The place, Vam had confided was run by very nice people. Vam explained:

I have been given an interview for radiology and respiratory therapy. I'm waiting to hear from there. I had one interview last week and the other one early last month. I, myself, am in a dilemma. I don't know if I choose to study then these next two to three years are going to be really tough on us because living with a single income is hard. Then we will have to cut down on so many things. It is so hard. Especially, with kids. We can adjust but you know, then saying to them, “Not this time.” I don't like doing this all the time.

(Transcript, April 2, 2016)

I understood that Vam and her husband, Kade put their children's needs and wants first, while

¹⁸⁷ This is unfortunately, a persistent plotline for many newcomers to Canada. It is a plotline that tends to *other* people not from Canada and position their skills as less valuable in their new homeland. My parents too, immigrants to Canada, had encountered problems in finding work in the fields they had been educated in.

meeting their own individual needs came second, if at all. I recollected Vam's earlier comments about how her work outside of her home world was compounded by the work she had to do in the home. Once more, Vam's concern for the well-being of her children was rendered visible in her maternal pedagogy.

Every day I cook. I get up at 5:30 and then cook their food, pack their lunches. I come back and again I cook. After my shift, again, I come home, and I cook. Nowadays, I think, "What am I doing? I'm working all the time!" Sometimes, I don't feel like getting up and then I get scared. Oh, my gawd! What are my kids going to eat? This weekend at least, they eat outside for the lunch part. They don't have that option during the week.
(Transcript, April 2, 2016)

Vam had shared with me in previous conversations some of the ways in which her body had been shaped by the various stressors in her life. While Vam's experiences of fatigue layered the stories she lived alongside others and her body remembered these stories for her, Vam also lived a story of love alongside her children. The need to do the best she could for her children was an overarching plot in Vam's stories to live by.

"Sometimes she needs to watch out!"

As we continued to talk, the conversation turned to Deepika's classroom. I remarked that it was "nice to be in the classroom and to hang out with kids again and to especially hang out with Deepika and Katrina. So, thank you!" (Transcript, April 2, 2016). Vam smiled in response, "Deepika appreciates it a lot. We appreciate it a lot" and added, "The class is really good" (Transcript, April 2, 2016). Hearing Vam say that she and Deepika were happy about my involvement in their life was wonderful to learn as I was enjoying getting to know Vam, Deepika and the rest of their family better. Below is fragment of our continuing conversation.

Me, in agreement: It is a nice class!

Deepika, speaking excitedly: We're all friendly and we talk a lot! That's the problem with our class but all of us talk a lot you know! We talk a lot!

Vam, laughing: You're not shy! That's an excuse.

Me, laughing: You're a little chatty, Deepika?

Deepika, emphatically: A lot!

Me: You know what? Personally, I like that you're not too shy! That will help you especially later in life.

Vam: Yes. (Transcript, April 2, 2016)

It was interesting for me to hear Deepika speak of herself so descriptively. In class, Deepika had shown herself to be attentive to her teacher, Anne, and her classmates. I wondered how Deepika's stories to live by had been shaped by this understanding that she was not shy. My comment, "*I like that you're not too shy*" (Transcript, April 2, 2016) and that way of being would help her now and later in life stemmed in part from my own stories as a child who had been painfully shy. Shyness, I had understood then, could make for a painful difference in school. Later, I understood shyness could emerge when a student felt less secure or not confident in certain situations. As a teacher, I had tried my best to help build community in the classroom so children could feel safe. For South Asian girls, I was very much awake to how imposed and impoverished plotlines of reticence and passivity could be imposed on one's personhood. Thinking back to my time in the classroom, I knew that South Asian girls were sometimes storied as shy when perhaps, they just needed a space of safety in which they could open up and feel comfortable. I loved that Deepika was not storying herself as shy and that her mother, Vam was not storying her in that manner as well. There is nothing wrong with being shy. However,

shyness, from my experience (in school worlds and elsewhere) when lived, can make it more challenging to negotiate certain worlds (Kubota, Saleh, & Menon, 2020; Menon, 2019). Being able to talk with diverse peoples was an ability that was valuable especially when traversing worlds (Lugones, 1987). I resonated strongly with Lugones' (1987) contention:

The first way of being at ease in a particular “world” is by being a fluent speaker in that “world”. I know all the norms that there are to be followed, I know all the words that there are to be spoken. I know all the moves. I am confident. (p. 12)

Lugones makes the connection between “being a fluent speaker” (Lugones, 1987) and confidence. And while Lugones is pointing to possessing a strong understanding of the norms of one world and not specifically referencing the ability to talk with confidence, I believe this latter quality can be an instance of “being a fluent speaker” (Lugones, 1987). In Western society especially, the ability to talk and the ability to talk well, is highly prized. This ability, I thought would hold Deepika in good stead and enable her to navigate her worlds with more ease.

As our conversation continued to unfold, I was somewhat taken aback when Deepika observed, *“I tried to stay shy, but I can't! I'm just used to being me!”* (April 2, 2016) and then added, more playfully, *“I used to hang out with other kids, other kids now need to hang out with me! Just kidding! JK!”* (April 2, 2016). The first part of Deepika's statement caught me off guard. I wondered if Deepika felt the need to step out of her shyness by encouraging herself to be more confident. The second part of Deepika's statement seemed to indicate that at one time she had been feeling shy and this had made it challenging for her to approach other children. Deepika's quip that *“other kids need to hang out with me”* (Transcript, April 1, 2016), I saw as her trying to venture out to do what she might have not been able to do before—meet new

friends. Thinking back to her story of the friends she had left behind in her previous school, I could see why it would be important for her to try and make as many friends as she could. School can be a hard and lonely place without friends. I thought back to Vam's comments that Deepika would meet her friends perhaps at university and suspected part of her curriculum making alongside Deepika had involved encouraging Deepika to meet new friends. Inwardly, I applauded these forward-looking stories being shaped by mother and daughter individually and together.

“Deepika is straightforward. That’s what I say” (Transcript, April 1, 2016). Vam suddenly spoke up, interrupting me from my reverie. Uncertain of her meaning, I looked across at her and waited for her to explain. *“Sometimes she needs to watch out. She just speaks out whatever is in her head”* (Transcript, April 1, 2016). Deepika's infectious giggling had us adults smiling. Vam elaborated:

My son is not like that. He thinks a lot. Sometimes, I’m the person who even when I get hurt or even if’s not comfortable for me, I’ll say, “Okay, fine. I will do it.” Deepika’s not like this. She knows where to accept, and where to say “No.” Sometimes, I feel that it’s good and sometimes, bad. And, Deepika started working on talking. If she doesn’t like something, she keeps quiet. (Transcript, April 2, 2016)

I found myself nodding as Vam spoke. I understood how hard it could be to say no to someone who was a friend or to say no in a situation when you were called upon to help. Sometimes, there was the additional worry of being storied in certain ways that could weigh heavily upon a person. Vam had already shared that she was often called upon to work late and she did so because she was a kind and helpful person and also, because it was important to her sense of professionalism.

Thinking about Deepika, I understood that Vam was concerned that Deepika did not get herself in a situation where her forthrightness could get her in trouble alongside others. Not everyone appreciated candor. Vam's comment that "*Deepika started working on talking. If she doesn't like something, she keeps quiet*" (Transcript, April 1, 2016) helped me to understand that Vam's curriculum making alongside Deepika was shaped within a maternal pedagogy of love and protection. Vam wanted Deepika to learn when it was safe to speak her mind and when it was not. Some situations warranted extra care. Words spoken, could be misconstrued, and used to impose unkind stories upon a person. In this moment, I reflected that shyness and outspokenness were both plotlines which shaped world traveling (Lugones, 1987) in complicated ways.

A Recollection of a Wedding and a Matter of Caste

As stories of our different experiences continued to ebb and flow between us, responding to Vam's query about where I had stayed while I was travelling in Northern India, I found myself describing the small hotel where my colleagues and I had been accommodated. I described the hotel had been overflowing due to a large number of guests who had come to attend a wedding.

Me, recalling: It was really packed. In the hallways, men were shaving in the hallways. There was no room.

Deepika, in shock: That's gross! Why are they shaving in the hallway? Why do they let people do that? The staff should be alert about that!

Me, laughing: Yes, I was uncomfortable, but I think the people I was with, were even more uncomfortable!

Vam, curiously: Do you know what caste? Did you say Brahmin?

Me, slowly: No, I don't want to pay attention to those kinds of things. I don't pay attention to those kinds of labels. (Transcript, April 2, 2016)

What I didn't share with Deepika and Vam in this moment, was that throughout my stay at the hotel, I had caught glimpses of the bride-to-be and she had looked very young. I had also seen the groom and his family milling about the hotel. And while the groom wasn't old, he was by my guess, several years older than his wife-to-be. I understood that what I was seeing, the people, the context were essentially a mere snapshot taken from my limited vantagepoint, I inwardly wrestled with the possibilities of darker undertones within the midst of these celebrations.¹⁸⁸ My thoughts returned to a much earlier visit to India where accompanying a cousin to a friend's house who happened to also hold her gynecological practice there, I learned that the line-up of families waiting to be seen included many who were desirous of having sons (Menon et al., 2015). And as I was speaking with Vam and Deepika, this was the hard story that was narrating the canvas of my interior self and it was all the more surprising then for me to understand that there was another layer to this storied experience that I wasn't as wakeful to as I might have been. My thoughts travelled back to the time of my visit and I recalled that some of the men might have possibly worn the garments that spoke of their Brahmin positioning but those signifiers hadn't been what I had been thinking about then. I wondered why Vam had asked. I knew it was not from idle curiosity or an entrenched belief in this discriminatory way of viewing others. I already understood that Vam too was not a proponent of caste. About to speak, Vam interrupted my thoughts to share with me a disturbing experience:

That's good! My kids don't know what that [caste] is either. Because, you know when we were in Hyderabad, small kids used to come to us and ask, "Are you [a caste

¹⁸⁸ The hotel clerk who was in the kind habit of greeting me and another colleague in our group had imparted that this wedding was a very grand affair for the families. I understood I would never know the different storied strands which threaded the lives of the wedding party that I had happened to see on this occasion. While I recognized I had to be careful of not imposing certain stories onto others, I couldn't but feel worried and uncertain.

name]? A boy, he came and asked Deepika and I said, “Just say that you’re an Indian” because I don’t like this. People shouldn’t talk like that. I asked him, “What do you mean by that?” But this [labelling people by caste] has never stopped. The kids keep asking and their parents should tell them not to do so, right? (Transcript, April 2, 2016)

Even as I provided a resounding, “Absolutely!” by way of response to Vam’s passionate interjection, I thought about the ways in which Vam was shifting master cultural narratives which used difference as a means to dehumanize and categorize. By way of helping Deepika to shape a response to the boy who had asked Deepika about her caste, Vam had crafted the means by which she and Deepika could narrate a counternarrative to a dominant story of caste. In this fashion, I understood Vam was living a competing story (Clandinin et al., 2006) against a still pervasive storyline plotted along lines of difference. Vam’s comment, *“The kids keep asking and their parents should tell them not to do so”* (Transcript, April 2, 2016) had me thinking about how different Vam’s curriculum making alongside Deepika was in comparison to the other family’s curriculum making in Vam’s story. I was reminded of Bateson (2000) who observed, “the familiar is comforting” and as well, that “it is easy to understand the temptation to blur one’s eyes and work with stereotypes, to put aside the effort of response and recognition” (p. 12). The pejorative narrative of caste reverberates culturally, intergenerationally, and in institutional and familial ways. There is effort and hard work needed to focus one’s eyes and to see and act beyond the categorization and stereotyping of caste. I was so appreciative of Vam’s stance, that such restrictive plotlines were not to be lived within the lives of her children. Proclaiming that it was more important to note that one was Indian rather than positioning one along lines of caste was one of Vam’s powerful stories to live by.

Deepika who had been listening avidly asked a question of us, *“Aren’t they all Indians? I*

mean, what's the difference?" (Transcript, April 2, 2016) which pointed to the underlying currents of inhumanness in reproductions of caste within its differing lived forms. Caste, with its cultural, societal, political, economic, and intergenerational reverberations continue to shape the everyday experiences of South Asians in India. As Desai and Dubey (2012) make clear:

Caste background continues to define opportunities available to individuals. Land ownership patterns remain unequal; lower castes have low educational status; have lower consumption expenditure resulting in lower access to nutrition, healthcare and private education; and have fewer social connections to seek help in emergencies or to provide access to information and connections to important social institutions such as government services, healthcare, and medical services. (p. 10)

These “lack of opportunities” (Desai & Dubey, p.10), I understood were not static stories, they rippled in different directions, shaping other stories and experiences. Moreover, listening to Vam, I was once more awake to the recognition that these restrictive narratives of caste were not confined to geographical borders of India. Nor did they simply disappear when new lives were made abroad, they continued to contour and mould the experiences of South Asians living in the diaspora.

I listened as Vam went on to describe the caste system to her young daughter in ways that she could understand.

The thing about the system, it's basically based on jobs. Based on the jobs they do, like you know, people who chant the mantras are the Brahmins. People who do the woodwork and all that, they are called Vaishyas. These are the business tradesmen. Kings are called

Kshatriyas and the people who do all the cleaning jobs, the Shudras. That's the major difference. So, based on your skill set, you are one of these. (Transcript, April 2, 2016)

Deepika was confused and exasperated in turn, declaring, *“That doesn't make any sense! They have different jobs now, so?”* (Transcript, April 2, 2106) Trying to help Deepika make the incomprehensible comprehensible, I explained, *“It's discrimination. It's putting people in categories and treating them in ways which aren't fair, kind, healthy, or good”* (Transcript, April 2, 2016). In this moment, I saw that Deepika was thinking hard. Her sense of justice had been disturbed in hearing that people didn't necessarily have, due to circumstances beyond their control, power over their own lives. Drawing upon her faith, Vam continued:

I felt so angry. When that boy was talking... What were the parents thinking? Literally what God taught you, the principles, they took on a different meaning and then you know... It's like those pictures you get online. The ones that say, “Pass it on or follow this or bad luck will follow you. Do this or you'll get bad luck!” Why would you get bad luck? (Transcript, April 2, 2016)

Musing on Vam's comments, I suggested, *“It's a default in responsibility...”* (Transcript, April 2, 2016). Vam's response highlighted her disgust with attempting to suggest God had ordained caste as a way of living. Using her example, she was vehement in her outrage, *“I especially don't like it when they say that bad luck will follow you. They are blaming God. This is like the [caste] system”* (Transcript, April 2, 2016).

“Whatever prayer you do, it has to come from the heart.”

Thinking back to another time, Vam made another connection to her Hindu faith. Noting in frustration that religion had become more commercialized than it had been before, Vam talked

about how the religious pilgrimages to Benares¹⁸⁹ had altered over time. Whereas once in the distant past, devotees had to contend with “*difficult travel*” and needing “*money, time, and proper transportation*” to get them to their holy destination, “*Now, it’s different*” (Transcript, April 2, 2016). People then, “*had so much dedication and that’s why they travelled to such a far place to take a dip in the river so all their sins would be washed off*” (Transcript, April 2, 2016). Elaborating, Vam noted in various tones of outrage and disbelief:

They [devotees in the past] had the realization to go to that place. I mean it’s only after you had such a realization, that you would take such a big risk to go there and take a dip. That made sense. But nowadays, everybody can go. You have lots of sins and you can just go take a tip and visit God! You can do anything, and you can just go take a dip and wash your sins away. It’s become a business! All the pilgrimages, the people who are going there, they are the business community. They call and just ask the priests to do this pooja¹⁹⁰ for them. This is wrong. Whatever prayer you do, it has to come from the heart. Then only does it have result. (Transcript, April 2, 2016)

Hearing Vam speak with such passion, I was reminded of how deeply her faith was intertwined in curriculum making alongside Deepika. The story Vam had shared was one in which Vam’s understanding of her faith was rendered visible. Prayers that were offered in exchange for financial support were ones to be viewed with suspicion. Layering connections with how pilgrimages in the past were shaped around personal, intergenerational, and faith-based

¹⁸⁹ Here, Vam was referring to the famous pilgrimage taken by millions of religious devotees to the Ganges River located in Benares to cleanse themselves of their sins. There is also the widespread faith-based belief amongst many Hindus, that if you are close to dying, being near the holy river at this point will help you on your path to Moksha. Moksha is an ultimate form of enlightenment and a release from earthly things.

¹⁹⁰ As mentioned elsewhere in this dissertation, *pooja* is shaped and lived in diverse ways amongst Hindus. In a broad sense, it can be thought of as a set of rituals, prayers, and faith-based activities performed in daily worship.

narratives, Vam pointed to the sincerity involved in such actions. Turning inward, I was reminded of my family's stories of faith. The many pilgrimages my mother and her siblings had undertaken first in their childhood and then in their adulthood to a certain special temple in hopes their prayers would be heard and ultimately fulfilled, continued to be a faith-based story that they lived. Undergirding their actions was a sincere belief their faith would be recognized. I understood Vam's frustration that the prayer and faith involved in pilgrimages to Benares and the holy river, had become an ostentatious spectacle and business for some. Rooted in the curriculum making shared between Vam and her children, Deepika and Deepika's little brother, Aari, was an abiding belief in the sincerity of good actions shaped by true faith.

The Ripples of School Stories: "How sick it is!"

As the three of us continued to converse and think about the differing stories we lived and heard, some of which were shared in our chat together, Vam invited Deepika and I to think about another experience. This too was steeped in the taint of caste. Vam spoke about a priest who she heard speaking.

The priest, he was talking about the caste system. There's a village in India where the children have to wear different uniforms at school. The Dalits, a subcaste. Yes, they have a different uniform in school! How sick it is! You know, you are making the child feel every minute they are someone not of worth. They [the children] are not allowed to drink the water from the glass near the fountain. They are not allowed to touch it! And, he [the priest] was supporting this and saying, "Yes, this is their sin! They're born in that caste." It's like, what nonsense are you talking about? And, he said in Hindi, "God made

us. Because what karma¹⁹¹ they did before, they are born in that caste.” God made them to be like that, so they have to be in that caste. (Transcript, April 2, 2016)

Like Vam, I, too, was disgusted and horrified by what the priest had been saying. To make any child (or for that matter, any youth or adult) feel like they are of not worth based on a derogatory narrative of caste, is not humane nor socially just. Vam’s story of the priest reminded me of times in my childhood and later adulthood when speaking to people who served others, was looked at in askance. I was reminded of familial stories which stretched backward temporally and some of which reached now in the present, where different family members were ostracized for wedding out of their caste. Again, I felt that familiar sickened shamed feeling come over me. Looking to Deepika, I saw that she was still with us. She was attempting to make sense of the insensible once again.

Deepika, speaking slowly: So, like the Nazis, where they had people wear a star? It’s like they had to wear different uniforms.

Me: You’re right, Deepika. The Nazis made certain people wear certain symbols. Jewish people were forced to wear a Star of David so they could be identified for their faith.

(Transcript, April 2, 2016)

Deepika’s connections with the story her mother had shared and other ones she had learned, helped me to understand how Deepika was thinking about plotlines of caste. She understood what had been done by the Nazis was horrific and her understanding that certain South Asian children were being treated differently for untenable reasons, had struck an empathetic chord in her. Deepika continued to speak, taking our conversation into other “*sick*” (Transcript, April 2,

¹⁹¹ *Karma*, in North American culture, has been appropriated to loosely mean one’s fate or destiny. For many Hindus, Karma refers to the way in which one’s current life is seen in light of previous lives. Each decision we make is ascribed value and shapes what our existence will look like in the next life.

2016) territory. Speaking about an incident that had taken place in her previous school, Deepika outlined an experience which left her feeling deeply embarrassed and frustrated within her Grade Three Community.

Deepika, speaking in an upset voice: My teacher showed us a video about India. It was like they only showed villages in the books [referring to her Social Studies textbook and the books the teacher had selected for the class]. That's what bugs me! Like, my old teacher would show videos that bugged me more! I don't know why she showed them!

Vam: She directly asked her teacher: "Why do you only show bad videos about India? There's a lot of good in India. Why don't you show that?"

Deepika: That made me cry! There was this video, you know the people who can't afford to go to normal schools in India?

Me: Yes...

Deepika: Well, there's this place where all the people go, where they have um, weird teaching methods. And then, some of my friends were like, "Did you go to a school like this?" And, I was like, "No!" I don't know what made them think that. So, my best friend, Nancy¹⁹² was like, "How would she be able to come to Canada if she was poor?"

(Transcript, April 2, 2016)

In Deepika's retelling of this experience, I felt my heart ache in sympathy and echoing frustration. Her young Grade Three self had understood that a single story (Adichie, 2009) of India was being imparted by her teacher. And, this monolithic story was further being projected upon Deepika herself. Deepika knew herself to be storied as poor and as having come from a school "with weird teaching methods" (Transcript, April 2, 2016) and had found herself the subject of misinformed pity by some classmates. Deepika, herself, understood that her roots belied such a simplistic rendering. Her experiences of India were a cartography of love, beauty, and complexity. The internal map Deepika knew and loved was not the one so narrowly

¹⁹² This is a pseudonym.

depicted in the few scenes that incorrectly reflected only a downtrodden people working within a poor educational system. Deepika's wish for her teacher and her peers to visualize a different India echoed a similar concern I had of how South Asian females are depicted in the scholarly literature. When I had visited several girl schools in Northern India, my heart had been gladdened to see the teachers and students coming together in deeply relational ways. There was a vibrancy and sense of positivity that is missing in the stories that were and are typically made visible here in Canada of Indian schools. Asking her teacher to look beyond such static images of India, was an attempt on Deepika's part to invite her teacher to world travel (Lugones, 1987) to her richly storied world of India. Deepika and her family were living competing stories (Clandinin et al, 2006) of India in their community and familial worlds, stories which were enlivened by a veritable composition of complex images, while the story being composed by Deepika's teacher seemed to be one which was decidedly restrictive, occupying a small space of what could have been a richly textured, multihued canvas. I was reminded of the young South Asian Canadian protagonist, Tara in Rachna Gilmore's (2001) young adolescent novel, *A Group of One* who is understandably upset when her teacher Mr. Toller imposes his single story of Indian-ness upon her in front of her Grade Five peers. He first asked Tara, in the midst of making a welcome banner composed of different languages, "Hey, kiddo, what's your language?" (p. 4). Tara, relating the disturbing experience to her best friend, Erin, describes the exchange between her and her teacher.

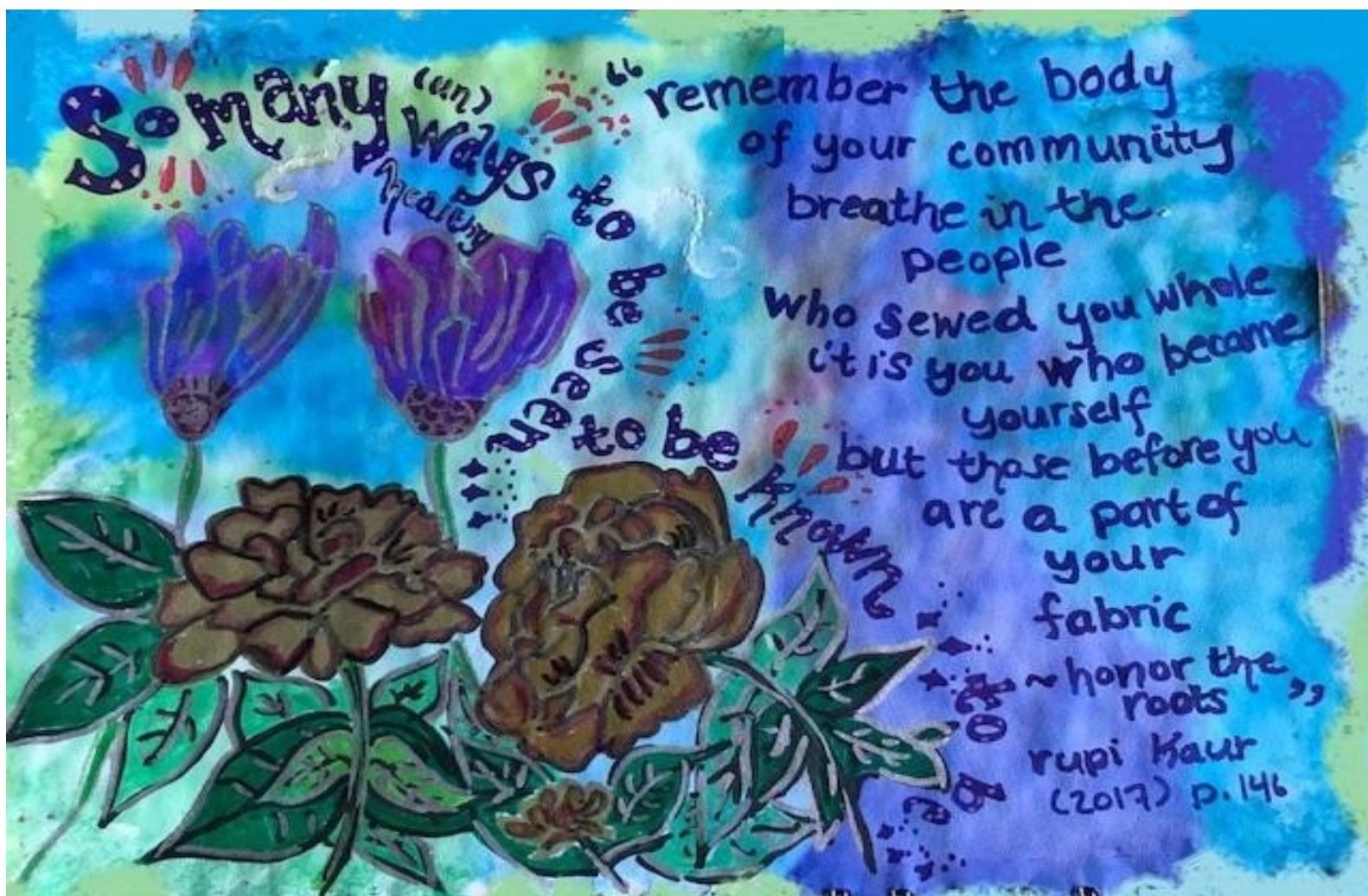
So I say, *English*, and he says, No, *your mother-tongue*, and again, I say, *English*... He asked what my heritage is. I mean why does he single out kids who look different—why doesn't he ask Lesley, or Doug? They have some heritage, too. But no, it's just me and Chang and Trev.... Then he said, "*Pity you don't know your language.*" (p. 4)

Deepika's teacher too, seemed to be thinking along the restrictive lines of a singular plotline, one which encompassed Deepika within its suffocating folds. In imposing her understanding of Indian-ness (in)directly upon Deepika and not seeking to illuminate other experiences of India, through one video offering, Deepika's teacher took refuge in a deficit type of intercultural curriculum making. Deepika's friend in trying to come to her friend's aid, unknowingly contributed to a story of India as a nation of poverty and little else when she queried, "How would she [Deepika] be able to come to Canada if she was poor?" (Transcript, April 1, 2016). As Vam so eloquently put it, "*People who watch such videos, they get a different kind of impression about India. They show only the bad things, which I don't like...*" (Transcript, April 2, 2016). I was troubled to learn that Deepika's former teacher did not take up Deepika's plea to show other stories of India (a variety of videos) and in making the choice to not do so, I believe, an opportunity for the whole Grade Three Classroom community to engage more deeply with one another and the curricular content, was missed.

A Heart-full Musing Interlude: How to Move Past Seeing Only Weeds...

As I continued to think with the differing stories I was hearing with each of my research friends, I found myself becoming more distraught. Deepika's stories of being made to represent a whole nation in an unwholesome way could have been avoided in her Grade Three classroom community. Deepika's peers had learned that it was permissible for them to story India and Deepika in certain ways after watching the video. However, it was the teacher's lack of action which perturbed me more. Knowing her student was upset, she did not correct these misrepresentations. The students having the video and their teacher as their main reference points had learned it was permissible to repeat the prejudices they had heard and seen. I couldn't help but think this is one of the means by which racism is given fertile ground—that is, with the

shaping of deficit stories. Students can act much in the manner of pollinators (un)intentionally spreading misinformation. At the same time deficit stories can work in harmful ways upon the children who are made the object of discrimination. These children can internalize these hurtful stories and grow up feeling inadequate with stunted ideas of themselves and others of similar heritage.



74-Seeing the Flowers Amongst the Weeds

Intercultural competence is one of those terms that can be taken up in surface ways. There is no doubt it can be, and has been, bandied about as self-serving or lip-service responses to diversity. Nevertheless, if it is taken up as part of a mindset that a teacher can *learn* to

cultivate and one in which a teacher can help students to cultivate, there is promise in shaping communities where respect can grow between diverse individuals. At the same time, stories which help communities to find pride in themselves are needed. As I continued to think about the people, children especially, who are made to feel less-than for being different, I found Kaur's words to be of comfort. Recalling Reddy's (2017) metaphor of foreign flowers (shared within an earlier musing within this narrative account), I sketched some flowers on a painted background of blues and greens. Petals rimmed or wholly coloured in metallic golds, I thought about the promise to be found in sustaining stories of our differing roots which can help us to flourish.

“Beggars and Villagers”

It would be several months later, when visiting Deepika and Vam in their home that Deepika would once more relate this story and I would learn that the stories the children told had rippled outward and inward in other negative ways. Deepika explained

I got so mad in my last school. They showed troubles of the world and in India, like, some poor, like, you know, beggars? They went to this school on wheels, like, it was on a bus. And then everybody in my class thought I went to a school like that, and I just, like, I got so mad at them. I started calling everybody stupid in my mind [laughed in an upset tone], because every single day when we talked about India, they were just like, “Yeah, India doesn't have buildings, right?” I'm, like, “Seriously? Are you kidding me right now?”

Sitting with Deepika's mother, Vam, her father, Kade and her younger sibling, Aari, I felt my sense of disquiet expand. They had been silent in the retelling, allowing Deepika the opportunity to share her grief. And, it was grief, I recognized. It was a sense of grief for being made to feel

different and conspicuous in unpleasant ways. Again, I felt outrage and disappointment come over me as I listened to Deepika share this story. I quietly asked, “Your teacher didn’t correct it...this misunderstanding?” (Transcript, October 7, 2016). Deepika shook her head in negation.

No. And then I told my teacher that [about the children’s misunderstanding there were no buildings in India] and then she actually explained it, 'cause I was crying. My best friend, she’s like, “Why would she come here, people? Think about it. Why would she have the money to come here if she was a beggar?” And then my teacher got mad at her. Because my best friend just like, she’s just like, um, she called them beggars. It even said that in the video. My teacher said to call them villagers. But they’re not villagers.

Vam, speaking quietly: They’re landlords and they have slums... Only seeing this leaves an impression, right? (Transcript, October 7, 2016)

I could only concur even as I thought about the stories that were being imposed on Deepika by virtue of a video clip. I felt angry on her behalf and other children similar to her who were storied in such ways. I wondered again about the teacher. Understanding that the children were operating under a misconception or rather several misconceptions about India and its people, why did she not seek to redress the issue? Was it because she did not know how to work on these stories? Was it because she too, bought into these stories? I realized with frustration, I would never know. All I would know is that Deepika, a young girl I cared about had been made to feel bad about her heritage and stories which positioned India and its people as “*beggars and villagers*” with “*no buildings*” and only “*schools on wheels*” (Transcript, October 7, 2016).

“My parents never made me feel, I’m just a girl!”

Vam, speaking reflectively, observed, “*There are places if a girl child is born, we say Lakshmi is born.*”¹⁹³ (Transcript, April 2, 2020). The time continued to pass in companionable conversation, and this time the talk turned towards our understandings and experiences of Indian girlhood. Deepika continued to munch on her pasta even as she kept an attentive ear to what was being shared. In this conversational fragment, Vam illuminated the need to recognize that while there were South Asian girls who experienced atrocities, there too, were plotlines offering other more venerable experiences for girls. Vam’s words gathered momentum.

Usually in our houses, it is like that. When a girl is born, even the mother and father touch her feet. She is given a high position. It’s an honour to be a girl child. They never yell at her so much. It depends on the families. In other areas, with other families, she can be mistreated and tortured.

Me: That’s the thing, people tend to only see the negative stories. That’s partly why I wished to do this research.

Vam: You are doing a good job. Seriously! I mean I appreciate you. That’s why I wanted to be a part of this. Why does it always have to be a negative picture of us?

Deepika, piping in: You should take a picture here and everything will be explained! (Transcript, April 1, 2016).

Vam understood the complexities involved in moving away from static and solely pejorative understandings of South Asian girlhood experiences. She wanted to show that there were other ways of understanding the experiences of Indian girls which allowed for different stories to be figuratively laid alongside the stories which disenfranchised them. Vam wished for people to see that there also existed uplifting plotlines for girls. Being a part of this narrative inquiry, I

¹⁹³ *Lakshmi* is the Hindu Goddess most commonly associated with wealth. Wealth, within these contexts, are most often construed along lines of good health, the love and welfare of individuals, families, and friends, and essential needs being met. Monetary wealth is also linked to this goddess.

was truly coming to understand, was one of the ways in which Vam saw herself as pushing back against this monolithic understanding of a diversity of Indian experiences. Deepika's involvement in the research was yet another way in which Vam could help Deepika to take pride in who she was and who she was becoming. Vam pointed to her parents as helping Vam to live a plotline imbued with her own sense of power and the wealth and joy of being an Indian girl. Deepika's response went to the heart of our concerns, "*You should take a picture here and everything will be explained!*" (Transcript, April 2, 2016) pointed to the strength of Vam's curriculum making alongside Deepika. I couldn't help but reply in happy astonishment, "Yes, smiling girl! Yes, exactly!" to Deepika's delighted amusement and pride.

My parents, they never made me feel like, "I'm a just a girl!" where girls and boys are treated differently. No, I was always given the opportunity to speak up on what I was feeling. Let's say, on any general topic. (Transcript, April 2, 2016)

Learning from Vam that her childhood familial curriculum making had been composed in ways which bespoke of love and respect, I could see how she carried these plotlines forward in how she loved, worked, and played alongside her children, Deepika and Aari, and her husband, Kade. In this manner, I understood Vam was living the stories she too had lived with her parents and continuing to shape spaces for Deepika to live affirmational plotlines that ran counter to other ones lived by less fortunate girls.

Not too much later, the waitress came by with the bill. Deepika's brother, Aari and her dad, Kade were on their way to pick Vam and Deepika up from the pizzeria. Busy with the interac machine, the waitress turned attention to our plates and ensemble of take away boxes. Smiling broadly, she gave Deepika a wink, "I have to say I'm quite impressed. Out of the three

of you, she [Deepika] ate the most!” (Transcript, April 2, 2016). Bill paid, the waitress sauntered away and left us to our own devices. Concerned that Deepika might worry over the comment, I grinned, *“Your mom and I didn’t eat as much only because I was asking her so many questions!”* (Transcript, April 2, 2016). Deepika was quick to explain her understanding of the situation and once more take us to the heart of the matter, *“You’re talking with me and my mom. You get to talk with me at school. So now you’re talking with my mom. When you come to our house you can talk again with me and my mom”* (Transcript, April 2, 2016).

Visiting: Very Much a Family Affair

There was already snow on the ground and the air was crisp with the foreshadowing kiss of frost when I made my way to Vam’s house that early October. The door of the house was flung open by Deepika before I even stepped out of my car. I felt an answering rush of excitement and climbed up the stairs to envelope her in a big hug. Leading me to the living room, I exchanged hugs with Vam and sat down on a couch. Aari, Deepika’s little brother exchanged shy greetings with me as his father, Kade, wrapping a comforting arm about his son’s slim shoulders, bade me a welcome. The family home was decorated with care and as my appreciative eye took in the décor, I caught sight of Ganapathy, reclining rather majestically, as was his wont, on a side table. Above Ganapathy was a metal wrought peacock clock. Seeing my expression, Kade revealed that the children’s grandmother had liked the clock so much that they had bought one for her as a gift to take back home. Deepika’s infamous high-heeled chair was in sight too. Exclaiming with wonder, I touched the large life-sized shoe in delight, *“Hey! I finally get to see the chair you’ve been talking about! It looks really cool!”* (Research Notes, October 7, 2016). Deepika’s black and white print pump had stepped its way into several of our conversations, so, it was fun to finally see the much talked about furniture piece. I learned from Vam that

Deepika's high heeled chair had been brought down from her bedroom to accommodate the grandparents—Vam's mother and father who had come to visit. As we chatted, Vam let me know that other guests had come to visit—Vam's best friend and her two-year-old son. The visits had been wonderful but also tiring for the family. Sitting comfortably ensconced on the sofa, I hoped that my visit would be more of the former and less of the latter!

“The teachers there had different roles.”

Hesitating, I queried, “Would it be okay if I turn on my recorder?” (Research Notes, October 7, 2016) and was relieved when both adults told me they had no problem with me doing so. Even as I wondered if I would ever feel comfortable in asking this question, Vam began speaking about her time as a young student in India.

Vam: Schools there are not the same as they are here. I had 70 children in my class.

Me: Oh, my goodness! I wonder how everyone coped. That does not seem like an ideal situation for the children or the teacher.

Kade: I didn't have as many as Vam but there were still plenty of students. Around 50 children in a class.

Deepika: Wow!

Vam: The teachers there had different roles there. It's not the same here.

Kade: Yes, here the kids can get help.

Vam, elaborating: The teachers gave us our books and we were expected to learn from them without any help.

Deepika: My [Grade Five] teacher is making me learn grammar now. She corrects us.

Vam: I really like this. She is allowing the children to have time to work in quiet and together. (Transcript, October 7, 2016)

As I heard Vam and Kade speak about their school experiences in India, I understood that they believed that the education system in this province afforded their children more opportunities to engage with their teachers and the curricular content. Here, the children were able to ask questions. There, in India, within the schools they attended, Vam and Kade suggested that “the responsibility was on us to learn” (Transcript, October 7, 2016). Deepika’s response that her teacher was “*making me learn Grammar*” (Transcript, October 7, 2016) hinted a possible dislike for this learning. As we continued to talk, Aari shared that kindergarten in India had not been a pleasant experience for him. “*I didn’t like it because my teacher made me feel dumb. My teacher pointed to the word, Insect. I didn’t know if the butterfly was an animal or an insect*” (Transcript, October 7, 2016). I learned from Vam that little Aari had been hit by the teacher with a stick on his arm for not knowing this distinction. Dismayed, in learning about this, I shared my disappointment that Aari had gone through kind of experience. This was a mis-educative experience (Dewey, 1935/1997) which had harmed Aari’s growth and an experience which caused him to adopt an unhealthy and untrue story of feeling “*dumb*” (Transcript, October 7, 2016). Vam explained that due to their frequent moves, the children had to be transferred to a “*lower class school*” (Research Notes, October 7, 2016). Drawing comparisons to the school that Deepika had attended before and the one in which she hoped to enroll Aari, Vam observed:

It was unfortunate because the Delhi Public School had a swimming pool, a volleyball court, and the following year, Deepika could have learned horseback riding. The kids had to be placed in this temporary school which was new. The school staff were our

[pointing to Kade and me] age group, so I thought it would be a good place for the kids.

(Transcript, October 7, 2016)

Appreciating that both parents had envisioned a different educational experience for their children, I asked Vam and Kade what happened after Aari had come home the day he had been struck.

I went into the school. I had to go and talk to his teacher. I told the teacher, I told her, “You had better not lay a hand on our kids!” I talked to the headmaster, “You can’t hurt our son or any other children like this. It is wrong.” (Transcript, October 7, 2020)

Kade then added that there had been recurring incidents with children being struck by a ruler. Vam elaborated, *“The children were getting hit for being late [to school] but it was the parents who were at fault. They dropped off the kids. Even in this sense, this punishment makes no sense”* (Transcript, October 7, 2020). I understood the point that Vam and Kade were making. Even within the context of arguing that the punishment was well-suited for the action, the action was not the children’s action but that of their parents. The children ought not be punished for their parents’ actions. Vam and Kade did not condone physical punishment. Vam shared she had made several calls to the school over these actions. Deepika and Aari listened avidly as their parents took turns speaking and I had a sense that they were learning how strong their parents were for advocating for a different quality of education for the two of them and other children as well. The contrast Vam had described between the Delhi Public School and this second and newer school the children attended, was sharp. Looking at Deepika and Aari, I understood the reverberations of the stories they lived within this *“lower class school”* had been embodied, and carried into their current schools, here in Canada. Vam’s contention, *“The teachers there had*

different roles. It's not the same here" (Transcript, October 7, 2016) took on even deeper significance. I had no way of knowing the stories that teachers at the children's former school in India had imposed on them but I had a sense now of the ones imposed on two of the children who attended this new school. The pleasure Vam and Kade had exuded when Aari and Deepika spoke of the positive relationships they had with their teachers at Borderlands School highlighted for me once more, the importance of shaping community in classrooms alongside students.

Sharing Experiences at Borderlands School

Encouraging me to "*Talk with the kids. They have lots they want to tell you*" (Transcript, October 7, 2016), Vam went into the kitchen. Kade remained seated as the children told me about their upcoming dance recital later this month. "*Both the children have been taking lessons*" (Transcript, October 7, 2016). Kade then clicked on the television set to show me a clip of the dance instructor and her studio. "Wow, looks like you two have a great instructor!" (Transcript, October 7, 2016) I suggested to Deepika and Aari. Inviting me to attend the upcoming show, Kade then left us to join Vam in the kitchen. I listened attentively as Deepika shared that her Grade Five teacher had asked the class to describe autumn through the poetic form of haiku. Without warning the teacher inside of me slipped out unbidden and I queried, "*Do you remember the pattern?*" (Research Notes, October 7, 2016). At first annoyed with myself, I then laughed silently, recognizing that it wasn't merely my teaching self from which the question emerged, but also, because I loved this poetic form, having used it to think inwardly and reflect outwardly. Unaware of my inner reprimand turned contemplation, Deepika was happy to explain, "*It's five syllables, then seven syllables, and then five syllables*" (Transcript, October 7, 2016). She went on to say:

I finished it already. It was, like, so hard for me to think of it. Oh my God, what is seven syllables? Leaves crunching underfoot, pirouetting down or did it begin with, crunching underfoot, leaves pirouetting down... Argh! I can't remember. I should send it to you 'cause I can send it to anyone I like! (Transcript, October 7, 2016)

“Whoop hoo! It sounds like you have some beautiful imagery that you are working with and I love how you're making it come together!” I replied in pleasure and then added, “Pirouetting? I love that!” (Transcript, October 7, 2016). By way of response, Deepika let me know that a “*LA [Language Arts] assistant*” in her class had helped her come up with the word, noting that “*She's very descriptive and wears cool boots!*” (Transcript, October 7, 2016). Finding the conversation more interesting now that it was about school, Deepika's younger brother began to share what he was doing with his peers in his Grade Two class.

Aari: We already started on our Thanksgiving art.

Me: Oooh! What are you doing?

Aari: A turkey. We drew it, but now we're doing it with paper.

Me: Oh, like you're ripping up the pieces? Is that the kind of turkey you're making?

Aari, explaining: We have a, like, tracer of feathers and then we get, um, a coloured piece of paper and then we trace it and then we cut out the feathers.

Me: That sounds like fun!

Aari, in a serious tone: And, we cut out a head and body. And, they're brown.

Deepika, interjecting: They're like, practicing their cutting skills

Aari: On the feathers, we write what we're thankful for.

Me: What did you write?

Aari: I wrote family, money, friends, and God. (Transcript, October 7, 2016)

Listening to Deepika and Aari tell me about the things they found most interesting in their respective classroom communities, helped me to understand the curriculum making that was being shaped by teachers and students. The children were bringing home their stories of school and teachers. Their parents, Vam and Kade listened from the kitchen as the children talked and I was aware these stories were being retold by the children. While I was hearing these stories for the first time, Kade and Vam had already heard these stories. For Deepika, her artistic challenges in word choice and syllabic form were of utmost importance to her in shaping an autumn haiku. Knowing how she loved to play with words through song, I understood this was a curriculum making she embraced. Aari, too, shared what was occupying his thoughts. The creation of a turkey as an art project was an educational experience he took seriously. The feathers had to be cut just so and then, composing a sentence for what he was thankful for required deep thought. Contemplating the stories the children had shared with me, I found myself thinking back to Marsh's (2013) observation that much of the curriculum from one nursery school was moving to children's homes but very little from the children's homes was making its way to their nursery school, suggestive of a privileging of certain knowledge over other knowledge. Within this context, I wondered about Deepika and Aari's upcoming dancing—both children had shared nobody at school knew about it—and how their interests could have enriched the curriculum making shaped in their classroom communities. I thought about the turkey making activity and wondered how students who were vegetarians understood the connection between consuming the turkey and thankfulness. I wondered too, what stories of First Nations people and settlers were being shared and which ones were not being shared.

It wasn't much later, when Kade announced it was time to eat. Dinner, it turned out was a homemade feast with plenty of food to go around. The sumptuous scents of Indian cooking had

awakened my appetite. Sharing my appreciation with Vam and Kade, Vam observed, *“We like to have people come over”* (Transcript, October 7, 2016) and that it hadn’t been any trouble. Dishes with biryani with chicken and spicy goat meat with parotta were included in the plentiful offerings. Commenting the food was delicious, Vam replied, *“I like to cook fresh food when I can”* (Transcript, October 7, 2016). Despite my protestations that I was full, Vam placed more food on my plate and I couldn’t help but smile. This was typical of Indian folks. Our stories of welcome and courtesy are very much steeped in food. Aari and Deepika were happy to drink Fanta pop, which they both let me know was only permitted on certain occasions and not every day. Catching my look of surprise that the pop was kept at room temperature, Vam informed me that, *“Ice water or any cold liquid to drink is not good for one’s system”* (Transcript, October 7, 2016). Vam then asked me to think about dishes in the sink and posed the question of whether they get clean with cold water or hot water. Replying hesitantly, *“With hot water”* (Transcript, October 7, 2016) Vam suggested, *“If we do this with our bodies [drink warm or room temperature liquids] we will be healthier”* (Transcript, October 7, 2016). In this moment, Vam’s expertise in ayurvedic medicine was brought to the forefront and I was able to see that it was an essential thread prominently interwoven within her familial curriculum making (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011) alongside her children and her husband.

“Tah-dah! This is my Secret Place!”

Gently refusing my offer to help clean-up once dinner was over, Vam told me to accompany Deepika upstairs. Deepika grabbed my arm with repressed eagerness and she urged, *“You can come to my room. I created this awesome thing!”* (Transcript, October 7, 2016). I replied with equal eagerness, *“Oh, I’d love to see it!”* (Transcript, October 7, 2016). Up the staircase we went with Deepika in the lead. At the entrance of a closed door, she paused

dramatically and with a theatrical flourish, announced, *“This is my room. Read the words”* (Transcript, October 7, 2016). Deepika gestured to the sign she had posted on her bedroom door and I read with care aloud, *“We are the stars! Welcome to Deepika’s room!”* (Research Notes, October 7, 2016). The gold star cut carefully from bright yellow construction paper accompanied by a pair of hand-drawn smiley faces, decorated the pale blue poster. *“I love this welcoming poster, Deepika!”* (Transcript, October 7, 2016).



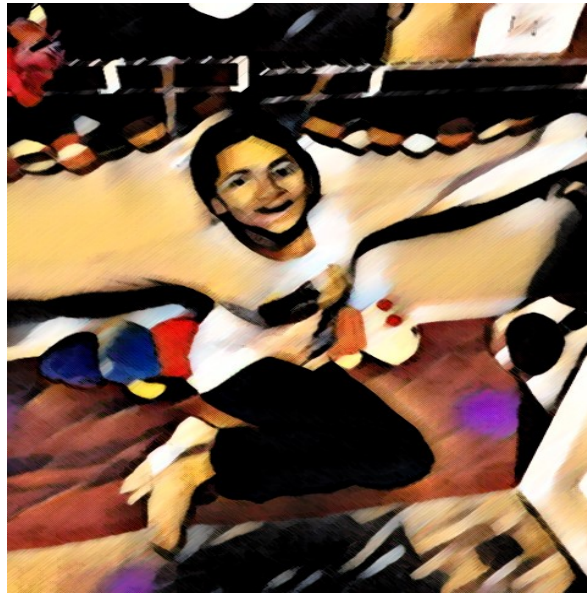
75-Deepika and her Sign of Welcome

Pleased, Deepika took me inside her tidy bedroom. Her bed was located beneath a window. Directly across from her bed was a closet. And, it was here that Deepika showed me her Secret Place. Deepika’s Secret Place was located inside her closet space which she had decorated in beautiful ways. Deepika was very proud of this space, which I loved seeing. Deepika explained the different items which she kept in her special spot and let me know this was the place she went to *“hang out”* (Research Notes, October 7, 2016) and to *“be by myself”* (Research Notes, October 7, 2016) when she needed time alone. As Deepika continued to talk, I found my smile grow. Hearing Deepika speak was reminiscent of how her mom, Vam had

moments before shared and explained her décor choices with me downstairs. Deepika then proceeded to show the items she kept in her Secret Place. Off to one side was a low table she had fashioned from an old cardboard box and had covered with a colourful polka dot tablecloth. On this table were some reading books and a jar of peacock feathers. Next to that was another jar with the hand drawn label, *Inspire* emblazoned across. Resting upon the carpet beside the table was a lovely arrangement of imitation orchids. Festooned across the three walls of Deepika's Special Place were chains of red and green construction paper which Deepika informed me were from the previous Christmas. Occupying a space of prominence, in the center of Deepika's sanctuary was a large stuffed caterpillar with a beaming expression lounging on the carpet. I understood that for Deepika this self-decorated space had been artistically decorated to her personal tastes. Inside this space were the items which Deepika considered important and special in her life. After jumping into her space and bringing me inside to show me her treasured items, Deepika ushered me back out.

She took me to her desk which was adjacent to her closet. The desk was a lovely affair which included a hutch like feature where Deepika could store her personal items and a working space below where she might do her homework. As Deepika was pointing out a miniature desk that stood on top of her desk, Vam came into the room to join us. Noticing what Deepika was showing me, she explained, "*I saw this and thought it matched Deepika's desk exactly. She liked it too and we got it for her*" (Research Notes, October 7, 2016). The mini desk did indeed look like a replica of Deepika's real sized desk. It also featured a fluffy roll back chair which I could see immediately why it would appeal to Deepika. I expressed my admiration for Deepika's room, "Deepika, you have an amazing room! And your Secret Place, I can totally see why you'd want to hang out there. It is so comfy and cozy!" (Research Notes, October 7, 2016). Vam touched

Deepika on the shoulder, “*Did you show her your secret light? Both of the kids have one*” (Research Notes, October 7, 2016). Deepika, following her mother’s advice, showed me a large round button that was sitting on her desk. “*See, it flashes, when you push on it!*” Deepika explained earnestly.



76-Deepika Enjoying her Special Place

In this moment, I could see the love Vam had for her daughter. She had helped Deepika create this very special bedroom and had proffered advice to Deepika on how to decorate it. The space that Deepika had marked as her very own sanctuary, was a wonderful space filled with Deepika’s treasured items. It was a place in which Deepika could escape when she needed to recuperate from her day to day challenges. It was as her jar of pens indicated, a space where she was inspired and got to be inspired. I was honoured that Deepika had shared her lovely room and Special Place with me. Smiling at mother and daughter, I commented, “You were right Deepika, this is awesome!” (Research Notes, October 7, 2016).

Driving home later that night, I felt happy. It had been such a lovely evening spent with a lovely family. The conversations we had shared had given me much to think about. Schools could be spaces offering sanctuary much in the way Deepika's Secret Place did or they could bend towards being spaces of tension. Deepika's story of the India clip continued to work on me.

“Currently, she’s learning, like, half-Kathak and half Bollywood.”

Vam and Kade had invited me to attend the children's dance performance on this crisp autumn day of October 23, 2016. Only a few weeks earlier, prior to enjoying a delicious meal with the family, Deepika and her brother, Aari had let me know they were taking Indian dance lessons at an Indian dance academy. At that time, they told me they were still practicing within their individual groups the various numbers they would perform at a popular public venue.

Vam: Currently, she’s learning, like, half-Kathak¹⁹⁴ and half Bollywood¹⁹⁵.

Deepika, enthused: When I practiced, I got better!

Vam, proudly speaking: Yeah! She got scolding. The teacher scolded her. She wasn't doing it properly and then practiced. And then her teacher said, “She has come out so well!”

Me, excitedly adding: That totally deserves a high five! (Transcript, October 7, 2016)

This hybrid of dance was very familiar to me and I was looking forward to once more experiencing that special borderland space. With the sound of the high five Deepika and I shared weeks ago still sounding happily in my ears, I drove up into the parking lot once more grateful

¹⁹⁴ *Kathak*, originating within Hindu temples, is a classical dance whose roots are South Indian. This form of Indian dance which draws heavily upon religious epics. Through vivid storytelling and dance, different tales are brought to life.

¹⁹⁵ *Bollywood* refers to the largely Hindi film industry coming out of India. Bollywood takes its name from the American film industry known as, Hollywood. Bollywood films are famous for the intricate song and dance numbers they feature within the stories narrated on screen.

for being able to access the very helpful Google Maps app for directions. I pulled out my phone and double-checked the time. I was early and would hopefully, be able to purchase my ticket and get a good seat for the performance. The weather had thankfully agreed, and the drive while long hadn't been compounded by heavily falling snow.

Inside the venue, I made my way to an empty table. The tickets, I had learned moments before, would not be sold until a certain person arrived. A little apprehensive that I wouldn't be able to watch the children perform I nonetheless took a seat to wait for Vam and the rest of her family. The foyer was packed with different family members crossing generational lines. I saw mothers, fathers, grandparents, and lots of children milling about. English mixed with Punjabi and Hindi punctuated the air. Young girls were dressed in Indian finery—jewel toned colours abounded. An overwhelmed young lady proceeded to hand programs printed on lime green neon cardstock. Smiling my thanks, I took one of the offerings and skimmed the contents. It was a fairly lengthy program. As I waited for Deepika and her family, another family came and sat at my table. And, I noticed the seven or so round tables in the foyer were quickly filling up. The ching-ching sound of bangles brought upon a wave of nostalgia. How many times had I along with my students prepared for a performance? Sequins caught and spun light, even within the shabby dimness of the sun's rays which feebly crept through large panes of glass. Amidst the costumes, the vivid plumes of colour, I noted there were children who were more somberly dressed in Western attire. As my eyes greedily drank in the potpourri of colour, I wondered how Deepika and her little brother, Aari would be dressed. I was also curious about their parents—would they be nervous for their children as they would be performing in such a large public forum? Might they just be excited? I recalled feeling both when helping the children in

my classes perform. Catching sight of a harried looking Vam and the children, I got up from my table and walked towards them.

“This is the time for them...because they are young.”

Tickets purchased and in hand, Kade took the children to the designated rooms behind the stage. Vam and I made our way to where the audience sat and found our seats. There was still time before the first act would come out and so it was nice to catch up beforehand. I learned the family had been a bit rushed in arriving to the venue and this was because the children had to be dressed in their costumes beforehand. With her long wavy dark brown tresses caught up in an elaborate bun, Deepika had looked stellar in a glittery silver sequin top and skirt. Aari too, had been looking like star-like material, handsomely attired in a pressed printed shirt and black dress pants. *“Deepika’s hair must have taken a long time to do,”* I hazard a guess. *“No, not really, I followed a video on YouTube”* (Research Notes, October 23, 2016). Nevertheless, I was impressed and said so. Deepika looked especially fetching with her hair gathered up. Vam went on to say that it just had been a hectic morning of making breakfast and ensuring the children ate—they had been too excited to eat much—and making it here on time. The children’s dance instructor had apparently been very strict about when she expected her students to arrive. The show was a long one and this necessitated skilled timing. I asked Vam why she felt it was important for Aari and Deepika to be involved in traditional dancing. I understood from our previous conversations that fine arts were important aspects which helped to shape her familial curriculum making (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011) alongside her children. Vam was thoughtful in her response, *“This is the time for them to take the lessons because they’re young. When they’re older they won’t have the chance or time to take them”* (Research Notes, October 23, 2016). Vam spoke about the need for the children to be exposed to the *“riches of our culture*

and customs” because when they entered adulthood, they would *“be too busy with their careers”* (Research Notes, October 23, 2016). Careers for Vam, I understood did not necessarily mean that the children had to attend university. They could attend trade schools as well or enter into some training in which they could make a living working within the arts. As Vam spoke, I recollected other stories, Vam had shared on being herself artistically inclined. In college, Vam had sung professionally. For Vam, such creativity was not limited to an in-school curriculum making but was intended for shaping meaning within their lives. As other audience members chatted amongst themselves, Vam explained to me that *“as long as my children are happy”* and *“have the opportunity for a good education in whatever can allow them to have a good life”* (Research Notes, October 23, 2016). This would be a wonderful refrain that I would hear repeated once again, in 2018, when I learned that the children were continuing to take lessons twice a week alongside their mother, Vam. In this moment as Kade came down the aisle to sit on the other side of his wife, we turned our expectant gazes to the stage as overhead the lights flickered, and the emcees began to speak.

The whole performance which featured adults and children alike spanned several hours and my eyes were treated to a diversity of acts which highlighted the heterogenous stories of South Asians. The people who made up the audience were making meaning of what they were seeing on stage. I recognized we were bringing our own understandings in viewing the performers and that this was not a passive act. As Greene (2001) contended:

In some fashion, as one attends, one lends the work one’s life. Or one brings it into the world through a sometimes mysterious interpretive act in a space between oneself and the stage or the wall or the text. (p. 128)

The mediating spaces being created between audience members and performers in this fashion shaped the aesthetic experience of the show. Being able to watch Deepika perform a more traditional stylized dance and Aari perform a Bollywood number with their dance academy peers was special for me. I recognized not all children are invited to explore their different identities in such evocative ways. For Deepika and Aari, I understood that Vam and Kade were shaping paths of possibility and imagination for their children. Below is a digitally shaped picture of Deepika and Vam. Kade had left his seat to check in on Aari whose Bollywood number was coming up. Deepika had completed her beautiful performance and in the midst of intermission, made her way to where her mom sat.



77-Deepika and Vam Share a Hug After her Lovely Performance

Living Music and Dancing as Artistic Ways of Being

Skipping forward temporally to that wintry day on February 19, 2018, visiting Vam and

the children—Kade had been at home but busy doing work elsewhere in the house—I asked Deepika and Aari if they were proud of their mom and it was lovely to hear them say, “*Yeah, we are*” and “*Yes!*” (Recording, February 19, 2018). For me, it was such a pleasure to hear that they were taking music and dance lessons together. I understood such artistry was important in how Vam and her husband, Kade were helping the children to shape their future stories. Still curious, I wanted to know if it was uncomfortable for Vam to be learning alongside the children. I couldn’t help but laugh aloud when Vam said, “*No. Not at all. I correct them if they are wrong*” (Recording, February 19, 2018) and laughed some more when Deepika and Aari groaned in unison. Gentle ribbing aside, I could sense the meaningful ways in which Vam was trying to connect Deepika and Aari with their roots. She and Kade were helping the children think about, and live, positive stories of their heritage. As we continued to sit in their living room conversing, Deepika observed, “*Dancing is very hard*” (Voice Recording, February 19, 2018). By way of explaining, Vam provided some context.

The dancing is very traditional. The owner of the studio sponsored a teacher from India to teach here. He’s nice and he teaches them the music and also teaches part of the dancing. The children have to listen to what he instructs and try to follow his example (Recording, February 19, 2018)

“*He’s pretty strict*” (Research Notes, February 19, 2018), Deepika suggested after her mother had spoken. I looked over at Deepika and noticed she looked quite uncertain. Keeping Deepika’s comment in mind, I asked if there would be an upcoming performance to come and watch. Vam nodded in affirmation. “*Yes, at the end of summer*” (Recording, February 19, 2018). Startled, Deepika asked in astounded surprise, “*How do you know?*” (Recording, February 19, 2018). I bit back a smile as Vam went on to explain that she had talked to the teacher and that

was how she knew. Deepika did not look relieved and said with a certain amount of apprehension, *“I don’t feel comfortable dancing”* (Recording, February 19, 2018). Vam took her daughter’s comment in stride and replied reassuringly, *“You won’t be alone, you’ll be dancing with other people”* (Recording, February 19, 2018). This sage advice, provided by Vam was a way in which she was letting Deepika know that she understood her daughter’s fears coupled with her strong faith in her daughter’s ability to overcome plotlines which situated her as not up to the challenge. Within this powerful curricular moment, I once more recognized Vam’s maternal pedagogy as being very much framed around affirmational stories of promise. As Vam so eloquently emphasized to both Deepika and myself, *“All learning is good learning. The critics are important in your life too. How you deal with them is important. They teach you so much about yourself”* (Recording, February 19, 2018). Vam was referencing her daughter’s worry about not dancing well alongside her concerns and also my fear¹⁹⁶ of sharing my work within this moment. In several of our conversations, I recognized Vam had brought this idea up with me before. I felt awed by Vam’s way of seeing life. This was a perspective which allowed one to move past what others thought of you and *“to show people that you can do something even if they say or think you can’t do something”* (Recording, February 19, 2018).

The pizza ordered by Vam from a local Indian restaurant, arrived. It was a delicious concoction of East meets West, featuring morsel bites of paneer¹⁹⁷ and spicy chicken, I had the notion, that it made sense that we were eating this pizza in this moment. The pizza was a tangible representation of our stories blended in our diverse worlds of experience, straddling different geographical places situated in heart and body. *“Who knows what the future will hold? Maybe*

¹⁹⁶ I share this experience in more detail within the methodology section of this dissertation.

¹⁹⁷ *Paneer* is a soft cheese which is used as a staple ingredient in many South Asian dishes.

the kids can open up a dance studio” (Research Notes, February 19, 2018) Vam wondered aloud, between bites of the savory food. Looking at Deepika, I took up Vam’s musing, “The kids will be grown and I will come visit with my gray hair and cane, and I will ask you about your stories then” and laughingly added, “And maybe a dance lesson or two!” (Research Notes, February 19, 2018). Later, recollecting strength in which Vam voiced her invocation for her children, I wrote:

remember the voice
of your mother, she who knows
you and live her love always
(Research Notes, February 19, 2018)

Vam’s advice, shaped in love, was a story for now and one for the future. It was a story of hope.

A Heart-full Musing Interlude: Om Ganapati

This *heart-full* musing emerged in response, in part, to my different visits to Vam’s house and also, as a response to my familial stories. I had been to Vam’s home several times and on each occasion when invited to come inside and make myself comfortable, my gaze would automatically search for Ganapati. It seemed fitting to me that he was both in my house and took up regal residence at Vam and Deepika’s home too. At its core, this multiperspectival narrative inquiry was centered on a puzzle around the curriculum-making experiences of South Asian girls alongside their mothers and teachers inside and outside of schools. And, here was Ganapati the Hindu God most renowned for his patronage of the arts and the science. Linked indelibly with education, Ganapati is also known as the one to pray to when in need of help when facing challenges or obstacles. He is the one to turn to when you are in search of new beginnings.

The tale of how Ganapati acquired his elephant head was one my mother used to relate to my brother and I when we were young. No matter how many times I heard the story, I never got tired of hearing it being retold. Parvathi, his mother had been wanting to take a bath. She instructed her son with his still human head to go and guard the gates of their abode from her enemies. Upon the path to the house, a man came whose eyes hardened upon taking stock of the young man who stood resolutely at the gate. Not bothering to respond to the query, “Who are you?” uttered by the young teen, the man decapitated the adolescent. Off fell his head and the boy crumpled to the ground. Hearing the screams and commotion outdoors, the now clean Parvathi, the Hindu Goddess, known as a protector of children, ran down to the man. Looking at him in horror, she exclaimed, “What have you done? You have killed your own son!” The story goes on to say that Shiva the Destroyer, Parvathi’s husband feeling remorse of not recognizing his own son having been away for many years, found a way in which to bring him back to life. Turning to the much-revered animal, the elephant, Shiva was able to provide an elephant head in lieu of a human head for his son. Devotees recognize that Ganapati as the God of the common people. Doing pooja, I reflected on his presence in the conversations I had alongside Vam and Deepika. I reflected upon his presence in my stories too.

Within this musing, are three different representations of Ganapati. In thinking about the unique ways in which we understand our faith and spirituality, I tried to convey a sense of how this protector’s presence can be heterogeneously understood by those within my community and beyond. Adopting his name in written form as *Ganapati* was another way of sharing his pluralities. His other names, *Ganapathy* and *Ganesh*, I have employed elsewhere in this work.



“I was waving but you didn’t see me!”

I climbed up the familiar steps to Vam’s house and before I could ring the doorbell, the door was flung wide open. *“I was waving but you didn’t see me!”* Deepika exclaimed as I jumped in surprise. *“Oops! I wasn’t looking at the window!”* I apologized as I drew her in for a hug. She had grown since the last time I had seen her. Dressed in a pair of faded denim overalls and a pale blue long sleeved shirt decorated with a smattering of rhinestones, she made for a delightful picture. Commenting that she looked great, Vam joked, *“They make her look like a construction worker”* (Recording, February 19, 2018). Deepika in turn replied. *“They’re my thing now. They make me feel cool!”* (Recording, February 19, 2018). She certainly looked *“cool”* with her purple glasses and freshly cut hair. Deepika and Vam’s ease with one another and me was a welcome feeling. Exchanging hugs with Vam as well, I was led by her into the living room.

We took our time catching up. Deepika spoke about her school. In Grade Six now, she told me that she still missed Borderlands School, *“I miss my teachers from there and my friends”* (Recording, February 19, 2018). Deepika then related to me that some of the *“old teachers”* from her previous school had dropped by for a visit. I let Deepika know that Katrina too, shared similar feelings about Borderlands School when we had met in early January of 2018. This knowledge appeared to help Deepika feel somewhat better. I wondered about the other students who also had to make such an abrupt departure from Borderlands School. For many of the students, they had been expecting to attend and complete their Grade Five and Grade Six year there. The transition into Deepika’s current school had not been one necessarily of choice by students and their families. Instead circumstances beyond their control had made it so they had to leave. As we conversed about Deepika’s upcoming attendance to a workshop held for female

students at a local post-secondary institute, I was once more reminded of my different teaching experiences in elementary schools. I was very familiar with the conference Deepika was describing as I had also organized similar outings for girls in my Grade Six class to this annual conference. “Deepika, you’re going to have so much fun! And, you’ll learn so much!” (Research Notes, February 19, 2018) I enthused. Responding to her questions of what she might expect, I drew upon my past experiences. Vam spoke about her new job and I could sense the excitement she was feeling. She was now part of a team of people doing research in relation to heart disease. Hearing this, I felt so happy for Vam. I could tell from her expression and her enthusiasm—this was a position which was allowing her to use her skills and medical knowledge in innovative ways. It wasn’t much later when our conversation took a temporal turn backwards, and Vam was recalling moments of when she was a student.

“The police are presenting it as a suicide.”

Vam talked about a time where she attended college in India. As part of her medical training she had been asked to take a course which required students to attend post-mortems. This was emotionally taxing on Vam. Deepika and I listened as she spoke:

My first experience...There was little boy who was maybe four years old. He was so little. He had been struck by a lorry and the parents they didn’t want the postmortem to be done. They didn’t want this, but it had to be done because it had been required by the law. This was so hard. (Recording, February 19, 2018)

This was not to be Vam’s last experience with the demise of someone so young. Travelling back into her memories of her medical training, Vam slowly shared:

There was a traumatic experience of a young girl who was fifteen years old. She had come from the village and umm, what they were saying happened wasn't matching what her body was telling the doctor. The police were presenting it as a suicide and the doctor didn't feel that this was the situation and when they cut open this poor girl's head they found out that it was a concrete mixture. It was a cement mixture and so it couldn't be suicide. It couldn't be suicide as the police presented. She was covered in blood.

(Recording, February 19, 2018)

Sadness and shock coursed through me. Here, I realized with growing horror was that hateful narrative of girl devaluation once more being lived. Vam's implication could not be more clear to me. I looked at Deepika to see how she was understanding what her mother was sharing. Deepika's face was pale and when she spoke it was trembling with emotion, *"That girl. I don't understand. I would want to be blind and deaf so that I don't have to see any of that. That would be so hard"* (Recording, February 19, 2018). Deepika, I understood, was not only responding to the idea of her mother, then a young college student, working within the mortuary department but additionally, the realization that a young girl close to her age had been murdered.

Responding to my query of what had happened to this young girl whose life had been so abruptly ended, Vam continued to speak.

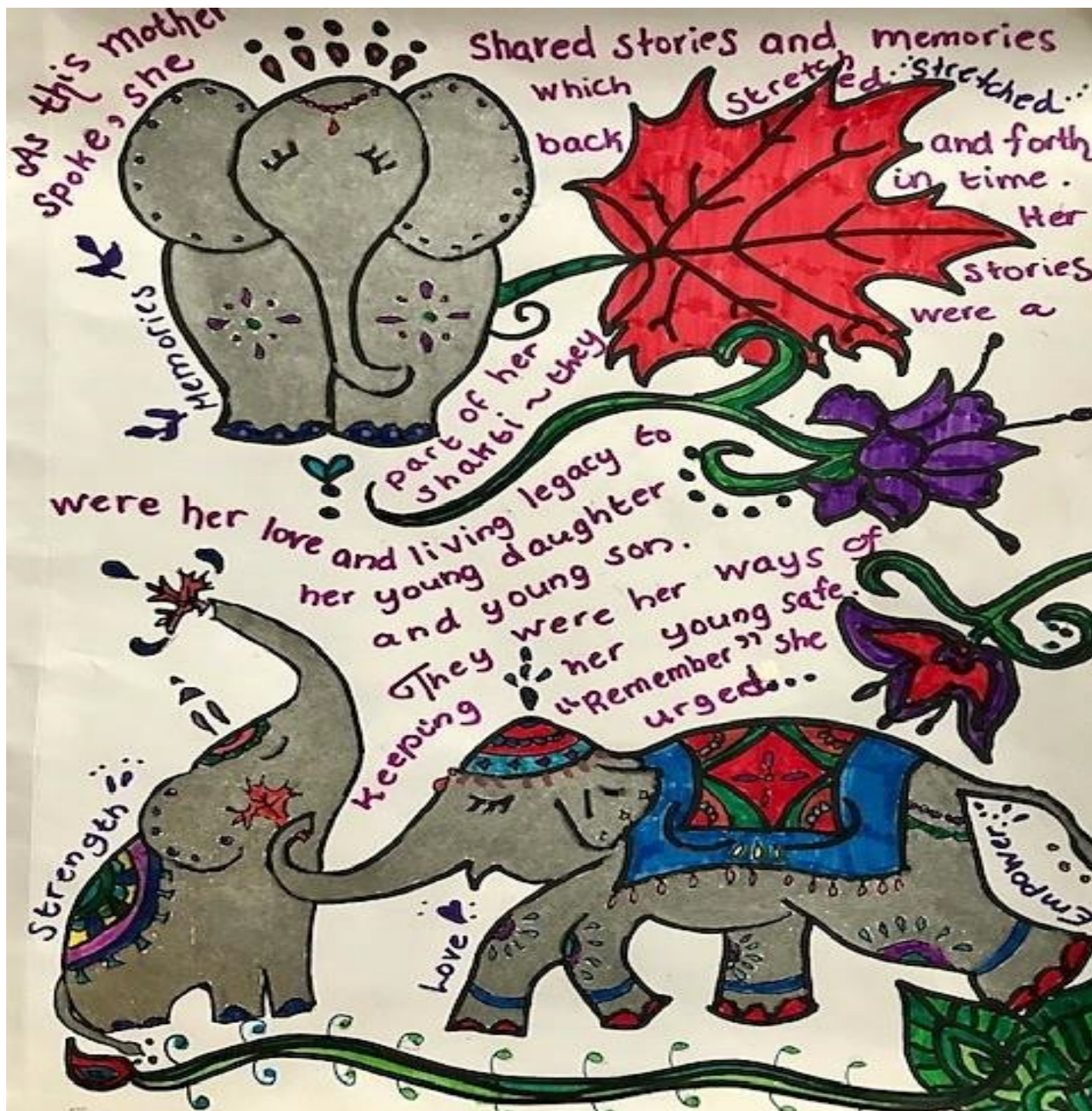
The police presented the case as a suicide. The doctor didn't agree. It turned out the girl had been married off for dowry purposes. The in-laws had killed her. They murdered this poor girl. The police, the officers, they sided with the family. But the doctor, he was courageous. He said, "It was not a case of suicide. This is a case where the girl has been murdered. (Recording, February 19, 2018)

As Vam related this tale of unspeakable violence, I came to understand that she was sharing the story not to scare Deepika nor Aari who had just entered the room but, rather to show that there is a need to work against this particular injustice and additionally, any other situation where inhumane treatment is taking place. In telling this story, Vam was sharing her belief that irrespective of age or gender, one can make a stance and live stories of social justice. Pointing to the courageous actions of the doctor who didn't back down in the face of corrupt members of the police force, Vam was helping her children see that they too, could be just as strong when confronted with injustice or any other challenge they came across.

A Heart-full Musing Interlude: The Call of Elephants

Listening and sitting with Vam's stories to live by—the ones she grew up with as a young person in India and then later, the ones she shared alongside her family—illuminated the love she has for her children. Reverberating in her thoughts, words, and actions, I could see Vam's wish for her children to be proud of their roots and to also, recognize their ability to be change-makers. In this way, Vam alongside her husband, Kade, helped Deepika and Aari understand their education could help them to be strong, healthy, and resilient. Believing that differing artistic opportunities can help craft her children's current and forward-looking stories of themselves, Vam encouraged her children to explore their talents in these areas. She also understood the significance of creating a familial curriculum which honoured their experiences, their hopes, and their dreams. Within this same curriculum-making, Vam drew upon her shakti, and reminded Deepika and Aari that they could live their lives with honour—standing up for themselves and others when they knew something is unjust. This *heart*-full musing depicts a protective and loving elephant and her young, two elephant calves. It is a symbolic

representation of the love and protection I heard reverberating in Vam's stories for her family and the love and pride I heard echoed by Deepika in her own stories of her mother, Vam.



79-To Remember and Empower

Journeying Forward while Reflecting Backward

Sitting with Vam, Deepika, and Aari in this moment, I felt a resonating response. Earlier we had spoken of this narrative inquiry and I had shared my sincere and deep appreciation for their ongoing research conversations with me over such a great length of time. Sensing my worry, Vam had reminded me, “*This is important work you are doing*” (Recording, February 19, 2018) and I had begun to gain a sense of how much I had needed to hear those words. My response had been heartfelt when I replied, “*This is important work we are doing*” (Recording, February 19, 2018). This was the message that was working on me even as I took my leave of the family with the hope expressed between us that we would meet up later to once more talk and share.

Chapter Eight: Inquiring into Bumping Places Across and Within Experiences

Layered and collaged within each of the accounts are narrative considerations of the temporal, situational, and personal and social interactions which foreground the palette of experiences and stories shared and lived alongside co-learners: two girls, Katrina and Deepika, their mothers, Barb and Vam (and families), and their Grade Four teacher, Anne. Interwoven within each of these narrative accounts are the differing plotlines threaded in the lives of each research friend as I came alongside them. These plotlines, that we co-composed together, are as intricate and nuanced as Deepika, Katrina, Vam, Barb, and Anne are as unique individuals. Each co-participant lived, told, relived, and retold (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 1998) stories of experience shaped within and across heterogeneous worlds (Lugones, 1987) of family, home, school, community, culture, and geography. These stories often foregrounded their curriculum-making experiences (Huber et al., 2011) shaped within these worlds. Their stories also reverberated the often-precarious journeys made traversing back and forth from these worlds. Over time, sfumato-like and less gradually, in engaging in this narrative inquiry, I found myself dwelling within the stories shared by research friends and my storied experiences. In this narrative inquiry, I was not a removed observer. I, too, found myself living, telling, reliving, and retelling experiences that reflected my multiplicities as a South Asian Canadian woman. Similar to my research friends, these stories were not linear or smooth.

Bumping Places as Spaces for Wondering and Inquiry

Within each narrative account, there were moments of tension and uncertainty—bumping up places—where personal stories came into conflict with dominant or master narratives perpetuated within certain worlds of curriculum-making. Bumping up places—spaces in which

the stories we lived or knew to be true *bumped up against* or did not conform with other narratives—also coloured the canvas of our experiences. What I mean by bumping places are the rubbing, perhaps clashing places, where tension is experienced. Clandinin and Connelly (1995) wrote of competing and conflicting stories that lived within teachers' professional knowledge landscapes. They wrote that some of the school stories and stories of school followed a positive, albeit different, plotline than the dominant stories of school (competing stories). The competing stories created spaces of disjuncture and dissonance that, while charged with possibility, were sometimes suppressed or covered over (Crites, 1979). Some school stories and stories of school bumped against the dominant stories sharply and in ways that could not allow both sets of stories to be sustained. These stories were named conflicting stories. Both competing and conflicting stories were shaped by bumping places. While Clandinin and Connelly (1995) were writing of knowledge landscapes, the idea of bumping places helped me to think about the storied experiences of the girls, their mothers, teacher, and I, as we negotiated our life making in diverse worlds of curriculum-making.

In this chapter, I will inquire into, and highlight several of these bumping places, where points of tension and dis/ease shaded and contoured how we thought of our lives and our worlds of experience. Here within this space, I ruminate alongside differing wonders. I wonder where the bumping places were made visible in the narrative accounts. I ponder alongside wonders of how these bumping places, made visible in the narrative accounts, reverberate backward and forward in the stories. As a way of living my ontological relational commitments in engaging in this narrative inquiry alongside co-participants or research friends, possible moral and ethical considerations, as well as possible educative and mis-educative (Dewey, 1938/1997)

considerations, will be accentuated. In this manner, I am drawn close to Clandinin et al. (2015) who made clear:

As we write proposals, we see that our ontological commitments in narrative inquiry also shape how we live in the world, as we write proposals, frame research puzzles, and come alongside participants in inquiries. These ontological commitments with their related responsibilities become a way of living in the world. As we attend to our ontological responsibilities, we are attending to the lives, the experiences, of those with whom we live in relation. (p. 23)

Attending to my ontological commitments further help me to situate this chapter within the context of this dissertation and to open up spaces for dialogue and further wonders.

Threaded throughout these bumping places are differing plotlines of “arrogant perception” (Lugones, 1987, p. 4) being lived out¹⁹⁸. These offer another collaged layer of inquiry. Building upon Frye’s (1983) work, Lugones (1987) suggests arrogant perception is “the failure to identify with persons that one views arrogantly or has come to see as the products of arrogant perception” (p. 4). She further contends:

To the extent that we learn to perceive others arrogantly or come to see them only as products of arrogant perception and continue to perceive them that way, we fail to identify with them—fail to love them—in this particularly deep way. (p. 4)

Lugones provides a lens by which we can understand what it means to arrogantly perceive one another and to be the object of arrogant perception. She further allows in her conceptualization

¹⁹⁸ See Chung’s (2016), Kubota’s (2017), and Saleh’s (2017) dissertation work—narrative inquiries alongside diverse community members whereby differing stories of arrogant and loving perception (Lugones, 1987) threaded inquirers and co-participants’ experiences.

that we, ourselves, can arrogantly perceive ourselves, thus simultaneously being an arrogant perceiver who makes our own self an object of arrogant perception. Arrogant perception is in stark contrast to “loving perception” (p. 18) which Lugones believes can be enacted through world travelling to different worlds¹⁹⁹. Reflecting upon her relationship with her mother, Lugones explicates, “So travelling to each other's “worlds” would enable us to *be* through *loving* each other” (p. 8) Within the bumping places taken up for consideration here, is the recognition on my part, that plotlines of arrogant perception were embedded in intricate ways throughout the dominant narratives that were replicated, rejected, and interrupted by co-participants within the narrative accounts.

Bumping Place 1: Navigating (and Circumventing) “Less Than” Narratives

Coming alongside the daughters, mothers, and teacher in this narrative inquiry, I began to gain a deeper sense of how their stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) were shaping how they were composing their identities within and across their different worlds of experience. As Estefan, Caine, and Clandinin (2016), drawing upon Connelly and Clandinin (1999), explicate, ““Stories to live by” offers a narrative way to think about identity through a conceptualization of identity as experiential, as contextual, as embodied, as always in the making, and as shaped at the nexus of context and knowledge” (p. 16). Thinking narratively allowed me to metaphorically travel alongside research friends as they invited me into their stories around home, family, culture, nation, amidst others. In this way, I came to slowly appreciate that there were certain master narratives working against how each of the girls and women were shaping their identities within differing worlds of curriculum making (Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin 2011; Lugones, 1987). One such dominant narrative which stood out for

¹⁹⁹ Worlds and world travelling (Lugones, 1987) have been interwoven throughout this dissertation.

me, was a story which attempted to position each of the women as *less than* other individuals. Nested within this narrative of ‘Less Than’ were storylines of arrogant perception (Lugones, 1987). The bumping places were experienced differently for Vam, Barb, and Anne.

Thinking with²⁰⁰ Vam’s Stories of South Asian Girlhood...

The very first time I met Vam, when I attempted to gain a sense of whether she and Deepika might like to join me on this research adventure, I had been elated by her response. I recall not having to say much more than I hoped to interrupt narrow plotlines that still worked on the lives of South Asian girls and women, before I saw Vam was nodding in approval. Vam’s forthcoming reply, “*Yes, that’s why I am interested in your research*” had been the proverbial music for my ears to hear. I felt as if I had found a kindred spirit. Vam’s unabashed desire to disavow master narratives which proclaimed females as less worthy than males (Gill & Mitra-Khan, 2008; 2009) resonated strongly with my own. In that first conversation sitting together at a local coffee shop and imagining forward what this narrative inquiry might look like, Vam had shared with me that she wished Deepika to participate in the study because she did not want her to take for granted “*how fortunate she was in comparison to other girls.*” In this moment, Vam was discussing the opportunities, education and otherwise, South Asian girls did not necessarily have access to in their lives. Elaborating on this point in other conversations, she construed, “*It depends on the families. In other areas, with other families, she can be mistreated and tortured.*”

Vam spoke of her own experiences working alongside a doctor who despite being pressured to

²⁰⁰ Many of the subheadings within this chapter are prefaced with the words, *Thinking with...stories...* Narrative inquirers often think *with* stories and not merely only *about* stories. Thinking with stories allows for deeper inquiry that moves past surface considerations. Morris (2002) explicates:

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. Thinker and object of thought are at least theoretically distinct. Thinking with stories is a process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative as take the radical step back, almost a return to childhood experience, of allowing narrative to work on us. (p. 200)

look the other way in the case of a young adolescent girl's murder at the hands of her in-laws, he chose not to do so. She explained: *"The police were presenting it as a suicide and the doctor didn't feel that this was the situation."* I understood that this was a bumping place for Vam and her sharing this story with me in the presence of Deepika and her younger brother, Aari, was a means of encouraging her children to advocate for themselves and others when encountering unjust situations.

In subsequent conversations, thinking upon her own familial stories, Vam informed me, *"My parents never made feel, I'm just a girl!"* She accentuated that alongside a narrative which situated South Asians females as less than, there existed more hopeful plotlines, affirming: *"There are places if a girl child is born, we say Lakshmi is born...When a girl is born, even the mother and father touch her feet...It's an honour to be a girl child."* Vam drew upon her familial stories, revealing how when she was a young girl growing up in India, she had been cared and loved for in healthy ways. With much feeling, Vam emphasized, *"My parents, they never made me feel like, "I'm a just a girl!" where girls and boys are treated differently."* Within these moments, I recognized Vam was living a competing plotline alongside her children where children irrespective of gender were to be cherished and afforded the same quality of life. At the same time, Vam was teaching her children that they had to be prepared to act when needed. In this manner, I understood Vam was living her shakti and helping her children to understand that they too, could draw upon their own shakti to help them.

Thinking with Vam's Stories of Education and Career...

Vam, in sharing experiences of herself, revealed that her move to Canada had meant accepting some very challenging losses. In Vam's stories to live by, she knew herself to be a

great practitioner of ayurvedic medicine. She had gone to school and taken training for her specialization. In India, she was able to practice and her specialized knowledge was held in high esteem. Here in Canada, this knowing was not afforded value by regulatory bodies. This was a bumping place for Vam. Her education and her years of experience bumped resoundingly against a master narrative of education in Canada. This narrative essentially proclaimed that education was only valuable if it could be formally recognized here. In this fashion, education which was obtained abroad (not in Canada) was rarely given weight if at all. I was wakeful to this bumping place in my own life. Reverberating backwards, this was a familiar plotline which lived in my stories of my parents. They too had come to Canada as immigrants not understanding until reaching here that their education and experience would not be considered valuable or useful. All the work they had done towards obtaining credentials in India vanished upon arrival to Canada. Similar to Vam, my mother understood she would have to take additional course work because her undergraduate degree was not recognized in Canada. My father too was not able to practice as he had been educated. In India, he had taken course work that allowed him to practice as an accountant. Here in Canada, he was employed as a security guard and had taken any other work he was able to get. My mother who had sewed as a hobby, who had a love of that particular craft, found unexpectedly, that she was having to rely upon these skills within a factory setting to make ends meet.

Bumping up against this master narrative, Vam had been struggling about whether or not she should attempt to do course work (not within her specialization) but within the medical field. She wondered if she might be able to do work that might not be what she devoted early adulthood to but something that she could still enjoy. However, I was to learn that Vam had not been able to do so. Vam, in conversation with her husband, Kade, had decided this might not be

the best route for them as a whole family. Further education meant a further tightening of their finances and not being able to provide their children with what they needed and what they wished. As Vam put it, *“I, myself, am in a dilemma. I don’t know if I choose to study then these next two to three years are going to be really tough on us because living with a single income is hard.”* Vam’s concern for her children was very prominent in her thinking: *“Then we will have to cut down on so many things. It is so hard. Especially, with kids. We, can adjust but you know, then saying to them, “Not this time.” I don’t like doing this all the time.”* Reverberating forward, Vam spoke frequently with her friends and colleagues in India. She narrated how they would regularly share information regarding practice and their experiences in ayurvedic medicine. Using the mobile platform of *What’s App*, became a way in which Vam was able to enact a competing story for herself, one which enabled her to resist a dominant plotline which arrogantly perceived (Lugones, 1987) and further, storied the education and practice of alternative medicine as less than. Later in February of 2018, Vam would share with me that she was now working with a research team involved in the study of heart disease. Here, she proposed, she was being afforded an opportunity to draw more fully upon her skills²⁰¹ and medical knowledge. When Vam spoke about her new job, I could sense the excitement she was feeling. This was a position which allowed her to use her skills and medical knowledge in Canada, in ways which were meaningful to her. Vam revealed, *“I am happy doing this work.”*

Thinking with Barb’s Forward-Looking Stories for her Daughters...

Barb spoke about her dreams and hopes for two young daughters, often articulating her wish for them to be formally educated. Formal education, for Barb, involved admission to a post-

²⁰¹ Deepika was also learning from her mother about the workings of the human heart. She showed me a sketch she had completed recently of a human heart. I saw this learning as another way in which Vam was composing a competing story to a narrative which arrogantly positioned alternative medical knowledge as ‘less than.’

secondary institute. Thinking about her eldest daughter, Katrina, Barb intimated, “*I will make sure she gets a good education and that she will get a good life in her hands*”, alluding to the “*good path*” she wished both daughters to travel upon. Barb didn’t specify which areas she hoped for Katrina to go into upon completing her schoolwork and entering into university, but this was something she often spoke of in our conversations together. Barb regularly juxtaposed not wanting Katrina to “*be lazy*” alongside a desire for her “*to try her best*”, and to do something with her life. For Barb, I understood that putting effort in schoolwork alongside any challenges Katrina encountered within her life, that is, “*to try her best*” shaped Barb’s understanding of what it meant to have a good life. This forward-looking story for Katrina and her younger sister was embedded within Barb’s own familial stories of striving to take full advantage of whatever life had to offer her. This was a tension for Barb, one which she did not wish for her girls to encounter. Barb, reflecting on her growing-up experiences in India, shared she did not have the same educational opportunities that her daughters had here in Canada. At the same time, I understood Barb wanted to provide her daughters with many other opportunities to develop and grow in healthy ways. South Asian American author, Divakaruni imparts, during an interview, some of the tensions she experienced when she moved from India to the United States:

I grew up with very definite notions of womanhood, of who is considered a good woman and how she is to behave, especially within the family context. Much of that was based on the notion that a good woman makes sacrifices. As a result of immigration, when we find ourselves in the West, there is quite a different notion of what a good woman is and what she is expected to do. (Zupančič, 2012, p. 94)

I understood that for Barb like Vam, she was making choices every day on complicating “definite notions of womanhood” (Zupančič, 2012, p. 94) and re-writing these plotlines in ways which were meaningful to her. Enrolling Katrina in ballet, swimming, skating, and Indian dancing were only some of the avenues Barb sought in helping her daughters creatively shape their knowing of themselves. Within this storied context, I saw Barb complicating singular narratives of what it means to be ‘good’ by co-composing new possibilities of goodness alongside her daughter, Katrina. Barb also spoke lovingly of her mother and let me know that her mother had guided her when she was young. These were sustaining stories which Barb carried from one homeland to another. Barb wanted Katrina and her little sister, Ashi to be able to look back on their lives and see her as a loving mother, one who tried her best for her girls.

Thinking with Barb’s Intergenerational Stories of South Asian Girlhood...

Barb understood there were intergenerational ripples which continued to shape her life and that of her girls. Barb was cognizant that there were other ways of being fostered through a dominant cultural narrative which bespoke of females as being situated as *less than* in comparison to males. For instance, though the Indian government introduced a law in 1994 to abolish sex determination tests, a cultural narrative persists in promulgating the harmful message that girl children are liabilities while boy children are to be valued (Mohyeddin & Colabrese, 2018). These dehumanizing ways of viewing girls was a plotline that Barb actively resisted. Barb’s stories to live by embodied a totally dissimilar set of beliefs. Barb observed, “*There has always been a difference for girls and boys. We didn’t have that many rights.*” Barb had been talking specifically about her experiences as a female growing up in India. Living a heartfelt competing story, Barb had shared with me repeatedly and in different ways that she and her husband, were “*blessed with girls*” and moreover, “[*We*] *love them!*” Thinking with these

stories, I recall how Barb talked about her experiences in the hospital with friends, family, and other members of the community coming to visit her when she had given birth to her girls. On both of these momentous occasions, Barb expressed that some community members instead of celebrating the birth of her daughters, disclosed a preference for her to have had sons.²⁰² Barb soundly rejected this view. This bumping place for Barb only seemed to strengthen her resolve and was mirrored in her knowing that girls are equally deserving of love and care as boy children. Barb demonstrated her love and care for her daughters in myriad ways. Not wanting to cover over her own stories to live by, she passionately advocated for, and lived, a different story to one that is lived by some South Asians and regrettably also, found within other Canadian families and communities and elsewhere²⁰³ in other countries (see: Dahl & Moretti, 2004). The strength with which Barb voiced her convictions brought to the forefront the intricacies involved in crafting a counternarrative of being that was diametrically opposed to this particular dominant narrative. Barb resisted this script which covertly and overtly reiterated a message that being an Indian girl was not of much worth except perhaps for her value in being able to bear sons. This is a narrative which amplifies an arrogant perception of females as less than males within Indian society. Barb's stories to live by conflicted sharply with this particular narrative regarding the worth of girls. Resonating with Barb's understanding that such messages needed to be

²⁰² As I have tried to make more visible throughout this dissertation, cultural narratives which take up certain constructions of South Asian children are lived in different ways within diverse families. Children can be beloved by their families and still have stories imposed upon them for myriad reasons. For instance, jewelry (at times presented as dowry) can be also be seen as ways to provide financial security for girl children when they are older. Concurrently, there are families who are able to resist unhealthy stories of children. Barb and Vam shared with me repeatedly that they were "blessed" to have their daughters. They chose the descriptor, "*blessed*" as there are families, who unfortunately, do not view having daughters as a blessing. One of my personal justifications of engaging in this narrative inquiry is to help highlight that there exist healthy stories of South Asian families and their daughters being lived out here and in India.

²⁰³ Dahl and Moretti (2004) observe, "Our empirical evidence indicates that American parents favor boys over girls" (p. 1) and further note, "At least since 1941 and continuing to the present, more Americans have stated that they would prefer to have sons over daughters" (p. 3).

confronted through action, I found myself thinking about Barb's experiences growing up in Delhi, India with the understanding the girls and boys lived out different plotlines in response to a dominant narrative which encouraged different cultural expectations for females and males specifically. Yet, threading Barb's stories was an emerging understanding that plotlines could be shifted. Thinking about Katrina's future, Barb didn't concern herself with prescriptive plotlines of marriage, instead foregrounding the importance of a formal education²⁰⁴ alongside opportunity, voicing, "*I want her to be well-educated, meet her boyfriend, get married or don't. She can do it. We are very, very open-minded*". This vocalization of Barb's (and her husband, Ron's) belief that Katrina did not have to be storied within the confining borders (Menon & Saleh, 2018) of certain 'Good Girl' images, highlighted Barb's rejection of a dominant narrative which arbitrarily imposed restrictions on opportunities. These were opportunities of choice. I thought back to the girls²⁰⁵ in my classes who had been made to leave their homes in Canada to attend schools in India. Katrina and her little sister, Ashi, did not have these same concerns. Katrina and Ashi were also actively encouraged to think about futures which invited further education. Barb spoke of the differences experienced within generations of her family. She observed, "*I think things have changed over there [India]. Even my brother's kids, now, they're having grand adventures. They go everywhere. They do their own thing. Within one generation, things have changed a lot*". Reverberating forward, Barb articulated her hope for further change. Reverberating backwards into my childhood, I recounted times of bumping up against this particular dominant story of being arrogantly perceived (Lugones, 1987) by my father. Thinking

²⁰⁴ For Barb, a formal education meant a widening of choices for Katrina and opportunities for Katrina to support and sustain herself in healthy ways.

²⁰⁵ The girls I taught had family who loved them. However, I bumped against the ways in which they seemed to be storied and the restrictive plotlines they appeared to be caught in.

alongside colleagues and friends as to the relational ethics of narrative inquiry, I had written with these particular stories of childhood in mind.

“Somebody needs to control her.” My brother laughs wryly as he mimics my late father’s voice. The words are the same as the ones my parent oft employed when he was irate with *her*. Though there was another female in the household of my childhood—my mother—there was no doubt that my father always meant me within this context. This phrase or some close variation of it emerged in response to any quality of behaviour he found unacceptable on my part. The words were never said in jest and once voiced, the situation immediately became fraught with a sense of menace. (Menon, 2018, p. 70)

Reverberating forward, and alongside Barb, I, too, echo her hope for more change. I want to see different plotlines being lived by South Asian girls. I wish to see plotlines which nurture and sustain them in ways which seek to uplift and not crush and maim.

Thinking with Anne’s Stories of Professional Development...

Anne also had experienced plotlines being imposed upon her which situated her as *less than*. Anne spoke of moments where she bumped up against a dominant narrative of schools which placed teachers as being less professional than administrators. Anne recounted a story of where she and her colleagues attended Teacher’s Convention, a time of professional development for educators to come together to learn and exchange ideas in collegial fashion over a span of several days. In Anne’s story, an administrator from Anne’s school asked teachers to show their attendance by “*being spotted*” by the administrator. Upon being recognized for their attendance, the teacher received a sticker. Anne’s comment, “*I’m comfortable if I ignore the admin. If I didn’t have the awesome people, I work with, I wouldn’t stay*” pointed to her dis/ease.

This was a conflicting plotline of how Anne knew herself to be as a teacher. As a means of ameliorating the dissonance she and her colleagues felt at being made to prove their professionalism along such reductive lines, Anne and her fellow teaching friends chose to find humour in the situation. By doing so, they made a game of it where they tried to be seen by their administrator as often as they could over the course of the convention even as they found spaces to confide in one another about the unfairness of their situations. Nobody checked up on whether the administrators attended the convention. Nobody questioned their sense of professionalism. In this fashion, Anne and her like-minded colleagues were able to craft a cover story for themselves through humour. They lived competing stories to live by in their classrooms alongside children and families and each other, which honoured their sense of professionalism as educators. In this situation, a storyline of arrogant perception was rooted in an institutional narrative which ranked school officials according to a hierarchy with administrators (such as principals and assistant principals) being ranked higher than teachers. Nested within this storyline, were the actions of the administrator who arrogantly perceived colleagues by confirming the attendance of teachers at a professional development conference through the giving of stickers. At the same time, the normative script of a teacher's professional learning is typically situated as learning with other teachers in the form of limited time spent either at school or outside of school. Similar to other professions, these often take the form of compressed workshops and presentations which can shape the type and quality of engagement involved. This tension of how teachers engage in learning, in turn, begs the question of: "What kind of learning is valued and alongside whom?"

Thinking of Anne's Identity-making as a Teacher alongside Children...

While volunteering in Anne's school, I learned that there was a storyline of the children in Anne's classroom being named as less than. Anne shared with me that the administrator of her

school at the time was not pleased with the academic performance, as measured by test scores, of the children. Resonating with Anne's tension with this dominant narrative of school success, I too, experienced a bump when I heard firsthand these stories from Anne's administrator. In the storied moment where I had a brief conversation with the principal of Borderlands School and later related that encounter to Anne, I became more wakeful to the bumping place. Encountering the principal in the staffroom, I mentioned that it was pleasant to be back in the classroom again and that the children in Anne's class were wonderful. I further spoke about their creativity and their artistic work. These comments appeared to upset the principal who bluntly informed me the children "*were low academically.*" Talking with Anne about the incident, I was saddened to hear that she was used to hearing comments such as these. Anne bumped up regularly with this particular narrative of school standards as measured in restrictive and often quantifiable ways. Anne's unhappy comment of "*I'm not surprised*" reminded me of the difficult spaces Anne found herself in when trying to teach in ways which mattered to her and the children within the Grade Four community. I wondered at this overarching narrative which arrogantly positions children as receptacles for knowledge instead of knowledgeable beings (Clandinin et al., 2016; Huber et al., 2018) who actively participate in the learning and teaching experiences that they engage in alongside their teachers. Within this storyline, as imposed by Anne's administrator, Anne was viewed as not doing enough for her students. Using a techno-rational orientation, the children were viewed in similarly, deficit ways. Anne's knowing of herself as a loving and hardworking teacher working and playing alongside equally loving and hardworking children within the Grade Four Community bumped against this restrictive understanding. In the following year when Deepika and Katrina had moved into separate Grade Five classes, I was reminded that this normative script of school could be perpetuated in other ways. Katrina and

Deepika shared stories with me regarding their concerns for getting better marks. Each girl was worried about their report cards and while both girls had different interpretations of what it meant to be a ‘good student’, I recognized these inculcated a Western script of learning based on measured test scores and evaluations.

Bumping Place 2: Thinking about Difference within Diverse Plotlines

Being able to talk with Deepika and Katrina and their mothers, Vam and Barb, I became more awake to how many of our experiences were layered with subtle and not-so subtle images of understanding difference across our worlds. Lorde (1984/2007) writes about “distortions of difference” (p. 115) and cogitated:

It is a lifetime pursuit for each one of us to extract these distortions from our living at the same time as we recognize, reclaim, and define those differences upon which they are imposed. For we have all been raised in a society where those distortions were endemic within our living. Too often, we pour the energy needed for recognizing and exploring difference into pretending those differences are insurmountable barriers, or that they do not exist at all. This results in a voluntary isolation, or false and treacherous connections. Either way, we do not develop tools for using human difference as a springboard for creative change within our lives. We speak not of human difference, but of human deviance. (p. 115)

As I have mentioned elsewhere, difference (Kubota, Saleh, & Menon, 2020; Menon, 2019; Menon, 2018; Menon & Saleh, 2018; Saleh, Menon, & Kubota, 2018) or “distortions of difference” (Lorde, 1984/2007) can be taken up in ways which can work towards enriching or

diminishing lives. This bumping place speaks to similar concerns as to how difference was arrogantly perceived (Lugones, 1987) by ourselves and others.

Thinking with Katrina and Deepika's Experiences of Painting Mermaids...

Deepika and Katrina reminded me anew of the importance of attending to those images which often slip unnoticed unless we shift them from the peripheral to the center of our focus. One of our earliest art making activities took place in a pottery studio where the girls and I were afforded the opportunity to come together to shape a curriculum of friendship in artful ways. With a wide assortment of selections on offer, Katrina and Deepika were aligned in their decision to choose mermaids to paint. Their preference of mermaid, the same fantasy-based figurine for each girl, had flowing locks of hair cascading down her shoulders as she reclined gracefully by a smaller-sized seahorse. This figurine unbeknownst to me at the time was to become a place of inquiry. As the girls painted their figures and we talked, I began to realize they were painting their mermaids according to a dominant narrative which reverberated along plotlines of singular images of attractiveness, ones which were patterned as normative and monolithic. Then, curious as to why they each had decided to paint their mermaids' hair a variation of blonde, I asked them. Their responses to my query took this much anticipated moment of artful curriculum making into different territory than I had been envisioning. On the drive over to Deepika's home and Katrina's home, prior to picking them up, I had been indulging in thoughts of the three of us enjoying some art making outside of school and of chatting about what was happening in their lives. Deepika's easy reply, "*It's just like she should have blonde hair. Mermaids have blonde hair*" and Katrina's swift agreement, had jolted me and reminded of other similar experiences alongside children of colour. Asking about whether these imaginary characters, mermaids, could possibly have Indian features with hair colour other than blonde and

skin which was brown, I became more perturbed. Katrina iterated an understanding that possibly, “*Mermaids could have red hair*”. When Deepika opined that “*Mermaids have peachy skin*”, Katrina added her agreement, announcing “*That’s the colour for mermaids.*” The girls’ articulated knowing bumped against my advocacy for a more diverse plotline of beauty which called for an appreciation for a multiplicity of images for what it means to be attractive. Listening to the girls voice their thoughts, I recognized in this storied moment, they were not troubled in the least about the shades they had picked to decorate their figures with. At the same, I also understood, Katrina and Deepika were not worried about creating art which upheld diverse representations of attractiveness.

Reverberating backward, I thought of the children of colour who I worked with in classrooms who had chosen to illustrate their self-portraits along Western prescribed plotlines of attractiveness. I was reminded that how we look and how the world looks at us does not take into consideration our preferences or choice but does indeed shape who we are. I pondered even then, what happens when people of colour are bereft of sustaining stories *of* and *for* people of colour. Thinking about the present, I wondered what kinds of stories of themselves the girls might be holding. Reverberating forward, I wondered what kinds of stories they could live by when imagination for everyone is not only actively encouraged but lived within diverse communities instead of being curtailed or worse, fostered for only some special some. I write this wonder here recognizing again the vast topography of what is left unsaid. Imagination cannot be easily fostered when there is still so much that is not being acknowledged. I think upon Lorde’s (1984/2007) brave sharing of one early childhood experiences:

Sixth grade in a new catholic school and I’m the first Black Student. The white girls laugh at my braided hair. The nun sends a note home to my mother saying that “pigtails

are not appropriate attire for school,” and that I should learn to comb my hair in “a more becoming style”. (p. 148)

This is one experience amongst many Lorde shares with her readers and thinking once more upon it, I’m scalded, burned with her (un)veiled tears and locked in memory. More recently, I had represented a mermaid with brown skin on paper as a means of trying to make sense of an artful moment alongside two lovely girls. The moment had been imbued with tension for me and underscored the pervasiveness of certain plotlines. I wondered then, how can imagination be nurtured within the strangling confines of such a trap? Bumping up jarringly against this single story (Adichie, 2009) of mermaids, this static construction of what characteristics were deemed as desirable and what construed as different, caused me pain. In this storied moment alongside the Katrina and Deepika, I understood that embedded within a master narrative of Western attractiveness existed a plotline which arrogantly perceived (Lugones, 1987) other iterations of beauty. Additionally, and for me, more disturbingly, Deepika and Katrina could be unknowingly perceiving themselves in arrogant ways. Faced with a bombardment of images outside worlds of school which storied certain traits as being normal and others as less than and likewise faced with similar images captured in their textbooks and reading books (Sims Bishop, 1990), I wondered how Deepika and Katrina were shaping their identities. I further wondered, about how teachers, situated in school worlds could help to mitigate the darker messages of these narratives which work to constrict the plotlines for children such as Katrina and Deepika. I queried once more, how can these storied images be disrupted to make way for healthier, more complex and nuanced appreciations of difference.

Thinking about Mermaids and Imagination...

Yet this is the very question which besieges me even as I write this. Imagination must be developed and allowed to flourish so that different palettes are employed, so that different shades and hues of what marks each of us as unique can be honoured even as what marks us as human is allowed to shine. Greene (1995/2000) captures a sense of my inner struggle evocating, “People trying to be more fully human must not only engage in critical thinking but must be able to imagine something comes of their hopes; their silence must be overcome by their search” (p. 25). Katrina and Deepika’s responses helped me to understand they were not questioning this singular plotline of attractiveness nor were they necessarily ready to do so. This was an additional bump that I experienced. This moment, rippling backwards and forwards, spurred me into action. I found myself at a cross-roads, I could let this moment be, distressing though it was, and live alongside Katrina and Deepika in ways which did not address tensions or I could try and push and prod at the bars of these imprisoning stories even if they caused discombobulation. In that moment of curriculum making alongside Deepika and Katrina, I tried, with care, to awaken them to other possibilities for imagining what their mermaids could look like, that they need not be limited to a prescriptive plotline of hegemonic beauty.

I wondered too, how families could go about helping to create diverse stories to live by that move away from implicit notions perpetuated through dominant narratives. With Katrina and Deepika, I understood both mothers, Barb and Vam to be very much role models for their girls and this familial curriculum making gave me hope. I also knew, teachers such as Anne were working against master school narratives to make spaces for diverse ways of being which honoured the meaning making and life making of the students in their classroom worlds. Greene (1995/2000) draws upon her reading of Alice Walker’s moving novel, *The Color Purple*, when she writes of two of the main characters, Celie and Shug.

As Celie realizes that what she did *not* know or even question, Shug advises her to imagine, to “conjure up flowers, wind, water, a big rock.” Such conjuring is a struggle, not just in itself but because what is imagined is still partly shaped by past oppression... Yet by finding her imagination, she has found a way out of oppression. She is beginning to look through her own eyes, name (in her own voice) her lived world. (p. 25)

Imagination could help to expand those boundaries placed by monolithic narratives of beauty and attractiveness which are nested within and composed of other stories which serve to break a person down or oppress their humanness. I understood that I wanted the girls to have opportunities to “look through her own eyes, name (in her own voice) her lived world” (Greene, 1995/2000). However, I also recognized, imagination needs help so that it might be encouraged to develop and take shape in the minds of children who might be more vulnerable to negative or hostile narratives than adults who by virtue of their older age and experiences, may be better able to recognize the danger of such stories (Adichie, 2009). Attempting to connect this idea of imagination alongside a sense of a questioning attitude, I revisit Lugones’ (1987) words:

Through travelling to other people’s “worlds” we discover there are “worlds” in which those who are the victims of arrogant perception, are really subjects, lively beings, resisters, constructors of visions, even though in the mainstream construction they are animated only by the arrogant perceiver and are pliable, foldable, file-awayable, classifiable (p. 17)

World travelling can be a means by which to help encourage imagination to take root. Like Celie, in the *Color of Purple*, who was asked by Shug to “conjure” and thus, as Greene

(1995/2000, p. 25) suggested, move away from oppression, Deepika and Katrina, and other children too, may require assistance. Being able to make those unsteady attempts to travel worlds not made visible before can happen if children (and adults) are invited to attend to their other worlds where they are already storied as “lively beings, resisters” (Lugones, 1987, p. 17). This knowing can then help children to imagine beyond prescriptive plotlines whereby mermaids and other such fantastical creatures can become sites of world travelling, imagination, and possibility. Lugones (1987) speaks of arrogantly perceiving her mother and how traversing to her mother’s world allowed her to see her in a different light, observing, “I came to realize that there are “worlds” in which she shines as a creative being” (p. 18). I continue to imagine worlds that call upon us to imagine otherwise and to see each other as a “creative being” (Lugones, 1987, p. 18). In imagining another story, as the research continued to enfold and unfold, I found myself trying to make artful spaces for creatively thinking and creatively being where these two girls, who I was so fond of, could explore their “plurality of selves” (Lugones, 1987, p. 14).

Thinking with Deepika and Katrina’s Experiences of Mehndi...

Coming alongside Katrina and Deepika, the girls and I engaged in creative ways to explore art making in relation to stories of heritage and culture, identity and identity-making. Due to constrictions of space and time, not all of these journeys made their way into this dissertation. However, another moment of art making together brings with it a sensation of a bump. The girls and I had discussed the idea of getting our hands done.²⁰⁶ *Hands done*, for the three of us meant having mehndi being applied to them in contrast to another meaning of *hands done*, which can indicate getting a manicure and having one’s nails polished. This was a henna

²⁰⁶ The girls understood immediately what getting our hands done meant when I had brought up this suggestion to them and their mothers. They also understood the parallel storyline which carried the Westernized meaning of getting one’s hands done. Unfortunately, after we had our mehndi applied, we ran out of time to get our hands done in this other sense. The gold and glittered nail polish I had bought for the occasion remained untouched that day.

story that many South Asian girls and women experience with a sense of joy at various times in their lives. Yet as the day approached in which we would have henna applied by the mehndi artist, I was disquieted. Deepika and Katrina were expressing themselves in ways which had me concerned about the upcoming experience. Deepika had begun to voice a worry about getting her hands done. Katrina, who had been quite enthusiastic about the idea ever since I had brought it up, seemed simultaneously elated and confused on the day we were to get the mehndi applied.

Deepika let us, Katrina and I, know her biggest fear, *“I don’t want anyone to make fun of me. I’ve had people make fun of me before and I don’t like it.”* This was what I had been worried about when I had started to think more deeply about this activity. I wondered at the possible reverberations for the girls. I knew that this beautiful curriculum-making moment could be turned into something ugly. Within their home worlds, I understood the girls’ families valued this traditional curriculum making. Vam and Barb, Deepika and Katrina’s mothers, had been very happy that their daughters would be *“having an afternoon of fun”* and *“looked forward to seeing the designs”* the girls would choose. In Katrina’s and Deepika’s school worlds and other community worlds, there was the unwanted possibility that their mehndi applied hands could signal ridicule, exoticizing, and more disturbingly, they could be treated in more explicitly dehumanizing ways. As an adult I was better equipped to negotiate these potential ripples, but the girls were young, and I wanted to keep them safe. This consideration was more complicated than it initially appeared. I pondered what it meant to keep Deepika and Katrina safe and contemplated inwardly, how can I live a plotline of keeping them safe while also hoping they could live a plotline of diversity? My knowing of diversity was grounded in experiences that were not necessarily safe. Yet, I knew too that being able to live out diversity could enrich their understandings of themselves in creative and sustaining ways. I wanted Katrina and Deepika to

be able to have the freedom to express and fully enjoy the affirming stories of their heritage and culture and not merely see themselves caught within larger narratives which positioned girls as less than or focused undue attention to social constructions of caste or additionally, situated difference as undesirable. I queried, how do we live within and against such stories simultaneously? Within this bumping place, I pulled on my experiential knowledge as a teacher coming alongside diverse children and families, and as a South Asian woman of colour who understood the importance of self-affirming stories. *“I can see why you wouldn’t like that. Nobody would. But hopefully, your friends are going to think this is cool”* had been my response to Deepika. Referring to the children’s picture book we had just read where the main character, Nadia had shared a similar worry about getting her hands done, I had turned to Katrina for her thoughts. I asked her *“What do you think, Katrina? What do you think about Nadia?”* and waited with fingers figuratively crossed. Katrina’s response, *“She shouldn’t be worried about her hands. She should be proud that she has beautiful hands. She should show them off”*, helped both girls regain their excitement about having mehndi²⁰⁷ applied. Katrina’s first, and then Deepika’s echoing rallying cry of *“Rock it!”* was the beginning of a new competing story to live by.

The bumping places for Katrina and Deepika were their concerns about how this traditional and richly storied art activity would be taken up in their school worlds. They were experiencing tensions and uncertainty as to whether their peers and friends would arrogantly perceive them. Both girls had indicated in complicated ways throughout the narrative inquiry

²⁰⁷ In this moment, my hope had been for Deepika and Katrina to gain a deeper appreciation of our stories of mehndi. They had their familial ones in which they could elaborate upon and also, the stories that were being crafted between us. We had chatted about the different patterns and their meanings and had used children’s literature to help guide our conversation. I had hoped that when the girls went to school, they would have these affirming stories to help bolster them (should they need it) if their peers and teachers asked them about the intricate mehndi patterns. I understood that the understandings shaped by students and teachers would not necessarily be the same as the ones the girls, their mothers, and I had of our mehndi but they would be emerging ones, understandings which would allow for openings for respectful valuing of one another’s differences.

their wish to not be seen as different. Their stories to live by were complicated by plotlines of difference and discrimination they had already faced and the worries that they would once more have to contend with such plotlines. Competing with these stories to live by were their understandings that henna applied to hands was a joyous plotline that they had lived alongside their mothers on various celebratory occasions. Reverberating backwards, forwards, and across, these bumping places made visible the arrogant perception experienced in plotlines of past discrimination and possible future discrimination.

Thinking with Katrina's Naming Stories...

Within this bumping place, I was reminded of the girls' stories of their names and how their peers and teachers had at different times, made them feel like their names were "*too hard to spell*" and "*too hard to say*", contributing to Deepika's and Katrina's feelings of difference. Katrina's and Deepika's stories of their birth names shaped within familial and intergenerational narratives of love and belonging bumped up against stories of difference shaped within school worlds (Saleh, Menon, & Kubota, 2018). One particular conversation comes to mind. In the presence of her parents and her little sister, Katrina brought up her tension with her classmates and teachers having difficulty with her name. Katrina shared, "*Some people shorten my name. I don't like it.*" She also spoke of the unwanted attention her name drew, noting that her peers rhymed her birth name in unpleasant ways. Katrina recollected, "*They compared me to a _____ . For a period of time, they started calling me this, _____ .*" Speaking about the lack of effort on the part of people to spell and pronounce her name correctly, Katrina disclosed to her parents, and my increasing, dismay, "*Somebody put my name on the board, You know for heating up your food in the microwave. And one guy, he spelled my name in the WORST WAY possible! It looked like ____! I didn't like it...*" Katrina's stories around her name foregrounded

the complicated ways in which difference can be arrogantly perceived (Lugones, 1987). Learning that her parents had deliberately selected a name which they thought would be easy to spell and pronounce, a name which they had surveyed non-South Asians with, prior to conferring the name upon their eldest daughter, surprised Katrina. This preventative and thoughtful action on the part of Katrina's parents, an attempt to shape a competitive story for Katrina, also underscored their awareness of how names and processes of naming can work to erode one's sense of self and their concern of safeguarding Katrina's shakti. Katrina's understanding of her name took on the weight of hurtful stories which situated difference as undesirable instead of traits to be treasured. Similar to Tico the bird with the golden wings in Leo Lionni's (1975) children book, *Tico and the Golden Wings*, who was welcomed back into his flock with the greeting, "Now you're just like us," (p. 31) when all his beautiful feathers had been given away, I continue to wonder, do children have to give up what is special about themselves in order to fit in with their peers?

Lorde (1984/2007) reasoned:

We have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate, But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals (p. 115)

Lorde's words are difficult ones to digest. For some, difference is not anything to worry about. These are the people who have the privilege to think this way. For others, difference is a lived reality which layers and crafts the canvases of our lives. As I let Katrina's stories of her name and (re)storying of her name rest uneasily alongside other such stories of experiences, I remind myself that asking these questions can shape our imaginings forward. So now, I ask again, considering Lorde's unpalatable insight, what can we do to shape stories whereby human

differences are not seen as stories to “ignore, copy, or destroy” (Lorde, 1984/2007, p. 115) but instead seen as stories to “honour, respect, and imagine” alongside one another?

Thinking with Deepika’s School Story of India...

As I reread the narrative account of *Coming to Know Vam alongside Deepika*, I found myself returning time and time again to Deepika’s experiences of being made to feel different than her Grade Three classmates because of where she had been born. Deepika had recalled a story of her teacher who had chosen to show a video of India which showcased the country in very unflattering ways. Deepika had shared over several conversations, “*My teacher showed us a video about India...That made me cry! There was this video, you know the people who can’t afford to go to normal schools in India?*” She had bumped up jarringly against a dominant Western narrative which positions certain nations as being more advanced than other nations. In the situation Deepika had described, this idea had been constructed along lines of whose education system was of most worth. Deepika, drawing on her experiential knowing, and her personal and familial stories of India had tried unsuccessfully, to invite her teacher to travel into her worlds of India. Unfortunately, and painfully for Deepika, India’s education system had, within the eyes of Deepika’s Grade Three teacher, been deemed most likely, as impoverished. The idea of bringing in other videos which showcased India in its rich multiplicity was not taken up by Deepika’s teacher. And this decision shaped not only how India and its people were storied by the children in Deepika’s class, the decision also shaped how Deepika was storied by her classmates. Deepika described how she had been unwittingly storied by her close friend as coming from a land of beggars, who coming to her defense demanded, “*Why would she come here, people? Think about it. Why would she have the money to come here if she was a beggar?*”

Returning to Deepika's stories is not easy. I was greatly perturbed that she had been made to feel as if her curriculum making lived within her storied worlds of home and India were not to be honoured. In these curricular moments, I believe Deepika's shakti was diminished as she was (un)consciously constructed as unknowing. Deepika's experiential knowledge was not seen as valuable by her teacher within these moments in her classroom community. Bumping up too, were my stories to live by, which had me wishing to see alternative ways in which the girls could think of themselves in relation with their peers. These were stories to live by which also had me wanting school worlds to be open to diverse ways of being. Instead of a dominant school narrative which took up a rhetoric of democracy and diversity in surface fashion (Menon, 2019; Menon & Saleh, 2018), I wanted other stories to be lived. As Greene (1995/2000) asseverated:

Young persons have the capacity to construct multiple realities once they have begun to name their world...The young can be empowered to view themselves as conscious, reflective namers and speakers if their particular standpoints are acknowledged, if interpretive dialogues are encouraged, if interrogation is kept alive. (p. 57)

Greene's contention much like a water droplet upon a surface magnifies what lies beneath, brings into prominence the disparity of what could have been a rich learning exchange for the students and the teacher in the moment. Deepika was not afforded the opportunity to "construct multiple realities" or "empowered" as her "standpoint" (Greene, 1995/2000, p. 57) was not recognized as important enough to warrant further discussion in Deepika's classroom community. Within her world of home, Deepika had shared her stories with her mother, Vam in detail. Revisiting these bumping places, I resonate with Clandinin et al. (2006) who discerned:

When children with diverse lives come to schools living their stories to live by, it is moments such as these that teach us all how to be attentive to what we are doing in these educative or mis-educative places we call school. We wonder: are schools interrupting children's and teachers' stories to live by? Are their stories to live by interrupted for educative or mis-educative reasons? It is in trying to understand these curricular moments that perhaps we can begin to understand. Attending to these curricular moments as moments of interaction among the four curriculum commonplaces²⁰⁸ as they intersect might help us begin to understand what it means to negotiate a curriculum of lives for children, teachers, administrators, and families. (p. 147)

Much like Clandinin et al. (2006), who draw upon Dewey's (1938/1997) understanding of educative and mis-educative learning, I wonder what it means when bumping places such as the ones Deepika encountered are not worked within educative ways. I wonder alongside them "what it means to negotiate a curriculum of lives" (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 147) for children similar to Deepika and their families with teachers in schools.

Thinking with Barb's Stories of Racism at Work...

In conversation with Barb I learned of her struggles in negotiating institutional plotlines which arrogantly perceived difference along lines of discrimination and racism. Barb bumped up gently and not-so gently against these stories of difference. In her stories to live by, she knew herself to be a hard worker, somebody who was skillful and was responsible. Within Barb's current world of work, Barb had talked about the difference in treatment she received in

²⁰⁸ Schwab's (1973) four *commonplaces* of education: teacher, learner, subject matter and milieu can be understood as being in constant interplay with one another. That is, each commonplace perpetually interacts with the other commonplaces in diverse ways.

comparison to her fellow employees. On numerous occasions Barb spoke about her current working situation in which employees who did less work than her were recognized in positive ways by upper management, noting: *“Some people, even though they don’t do much, they get lots of appreciation. I do more and I get less appreciation.”* At the same time, Barb who worked hard and showed herself to be a resourceful employee was not offered such accolades.

Recognizing that she was being storied or judged in unfair and parsimonious ways based on her ethnicity, Barb drew upon her shakti, observing, *“The thing is, they can’t ignore what I do. They can’t hold me back for too long.”* This sense of inner strength and determination was something she strongly characterized as a *“pushing past”* of the racism she faced regularly. Barb embodied an unshakable faith in herself to make herself be seen and heard. As she passionately articulated, *“I still fight!”* and *“I will never give up!”* Barb’s stories to live by were in direct contrast to the stories imposed upon her which positioned her difference in skin colour, heritage, language, and home amid myriad others, as identities of limited value. The dominant narrative which upholds Canada as a multicultural society that values the pluralities all of its people was not being lived in Barb’s world of work. Instead, Barb’s stories to live by competed with Barb’s working world’s stories which positioned difference as undesirable in complex and (in)visible ways. Barb’s stories to live by, imbued with her shakti, are stories of resistance to plotlines which serve to arrogantly perceive her (Lugones, 1987) and dehumanize in her working world. Moreover, Barb’s stories of lived resistance are ways in which Barb is making known to her daughters, self-affirming stories of experience that can be shaped along lines of possibility and imagination. Reverberating forward from this bumping place, Barb shares her curriculum making alongside her two daughters, *“I teach my girls this. One day they will recognize me. They can’t hold me back for too long...”*

Thinking with Vam's and Barb's Stories of Caste...

Barb and Vam had raised considerations of caste and shared stories which were etched within penurious plotlines. These stories and experiences, I was reminded, traversed geographical, intergenerational, and personal worlds (Lugones, 1987). Living in Canada, it might be easier to suppose that matters of caste do not exist. Yet, speaking with Vam and Barb (and with their husbands, Kade and Ron), I knew that this kind of understanding was grounded in distortion and fallacy. My own familial stories also called me to attend to these distortions. For each of us, I recognized, that dominant narratives of caste, naming, and (be)longing bumped up harshly against our personal understandings of what is right and just, of what it means to be human. Barb and Ron spoke of troubling times contoured by Punjabi community members, *“Even our own people can treat us poorly. So, if you look at a name, you can tell which caste you belong to. If you belong to a certain caste, they won't talk with you.”* Vam and Kade spoke of the flattening of lives that is perpetuated through living plotlines of caste. Vam spoke of a Hindu priest in India who suggested that children of certain caste couldn't use the same drinking vessels as their peers. In response to this dehumanizing narrative of caste as espoused by the priest, Vam had been vehemently opposed, questioning sharply, *“What nonsense are you talking about?”* Speaking about certain Hindu families' habits of asking “what caste do you belong to”, Vam had refuted such constricting storying, pointing to the familial curriculum making as being a powerful shaping force in preserving such narrow plotlines. She observed, *“The kids keep asking and their parents should tell them not to do so.”* Living a counternarrative to Indian caste, Vam and Kade had instructed their children to simply respond that they were Indian citizens if they were asked about caste. Reverberating forward to present times in Canada, Barb and Ron had shared how their familial curriculum making was paving a counternarrative to stories of caste,

“The first generation to come over here, they brought this over here. But we’re not teaching this to our kids. So, the second generation living here won’t know about this.” I understood Vam and Barb alongside their spouses were living competing stories (Clandinin et al., 2006) against a still pervasive storyline plotted along lines of difference. I see both families drawing upon their respective wisdom as they teach their children, using Ron and Barb’s powerful words, *“so, they won’t think of this as a hinderance to hang out with people of different castes”* and to make it so that *“the third generation will completely forget about this kind of thing.”* Ruminating upon these different experiences which narrate several intricately textured and crafted visages of caste, I can not also help but wonder about other narrow plotlines of defining and constraining people. Though not named caste, these are stories that are lived amongst diverse peoples in all parts of the world.

Bumping Place 3: Living Artful Curriculum Making within an Artistry of Lives

“You sure do a lot of art with your kids,” had been a comment I had heard time and time again in my teaching career. The statement was not typically couched in admiration but was often questioning in tone or worse, dismissive. When framed within a questioning tone, the comment appeared to be more of a matter of thinking as to why art making a large part of my curriculum making alongside students. The why seemed to stem from an arrogant perception (Lugones, 1987) that the arts were not helpful in the pedagogy or praxis of being an educator. The educative possibilities that emerge from being able to invite students to make meaning through artistic and creative means appeared to have little appeal. Yet, as Eisner (1997) knew, the way we think and represent our ideas need to be given more thought. He proposed:

What you choose to use to think with affects what you can think about. Furthermore, the ability to represent experience within the limits and possibilities of a form of representation requires that you think within the material with which you work. (p. 3)

Eisner's observation points to the manner in which meaning making can be hindered when forced along restrictive plotlines which adhere to hegemonic understandings. At the same time, Eisner helps to highlight a widening of vistas made possible through a diversity of representational forms if an arrogant perception (Lugones, 1987) of such meaning making is forsaken in recognition of the artistry of our lives—that is, how we may shape artful and aesthetic experiences even as we artistically compose our lives. I found myself, similar to Clandinin and Huber (2002) who while attending to by co-participant, Denise's stories to live by “realized it was the artistic and aesthetic dimensions of her life that kept calling to us” (p. 167). They further described, “It is the beauty that she has composed in her story to live by that holds our attention” (Clandinin & Huber, 2002, p. 167). It is with these entangled and intricate understandings of how we (can) craft our lives that I think of the bumps that were experienced by co-learners in this narrative inquiry.

Thinking with Anne's Stories of Shaping Aesthetic and Artful Meaning Making...

Anne shared this same understanding. This understanding shaped her stories to live by as an artful teacher, a mindful teacher who appreciated learning and teaching in creative and artistic ways. This particular plotline was interwoven and texturized throughout her canvas of lived experiences. Anne bumped up against master narratives of school which situated arts and teaching within artful ways as less important than measured scores of student achievement. This techno-rational understanding of student achievement was a plotline that Anne didn't particularly

care for. In one conversation, thinking about the various artistic and cultural activities she fostered alongside her classroom community, Anne stated regretfully, *“I’ve got to pick and choose. Too much curriculum.”*

Nevertheless, from coming alongside Anne in the classroom, I understood Anne to be living a competing storyline with the children. Anne’s art activity around Van Gogh brought forth powerful memories of this lived storyline. Anne hadn’t been content to have children merely replicate a famous artist’s work (which is something that happens in some classrooms) but instead tried to invite resonances and deeper thinking by sharing parts of the artist’s life his artwork. When the children learned that Van Gogh had cut off his ear, Anne helped students to reflect upon their earlier discussions about stress that had occurred in Health class. Anne had replied, *“He didn’t have good strategies for dealing with stress. He had a lot of feelings. He didn’t think clearly.”* Later Anne reiterated the importance of having healthy strategies for coping with life stressors, *“It’s okay to talk about depression. It’s okay to talk about your anxiety.”* It was only when the children had some understanding of Van Gogh’s experiences that Anne began to talk about the students working on their own artwork that replicated his style of artistry, and encouraged living in diverse ways with art.

Greene (1995/2000) contended:

It is my conviction that informed engagements with the several arts is the most likely mode of releasing our students’ (or any person’s) imaginative capacity and giving it play. However, this will not, cannot, happen automatically or “naturally.”...The point is that simply being in the presence of art forms is not sufficient to occasion an aesthetic experience or to change a life. (p. 125)

Anne drew upon her own experiential knowing and her understanding that “simply being in the presence of art forms” (Greene, 1995/2000, p. 125) was not enough for students to shape their “imaginative capacity” (p. 125). She invited students to think upon their own lived experiences and have those understandings help them to think about themselves as creative beings in their own right. Anne recognized, even if she did not name it as such, “aesthetic experiences require conscious participation in a work, a going out of energy, an ability to notice what is there to be noticed in the play, the poem, the quartet” (p. 125)

Alongside this deliberate contemplation of, and with, art forms, I saw that Anne was trying to have students think about art as meaning making across curriculum content. Eisner (2003) elucidated:

At the same time, we can think about what we teach in terms of artistry; that is, we can think about what we teach in any area of the curriculum as providing opportunities for students and teachers to think artistically about what they do. (p. 343)

I thought about how Anne infused art across all subject matter, inviting diverse ways of thinking and working with skills and knowledge. Much like Eisner’s understanding of artistry, I felt Anne was thinking pedagogically about her work and play alongside students in ways which allowed each of them to “think artistically about what they do” (Eisner, 2003, p. 343). Hoping to share her love of French, Anne decided to introduce students to a form of reader’s theater. Students were able to enact the roles of different animals on the farm and employ their burgeoning skills in speaking French in ways which were animated and artful. Anne had contoured the mandated curriculum to also invite openings for a living curriculum. During the activity, students shared moments of encounters with different animals and their understandings of being on a farm. Anne

encouraged a sense of curiosity and thus invited children to think and live in artistic, creative, and imaginative ways.

Thinking with Anne's Stories of Creative Community Building...

Anne's stories to live by very much embodied her artful nature. When recounting a bullying incident in the classroom community, Anne talked about the need for students to live in respectful ways alongside one another. Her curriculum making was threaded with an appreciation for the relational and, when describing an activity she did with her students each year, this affirmational plotline became more visible. Bumping up against storylines of bullying in her own life, Anne was able to draw upon her own wisdoms and creatively think of how to shift students' thinking and behaviour through an activity she named, "*The Crumpled Children Activity*." Encouraging students to recount experiences of when they thought they bullied and when they were being bullied: "*You sit down and talk about when something hurtful has been done to you and we even talk about when we have done something hurtful*", Anne offered an imaginative space in which students could try and envision different plotlines for themselves and others in their Grade Four community. Within this creative space, children were invited to learn to be otherwise and compose stories of resistance to stories that would have them thinking and acting in unhealthy ways. In this manner, I saw Anne instilling a sense of loving perception (Lugones, 1987) as she encouraged world traveling to each other's storied worlds (Lugones, 1987). Anne's curriculum making, layered with relational understandings, an appreciation of and for creativity and the arts, and her own artistic stories to live, shaped a competing plotline against a dominant school narrative which rendered student success along reductive lines.

Thinking with Vam's Stories of Living Artful Ways of Being...

Art and art making were familiar plotlines to both girls as each of their mothers' curriculum making alongside their children reflected an honouring of an artistry of lives. Vam spoke passionately about her children having diverse opportunities in which to live their lives. Vam's stories as a young person foregrounded her artful ways of being which she wished Deepika and Aari to experience as well. In her creative way, I saw Vam helping her children to live a competing story to a dominant narrative which relegates arts and art making to the background or attempts to nullify its worth. Throughout this narrative inquiry, Vam shared how important it was for her children to take part in dance and how to learn how to play a musical instrument. Travelling in memory back to when she was attending college in India, Vam made vivid that she had loved to sing. She spoke about how she had occasion to sing professionally. I understood that for Vam having Deepika and Aari learn about traditional dancing, singing, and the playing of musical instruments here in Canada was also a means for her and her husband, Kade, to build upon their shakti. Speaking about the singing and dance instructor who Deepika had described as, "hard", Vam had been resolute, "*The children have to listen to what he instructs and try to follow his example.*" Being able to travel worlds (Lugones, 1987) in artful ways would allow the children to develop a sense of pride in their heritage and also skills which could translate in creative ways as they crafted an artistry of lives amongst people who might not appreciate such art-scape making. Van opined why she and Kade, despite financial constraints, made time for the family to take part in learning several traditional art forms: "*My children will learn as much as they can. Maybe dance. Maybe singing. Maybe playing instruments. They will be prepared if they go to university or find something else they enjoy and can provide them a good life*". Being invited on several occasions to attend the children's artistic performances, I appreciated how Vam and Kade were composing different plotlines of possibility and

imagination for their children. Vam had noted that while the children were young was the time to encourage them to engage more fully with Indian art-forms as once the children became more occupied with their “*school studies*” they would have less time to do so. The story-telling power that the traditional dances that Deepika²⁰⁹ and Aari engaged in reminded them of their roots. The traditional dances especially, had movements which signified different meanings. As these recollections work on me, I turn once more to Greene (1995/2000) who casts light on how we can push against normative plotlines which serve to disenfranchise thought and behaviour of some.

I would suggest again, however, that it may be the imaginative capacity that allows us to experience empathy with different points of view, even with interests apparently at odds with ours. Imagination may be a new way of decentering ourselves, of breaking out of the confinements of privatism and self-regard into a space where we can come face to face with others and call out, “Here we are.” (p. 31)

Vam alongside Kade were showing their children how they can use their “imaginative capacity” (Greene, 1995/2000, p. 31) in artistic ways even when bumping against hegemonic narratives which position such art life making as decadent, self-serving, or unimportant. Composing such stories of resistance allow Deepika and Aari to honour their meaning making, construct healthy sustaining stories along lines of heritage and cultural worth, all the while simultaneously helping them to build their courage to show everyone, “Here we are” (Greene, 1995/2000. p. 31).

Within and Amidst an Artistry of Lives, Attending to Dis/ease within Bumping Places

²⁰⁹ Katrina too, was involved in traditional dance. The stories of her culture were different than the ones shaped by the dance movements that Deepika and her brother, Aari learned, but they too, called forth intergenerational reverberations.

In this chapter, I attended to what is typically beyond the purview of the frame²¹⁰ in order to invite readers to connect in different ways with what is not often perceived, that is, with the bumping places where participants' and my experiences were ones of dis/ease. My intent was not to offer a solution to a problem or to suggest absolute answers to considerations brought to light.

As Morris (2002) avows:

Narrative does not necessarily tell us who is right or wrong. In fact, it actively undermines the false confidence—born of absolutist, objectivist theories of morality—that an ethical dilemma necessarily calls for or accommodates a single right action. (p. 210)

Though Morris is writing about the turn towards narrative in ethics and pain in medicine, his insight allows me to situate this as offering additional beginning, and sustaining points, for dialogue, inquiry, and puzzling. I liken this chapter to collages-in-the-making. The pieces which shaped the various collages originated from other storied images. At first glance, the rips and tears might be taken as marring the art. However, a closer look might raise wonders... When did the rips occur? What caused the rips? What shape and form did these torn pieces take? Why did they take assume these forms? Who creates these forms? Textualized and layered (un)easily upon one another and patched here and there, the stories of individuals do not always fit with one another. They may jostle for position. In this piece of living art composed with, and by storied lives, polymorphous points of views are afforded prominence. A collage of bumping places and wonders evokes an artistry of lives which in turn calls us to attend to the complexity of experiences.

²¹⁰ Here, I am referring to the absence or neglect of certain experiences where there is little, or no attention directed to the complexity and depth inherent in an artistry of lives. It is the routine, the habitual, and the conforming (see: Greene, 1994; hooks, 1984; Minh-ha, 1991) which shapes what is framed for dis-engagement.

There are aesthetic considerations as well. These are the emotive qualities present within the bumping places. Morris (2002) advises, “It will not work to picture emotion as the feral horse running away with reason. The emotion implicit in narrative provides a valuable resource, I contend, in the formation of moral knowledge and of ethical action” (p. 211) It is with these thoughts of “moral knowledge and ethical action” (Morris, 2002, p. 211) in mind that I turn to the following and final chapter in this dissertation where I illuminate the personal, practical, and theoretical justifications (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 1998) of this multiperspectival narrative inquiry.

Chapter Nine: When Experiences Come Calling: My Personal, Practical, and Theoretical Justifications

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note, “Our research interests come out of our own narratives of experience and shape our narrative inquiry plotlines” (p. 121). As this multiperspectival narrative inquiry has unfolded, this understanding has become clearer to me. However, I am aware too, that this recognition is not very helpful for those who hope to learn from my experiences, if I am unable to make visible my personal, practical, and theoretical justifications of engaging in this work. Clandinin (2013) highlights the importance of attending to these narrative inquiry design considerations of “So what?” and “Who cares?” (p. 35) affirming:

We have found at least three ways in which we need to justify our studies: personally, in terms of why this narrative inquiry matters to us as individuals; practically, in terms of what difference this research might make to practice, and socially or theoretically, in terms of what difference this research might make to theoretical understandings or to make situations more socially just. (p. 35)

As a narrative inquirer I have been wakeful to these considerations (personally, practically, and theoretically) and throughout this inquiry and within this dissertation, attempted to raise these points for contemplation and dialogue. In this respect, I am once more eschewing an understanding that these justifications are in any form discrete categories made for easy consumption and regurgitation. Returning to my thinking around masala²¹¹ (Menon, 2018), I

²¹¹Earlier, in this dissertation, I have written a masala perspective may also liberate thinking from habitual constraints. Attending to the relational ethics of narrative inquiry I wrote:

believe articulating my personal, practical, and theoretical justifications of this work is messy, complex, and multilayered—a collaged iterative process of both canvas and medium which can be taken up in a heteroglossia²¹² of ways.

Thinking Personally

Before beginning this study, I was attentive to the different stories I was living and telling as a South Asian female, in particular, to childhood stories I had inquired into and ones that shaped my experiences in classrooms as student and teacher. I recognized these stories did not remain static but were given movement in response to how my life was unfolding. Clandinin (2013) recalls for me the importance of this personal understanding:

This justification is important for several reasons. First, we must inquire into who we see ourselves as being, and becoming within the inquiry. Second, without an understanding of what brings each of us to our research puzzles, we run the risk of entering into relationships without a sense of what stories we are living and telling in the research relationships. Third, without an understanding of we are in the inquiry, we are not awake to the ways we attend to the experiences of research participants. (p. 36)

Thinking narratively and writing autobiographically, it was helpful for me to think about the different stories I was embodying and carrying with me into this research journey. In Chapter One of this dissertation I travelled back in time and ruminated on my early experiences within

Masala refers to a blending of spices to produce a combination of bold flavours—often savory to the palate. In this instance, I employ this term to indicate the experiences of being situated in more than one world can give form to an assortment of intricate images that are further complicated by the ways in which the images are perceived, taken up, and employed by diverse individuals. (Menon, 2018a)

²¹² Here, I am thinking of the unique individuals who engaged in this narrative inquiry. I am also thinking of how research friends and I shared our stories as well as how our different experiences were shaped in diverse ways. For instance, some stories emerged around the preparation and consumption of food; other stories were lived in other ways which evoked some or all of our various senses.

familial, community, and school worlds (Huber et al., 2011; Lugones, 1987) and the intersections between. I understood that as a child my positionality within these worlds brought with it unique perspectives. These unique perspectives are ones which might not be typically viewed as significant. Clandinin et al. (2016) observe, “We wondered if there is a dominant narrative in which children are not considered trustworthy participants; that is, children may be thought incapable of storying the ‘truth’ of their experiences, of their lives” (p. 251). Inquiring into my early experiences, I recognized I had been caught in overlapping, mismatched, aligned, and distinct spaces between the worlds I lived and ones I traversed in my lived multiplicities. These experiences in turn, helped me to think about Deepika and Katrina’s experiences in school alongside Anne and other teachers (Chan, 2010; Clandinin et al., 2006).

Clandinin, Caine, Lessard, and Huber (2016) explain the significance of autobiographical narrative inquires as narrative inquirers coming alongside children and youth.

We also become more attentive to how we imagine ourselves in relation to particular research puzzles. However, we suggest that these autobiographical narrative inquiries are of particular concern in research with children and youth...these ongoing practices of autobiographical work make visible how participating in narrative inquiries have the possibility to shape not only who we are and are becoming but also the children and youth we come alongside. (p. 35)

They further clarify:

Seeing ourselves as people whose experiences are also under study highlights the importance of new conceptions of inquiry, ones in which we see ourselves as always in the making, as embodying cultural, social, familial, institutional, and linguistic narratives

in our past, present, and future experiences. (Clandinin, Caine, Lessard, & Huber, 2016, p 36.)

Understanding that Katrina, Deepika, and I were “always in the making” (Clandinin et al., 2016, p. 36) helped me find assurance in times when I felt challenged by the seemingly status quo persistence of some dominant plotlines (see: Chapter Eight).

Drawing upon my stories as an elementary teacher, I was able to better appreciate Anne’s experiences within her classroom and school worlds. She like her students was living in the midst of stories. These stories helped to shape her curriculum-making alongside the children in her classroom. These stories helped to shape her interactions between her colleagues, administrators, and families (Clandinin, et al., 2006). Returning to stories lived alongside my mother, I was able to better understand Vam’s and Barb’s experiences of motherhood and curriculum making alongside their children, their daughters especially. Layered within and betwixt these stories of mine were the complicated multiplicities I lived which called forth stories of identity-making through home, family, school, and immigration amongst others. Additionally, girlhood experiences reflecting plotlines of ‘Good Girl’ and ‘Bad Girl’ myths helped to shape my thinking. Concurrently, overarching narratives which devalued South Asian females or narrated them as ‘less than’ (Ghosh & Guzder, 2011; Gill & Mitra-Kahn, 2009; Mitra, 2014) contoured my understandings and hopes for this narrative inquiry. It was within this nested art-scape of stories that my personal justifications for inquiring into the experiences of South Asian girls alongside their mothers and teachers emerged.

A Heart-full Musing Interlude: Beginning Wonderings as I came Alongside Two Lovely Girls



80-Beginning Wonders

In the very early moments of this of this inquiry, I began volunteering in Anne's

classroom. And it was here, as I was just learning that there might be two girls who would possibly be joining me in this research venture, I had wonders about who they would be and what they might think of me. I wondered at the type of questions that might run through their minds. I wondered at how they might imagine this research unfolding and what it would entail. Thinking personally about my justifications for this research, I considered the stories I was bringing into this inquiry and the ones that would be shaped by the girls. Musing with these wonders, I sketched an image depicting a young South Asian girl sporting a Canadian Maple Leaf on her top. Adjacent to her, I drew a memory box with its lid left ajar so that stories might escape. Here I was playing with the idea of Pandora's box²¹³ and thinking about the power of nuanced stories. Once released into the world, these stories have the ability to interrupt, disrupt, and enliven singular narratives or as Nigerian poet, Okri (2014) beautifully expressed, "It's easy to forget how mysterious and mighty stories are. They do their work in silence, invisibly. They work with all the internal materials of the mind and self. They become part of you while changing you" (location 1187). The coloured diya in the inner lid represents the hopeful possibilities of sharing stories. At the same time, my concerns of unintentionally generalizing co-participants and their stories of experience by figuratively boxing them in by word, silence, and actions, worked on me. In this *heart*-full musing, the girls' experiences were foremost in my mind. Recognizing there is limited research which situates the focus on childhood experiences, let alone diverse South Asian girlhood experiences, I sketched a hovering hand to remind myself of the dangers of doing just that—unintentionally boxing or confining people. This was an ethical concern that stayed with me for the entirety of this research. Amidst Indian posies and

²¹³In one iteration of this Greek story, Pandora was used by her father, Zeus the ruler of the Greek pantheon, to get his revenge upon Prometheus, another God for allowing humankind to have the gift of fire. Pandora is said to have opened a box (that Zeus had provided her with), releasing all matter of ills upon the world save for hope which was to be a source of succor for humans amidst their many woes.

iconography which are an invite for border-crossing and border-dwelling (Anzaldúa, 1987/1999; Menon & Saleh, 2018), I posed in written form some wonders. In this heart-full musing I queried:

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Was I the Indian they had in mind?

Was I the Canadian they had in mind?

Who am I as researcher?

Who am I in their stories?

Who are they in my stories?

Wonders...

As a researcher, how do I stop myself from boxing in participants and their stories?

Dreaming...Picturing...Imagining...

Afterimages: Katrina and Deepika...

Later, as I came to know Deepika and Katrina better and they, in turn, came to know me better, I felt myself draw closer to them and learned more of their dreams and aspirations. I learned more of their everyday hopes and wishes. I learned more of their curriculum-making experiences inside of schools and outside of schools (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011). I learned more of their worlds and their world travels (Lugones, 1987) and in doing so, resonated in various ways with both girls individually and together. Their creative ways of being echoed

²¹⁴Thinking with the words in King's (2012) poignant poem, I posed these particular questions contoured in stories of nationality and ethnicity, recognizing others before me have asked it in different and similar ways (For instance, see: Cardinal, 2014)

my feelings toward artful life-making. I shared their wonder and delight when they experimented with painting outside of school in a studio, explored jewelry making through polymer clay, and represented and recorded their lives through their memory books. I shared their pain and hurt when they shared stories of being made to feel different than their peers through their names. When stories of heritage were raised in school in (un)healthy ways, I felt an echoing pain and joy when they told me these stories. When different friendships were challenged, I found myself returning to my stories of childhood friends. When traditional pastimes such as mehndi brought their worries to the foreground, I listened with an empathetic ear. When plotlines of skin colour and appearance upholding dominant Western narratives around attractiveness were made visible in our exchanges, I tried to intercede and make available other ways of seeing and being. Coming alongside Katrina and Deepika reawakened me to other stories that I thought I had hushed and pushed back from recollection. Both girls reminded me that while, sometimes, it is okay to be silent, sometimes there is a need to do more.

Lorde (1984/2007) proposed, “In the transformation of silence into language and action, it is vitally necessary for each one of us to establish and examine her function in that transformation and to recognize her role as vital within that transformation” (p. 43). As I continue to think with Deepika and Katrina’s experiences and lay them metaphorically alongside mine, I think about why I engaged in this work. As I do so, Lorde’s cautionary words resonate:

We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sister and our selves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned; we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, as we will still be no less afraid. (p. 42)

Recognizing the presence of distortions, (mis)representations, and simplistic ways of attuning to

peoples' experiences, I understand there is a need for different ways of being alongside one another. This dissertation, I believe may help to shape new stories whereby our humanity is more important than a suppression of our differences.

Afterimages: Anne...

My personal justifications of taking this up this narrative inquiry also stemmed from my experiences as an elementary teacher and a school leader. As a female of colour I encountered teachers and administrators who were similarly minded in wanting to honour the diversity and pluralities (Lugones, 1987) of the children in our midst. I also encountered teachers and administrators who did not feel the same way. I wondered why this was so. It made sense to me that this type of respect of and for children was very much needed and so I found myself at a loss of trying to understand why some teachers embodied (Johnson, 1989) and lived intercultural competence (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2012) as pedagogy and praxis and others did not. Coming alongside Anne was a way in which I could think about this part of my narrative inquiry puzzle more deeply. Being with Anne²¹⁵ in the classroom at different times during one academic year (alongside Katrina and Deepika and then visiting her less frequently at Borderlands School in the following year) enabled me to see firsthand how she created relational spaces for the children in her care. Through Anne, I was able to understand that this relationality was shaped in part by her formative years. As a child and adolescent, Anne shared with me that she knew what it was meant to be storied as different. This label of being different was not a kind one and Anne had been hurt by it. Growing up, Anne chose creative means as ways in which to explore her identity. Being storied as different and carving creative spaces for herself were made

²¹⁵ I continued to have research conversations outside of Anne's school with Anne throughout the years of this study.

visible in the manner in which Anne interacted with the students in her Grade Four classroom. Katrina and Deepika both voiced their appreciation of Anne. Their mothers, Barb and Vam, did as well. I understood their stories of Anne were ones which articulated their belief in her ability to relate well to the girls. I came to see Anne as a teacher who was willing to put in the effort to metaphorically travel to their worlds (Lugones, 1987). One of the bridges I saw her attempting to build between her students and herself was one crafted around artful ways of being. This plotline resonated for me as a teacher who too had come alongside her students in this fashion. Greene (1995/2000) writes about the relationship between art and imagination, reflecting:

When we see more and hear more, it is not only that we lurch, if only for a moment, out of the familiar and the taken-for-granted but that avenues for choosing and for action may open in our experience; we may gain a sudden sense of new beginnings, that is, we may take an initiative in the light of possibility. (p. 123)

I believe this is what Anne was invoking in her creative and relational practice alongside diverse children. Certainly, inviting me to be a part of the classroom community allowed me to “gain a sudden sense of new beginnings” (Greene, 1995/2000, p. 123). Musing alongside Anne’s stories of experience crafted across the topography of her childhood and adulthood, I came to understand that she was using her creative talents to see children in their wholeness and not merely on the basis of test scores, standards, achievement, and outcomes (see Chapter 8) or what Greene (1995/2000) as identified as “the familiar and taken-for-granted” (p. 123). Amongst the adults Anne worked with, I saw her doing the same. Plotlines of community meant effort and work but as Anne helped me appreciate anew, the hard work as well as the pleasure to be had in coming together in relational and often, heartwarming ways.

A Heart-full Musing Interlude: Thinking about Community

In the

musings depicted, I was playing

with the idea of fire. Fire is not only a source of heat.

It also has the ability to scorch us if not handled carefully. In spite

of this potential of danger, heat is necessary. Fire is necessary... A

single ember can enflame our imagination and set alight our desire

for more humane ways of being with one another. Dreaming

with fire can kindle and emblaze

imagination

and

possibilities

for community

building amongst and within diverse groups of people. Flickering, each flame within us can spark other flames, until we stand united in our commitment, until our hearts glow with care and respect. Stoking our spirits in the face of naysayers and those invested in stamping out our fires is vulnerable and hard work. Nevertheless, it is important work. Such dreams are worth dreaming even if it means we can get burned in the fiery combustion of turning them into reality.



81-Dreaming with Fire

Afterimages: Barb and Vam...

Revisiting my personal justifications of why I chose to engage in this research, I understood that I wanted to inquire into the experiences of mothers who were involved in the curriculum making of their daughters. When I came in closer relationship with Katrina's mother,

Barb and Deepika's mother, Vam, I found myself so deeply appreciative of the struggles they had endured and continued to endure in moving from India to Canada. My parents like Vam and her husband, Kade, and Barb and her husband, Ron, were immigrants to Canada. Hearing these parents' stories reminded me of some of my parents' experiences making a life in Canada. And as Barb and Vam continued to speak and share with me stories that they had lived in their youth and now as mothers of young daughters, I understood that they too had been shaped by intergenerational plotlines. However, lest there is a misunderstanding that their individual stories can be generalized to all Indian women, I want to say this isn't so.

Narayan's (2000) insightful metaphor of a prepackaged picture of culture helps to make this distinction clear.

Prevalent essentialist modes of thinking about cultures depend on a problematic picture of what various cultures are like, or on what I call the "Package Picture of Cultures." This view understands cultures on the model of neatly wrapped packages, sealed off from each other, possessing sharply defined edges or contours, and having distinctive contents that differ from those of other "cultural packages." (p. 1084)

Family stories framed within intergenerational stories, which are framed within societal and institutional plotlines, have shaped my understandings as a South Asian growing up in Canada. These stories might share some similarities with the experiences lived by Vam and Barb but they ought not be understood as duplications of one another. In a similar vein, Barb's and Vam's stories of experience may overlap and intermingle but they are not identical to one another. Narayan poses the questions, "Do I share a common culture with every other Indian woman, and, if so, what are the constituent elements that make us members? What is my

relationship to Western culture?" (p. 1085) and in so doing, points to the danger of essentialism. Keeping this caveat in mind, Barb and Vam's stories highlight for me their uniqueness and also how they see themselves within the midst of other stories. In coming alongside both these courageous women, I understood that for them, their stories as they told, lived, relived, and retold them (Clandinin, 2013) can help shape the lives of their daughters in healthy ways. Their stories of experience were some of the means by which they chose to teach and learn with their daughters. Positive intergenerational and family stories nested (un)comfortably within other not-so positive narratives point to an unassailable knowing that there is no one South Asian...Indian...Asian Indian...Indo-Canadian...Indian Canadian experience.

A Heart-full Musing Interlude: Living our Colourful Multiplicities

Moving away from caricatures of our experiences and our identities is not so easy. Karamcheti (1983), speaking as an American South Asian academic reiterates this point:

As a woman and as an Indian, I am simultaneously completely known to my students and an impenetrable mystery. I represent the extremes of glamour and squalor, the exotic woman, the pampered idol of orientalist fantasy; and the eternal victim, the oppressed Third World female doomed to poverty and ignorance, subject to being burned alive at both ends of the marriage bed, as a bride or a widow, I can speak with an almost genetic authority. This is of course very much a borrowed authority. Neither I nor anyone else can deliver a representative, authentic Third World woman to academia or elsewhere. (p. 277)

Like Karamcheti, I recognize the lure of simplistic tropes. Learning alongside my research friends, I am better attuned to our lived multiplicities. To deny this recognition I believe is to fall for the myth, one which advances hegemonic plotlines and representations. These are distortions which serve to keep the things the way they are for the benefit of some over others. Learning alongside the mothers and their daughters in this study, I see the potentiality in embracing our artistry as story-makers. In this musing I try to capture the many colours of our storied selves.



82-We Story Us

Thinking Theoretically

The relational ethics (Clandinin et al., 2018) of this narrative inquiry have been important considerations for me throughout this study. These considerations shaped my relationships with co-learners within and across different worlds (Lugones, 1987) such as home, family, community, culture, and institutions. I have come to appreciate that curriculum-making is as unique as the diverse worlds they are composed within (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011). I have become wakeful (Greene, 1995/2000) to how familial and school curriculum-making diverge (resulting in bumps) and at times, coalesce to shape a living curriculum (Aoki, 1993) which embodies (Johnson, 1989) a curriculum of lives (Clandinin et al., 2006). Coming alongside young co-participants, Deepika and Katrina invoked the need to attend to their meaning-making (Clandinin et al., 2016; Huber, 2020) so that their shakti was build-up and not merely preserved. At the same time, I am also more appreciative of how the creation of artful spaces alongside art making can help us in our world-building as artists and narrators of our own stories.

Relational Ethics...

I was especially concerned with my positioning as a South Asian researcher who would be learning with mothers and daughters of similar heritage. For me, this felt like an additional ethical weight. Early in this research journey, I wondered, how I'd be perceived. Would possible co-participants be frightened to share openly with me their experiences with me? I also had my understandings of being an elementary teacher who had worked at one point alongside Anne. I wondered how my stories as a teacher intertwined with my new stories as a researcher—how would these stories shape our friendship? I had other wonderings. I puzzled over what stories I would live as I attempted to come alongside co-learners in ways which honoured each of us and, I further puzzled over what stories would call to me. As I recall these wonders, I am drawn close

to Glanfield (2012) who writes of her vulnerabilities as a researcher (amidst her lived multiplicities). As she drives to Eagle Flight First Nation, she thinks about the shape of relational ethics in coming alongside participants:

How might I – a Métis girl from a small community, who grew up with these family stories of researchers, who is now in a place close to where I grew up, who is now in a place with a PhD and called a researcher – be? How do I live with the “researcher shadow”: that researchers “take away”; that researchers do not honour the voices and stories of the other; that researchers have the knowledge; and that the researchers’ knowledge and ways are valued? Researchers are the knowers and the ones with answers; all researchers have to do is provide an answer. (p. 58)

As time passed and I came to better know and care more deeply for research friends, this recognition that I needed to attend to my relational ethics alongside co-learners, became even more profound. Clandinin et al. (2018) write about how they came to understand relational ethical as being composed in the living of a narrative inquiry alongside participants.

As we talked we also realized that relational ethics is most visible in the living of lives, in the doing of narrative inquiry, in what we are asked to do as narrative inquirers.

Relational ethics call us to live, call us to take action with ourselves and with participants. (p. 10)

Engaging in this research, I believed that living a narrative inquiry alongside co-learners shaped a sacred trust between us. In this respect narrative inquiry, unlike some other types of research, directs awareness towards the lives of the participants and researcher. Huber and Clandinin (2012) in their work alongside teachers and children reflected:

As we do this, we do not see ourselves as experts, with answers to the questions we pose. Rather, we see ourselves as trying to puzzle through our dis-ease about what it means to live as coresearchers with children in relational narrative inquiry, particularly on school landscapes. (p. 794)

Resonating with their insight, I also came to appreciate:

Just what relational ethics are in narrative inquiry becomes most apparent when we bump against actions or ways of being that are discordant, that draw our attention away from lives in the making to other considerations. It is in, and through, the bumping places that we are called to attend to what is relationally ethical in the living of narrative inquiries and in the ways that we live in different places, including schools as institutions. There is hope that as researchers we honor the possibilities of engaging in research that is imbued with relationally ethical responses that are shaped in the living, in the breathing, in the particular, and that most centrally are attentive to people's ongoing life making.

(Clandinin et al., 2018, p. 10)

This attention to "people's ongoing life making" (Clandinin et al., 2018, p. 10) makes visible for me the ways in which different curriculum making shaped within diverse worlds can work with or against one another.

Curriculum-Making Worlds of Home and School...

Living alongside the girls in their Grade Four year in school and then coming alongside

them in places outside school over the span of several years, made more visible to me that what they were learning in their familial curricular-making worlds sometimes made for sharp bumping places in their school-making worlds. Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, and Murry-Orr (2010) observe,

The time to compose relationships with participants and ourselves makes it difficult for us to stand at a distance and judge the stories and the lives that others are living and telling. By coming alongside, over time and in relationship, we are able to name, show, talk about, dwell in the tensionality, and learn from the experience of dwelling within. It is in this coming alongside over time, with wide awakesness that we are enabled to necessarily call into question and make problematic the dominant stories of school as places where lives meet in smooth, happy, successful, caring school environments. (p. 83)

As Clandinin et al. (2010) point out, encountering dominant stories of school can shape moments of tension resulting in bumps. I think about Deepika who when she was in Grade Three, couldn't find a space to talk about her pain and discomfort of a video clip which depicted India as a place of impoverished living and learning until she reached home. There was no space in her school curriculum making which allowed her to share her knowing and her wisdom. The teacher who showed the video didn't appear to understand that Deepika required a space in the classroom community in which she could explain her thoughts. However, within her home world, Deepika shared her experience in different ways with her mother, Vam and her father, Kade. And in the several times she shared her experience with me (outside of school), I became more wakeful (Greene, 1995/2000) to how important those spaces made available within home worlds can be for children. It was in her home world of curriculum making that Deepika showed how she was

understanding this experience of the video clip in class and how she felt her teacher was not listening to her.

Katrina shared with her mother and me her worries about her friends. She spoke about some incidents of bullying she was experiencing with a former friend in her neighbourhood. Her mother, Barb, was Katrina's advocate, helping to try and create spaces for Katrina to make other friends who would know how to treat her right. It was within her home world of curriculum making alongside her mother, that Katrina was able to share the depth of her angst and pain about being teased in unkind ways. In her home world, Katrina was able to make visible that her experiences with her former friend and her understanding of those experiences were important to how she viewed herself. The girls individually and alongside their mothers shared these two experiences with me and I understood that it was because I was now a part of their worlds outside of school that allowed me to be in a position to hear them speak in such vulnerable and courageous ways. Through our conversations, I came to understand even more profoundly, how important it is to make those spaces in school where children such as Deepika and Katrina, can draw upon their familial curriculum making and their sense of shakti to help them negotiate the bumps they experience in their school curriculum-making worlds (Lugones, 1987; Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011). Attending to those bumping places (Clandinin et al., 2006; Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Murry-Orr, 2010) within worlds of school and understanding that school curriculum making is not a one size fits all kind of deal—can make it easier for children to travel in healthy ways between and amongst their unique worlds of experience. Such attention creates truly educative (Dewey, 1938/1997) experiences for teachers, children, and families.

As I continue to think about how and where those spaces can be made, I am reminded of Lessard's (2014) work alongside Indigenous youth. In his research for his dissertation, as he

came alongside a young person, named Sky and came to know her better, he bumped against a dominant narrative of school practice. He wrote:

Efforts were made to inform the school of the unique situation in Sky's life but those messages seemed to be met with hesitation from those in the school. I wonder about the hesitation and the stories that those in the school were composing of both Sky and her family around a plot line of a student being late. I wonder if the experience of life shifting shared by both Sky and her family was difficult to understand from a school perspective. I wonder where the space is to listen to the stories of youth and families as they try to maintain both life and school routines during unexpected circumstances. (p. 81)

As I think with Barb and Vam's stories of curriculum making, Katrina and Deepika's stories of becoming and identity-making, and Anne's stories of teaching with relationality, I find myself too wondering "where the space is to listen to the stories of youth and families as they try to maintain both life and school routines during unexpected circumstances" (Lessard, 2014, p. 81). Dwelling and lingering in this "tensionality" (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, and Murry-Orr, 2010, p. 83), I ponder alongside Chung and Clandinin (2020), who query:

If children and teachers are co-composing curricula of lives in schools and classrooms, in what ways does the story of each child's family become part of this co-composition? By listening more closely to each child's and each family's lived and told stories, might we better understand the tensions children and families experience in curriculum making? (p. 161)

Revisiting these wonders, I am reminded that these considerations are also ones of social justice.

As Caine et al. (2018) elucidate:

Living a commitment to those who are in our research also means that we listen carefully for the social justice issues that are named during and as part of the inquiry—issues that are named within a relational context and in ways that consider the values of consequences and the generation of possible future experiences. (p. 142)

Crafting an Artistry of Lives...

Over the course of this multiperspectival narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013), I came to more deeply appreciate the experiences of the girls, in relation to their teachers and families, but also, as individuals brimming with joy, love, and creativity. I came to deeply care for them in all of their incandescent multiplicities. As we moved our beginning conversations from Borderlands School into other communal spaces such as restaurants, coffee shops, movie theatres, recreation centers, farmers' markets, shopping centres, art studios and our homes, amidst others, I saw how they became more comfortable and at ease with themselves and me, as a research friend. However, it was in artful spaces that we co-created that I became more awake to how they could reflect on their experiences, sharing stories which geographically traversed cartographies of the heart, the mind, and nation. Within these stories were other stories of their lives lived and becoming, their understanding of themselves within a layered collage of familial, community, and cultural stories amongst other stories of experience. Being able to experiment with a wide range of artistic mediums invited the girls (and me) to inquire into our experiences in ways that evoked stories of our heritage which honoured our ways of knowing. The memory book the girls had started as part of our beginning conversations, became a site for representing their lives in both living and lived memory. They continued to work on their books after Grade Four and their books were frequently re-worked in relation to what was unfolding in their lives. Pictures, paintings, writing, drawing, and specially chosen memorabilia were not always kept. Some of

their representations were not shaped into ‘finished’ products. And, the girls did not always share their pages with me. The choice was always theirs as to whether they wanted to share or not. As I temporally traverse back in my memories, I believe it was the memory books which provided a starting shape of what was to come afterwards. And, the afterwards was a glorious inquiry and exploration of the girls’ meaning-making understandings of their storied lives. The reading of, and aesthetic responding to (Rosenblatt, 1938; 1978), select children’s literature speaking to a wide palette of South Asian experiences, the painting of mermaids, jewelry making, mehndi were only some of the art making endeavours we engaged in together over the years. I believe Katrina and Deepika, as they gave themselves the freedom to artistically explore and (re)imagine themselves, were struck by the idea that they could creatively trouble and contest differing, imposed stories that had been placed upon them. I don’t know if this was a conscious understanding but as time passed and we embarked on new artistic ventures together, I saw them becoming more anchored in their knowing and their storied canvases of themselves. Reverberating backwards and forwards in memory and future imaginations, I saw them artfully construct and craft identities which dispositioned the notion that is held by some that to experience South Asian girlhood is to experience a less than wholesome life. The vibrancy in which they came to their artforms and the ways in which they brought their stories to their art making, Deepika and Katrina illuminated their talents as artists of their own lives.

Subsequently, I understand that such art making has the potentiality to help bring about those spaces where familial and school curriculum making can meet in respectful and honourable ways. Within these artistically shaped spaces, South Asian girls such as Katrina and Deepika can allow their shakti to shine. They can be free to imagine themselves into an ever-shifting palette of stories. This is not a romanticizing of the girls or other children of colour. Instead, such co-

crafted spaces can be made available within teacher preparation programs and within schools if the intent is to open ourselves up to alternative perspectives and different visions of what is the artistry of our lives. As well, as a South Asian narrative inquirer and woman of colour, I discovered my *heart*-full musings invited me to wonder and think alongside the stories and experiences of co-learners in ways which also honoured my knowing and experiences. Artistically working, playing, and imagining alongside the girls and affording myself the opportunity to think and wonder artfully with storied experiences, emboldened and strengthened the collage of this research.

Why Does Any of This Matter?

Inexorably interwoven through this dissertation are my personal, theoretical, and practical justifications for engaging in this narrative inquiry. In illuminating the practical justifications of this narrative inquiry, I find myself thinking about what I have learned from my research friends. Coming alongside Anne, Katrina, Deepika, and the girls' mothers, Barb and Vam over the span of several years has helped me to understand our identities are indeed, profoundly contoured and shaped by our experiences. Anne's stories of experience brought into focus the wonderful sustaining relationships that can be had between children and teachers when there is reciprocity, care, and love. Anne's experiences also highlighted the need to attend to the complexity of being healthy within school structures that can work to do the opposite. Through Vam and Barb I came to see how plotlines of South Asians as a model minority exist alongside other plotlines which uphold various images of what it means to be a 'Good Girl' and a 'Good Woman'. Layered within these narratives are other narratives which speak to daughter devaluation, caste, racism, and intercultural insensitivity. Vam and Barb's living of their shakti brought into bright prominence how they interrupt and resist these imposed mis-educative (Dewey, 1938/1997)

intergenerational, institutional, and cultural narratives which shaped their experiences in India and in Canada. Deepika and Katrina, in inviting me into their lives, showed me the reverberations of their life-making. Their stories and experiences of “knowing, being, doing, and relating” (Huber, 2020) rendered visible the ways in which they dwelled within borderland spaces, crossed borders, resisted, and (re)imagined borders (Anzaldúa, 1987/1999; Menon & Saleh, 2018) within their unique worlds (Lugones, 1987) of school, family, and community. Epistemic and ontological concerns were brought to the forefront as the girls demonstrated how meaning-making can assume form within creative spaces which encourage artful engagement with people and various mediums. Thinking with Anne’s, Barb and Katrina’s, and Vam and Deepika’s stories pointed to how schools, though they might be spaces where bumps (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2010) may be experienced, can additionally, be sites of possibilities where social justice is lived (Caine et al., 2018). Caine et al. (2018) explain that a narrative practice of social justice not only names issues of social justice but also attends to lives.

In naming these ‘social justice problems’, and framing consequent research questions into particular ‘social justice issues’, participants and people more broadly can become at risk of having their experiences, their stories, written about, and for them, written over or, perhaps, squeezed to fit into the predetermined issue or problem. Lives, and the complex and continuous composing of lives, might also become invisible. (p. 139)

When thought of in this way, collaboration within and amongst difference can lead teachers, children, and families to a deeper knowing of one another whereby identity-making, and world-building, are actively supported. However, making classrooms sites for imaginative possibilities needs the engagement of all involved. In the following passage, Paley (1997) is

thinking specifically about teachers, but her words help me imagine possibilities for all who are concerned in the welfare and education of young people.

I have known teachers who were like rocks; nothing could move them or alter their ways. Sometimes that teacher has been me. Every path I take seems to go inward, to the center of my memories and my own regrets. (p. 54)

Paley's words recall for me a kaleidoscope of moments within this narrative inquiry. If some teacher educators, teachers, students, qualitative researchers are "like rocks" (Paley, 1997. p. 54), then perhaps this dissertation illuminating the differing experiences of co-learners and myself can be the water currents that ebb and flow against the rocks. Perhaps this inquiry into experiences can be the running waters which over time, contour a rock's surface. Perhaps, this body of work can be like the currents of wind that bit by bit loosen the grip of the steadfast rock to the bed where it is anchored, forever changing it and the worlds around it.

National Plotlines: Reverberating Stories of Misrepresentations

In September of 2019, pictures of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau surfaced which showed him wearing brownface and blackface. With brown make-up to darken his skin, Trudeau had also donned a turban and a robe to complete his outfit (Kambhampaty, Carlisle, & Chan, 2019). He was a teacher at the time, employed at a Vancouver based private school. He was twenty-nine years of age. I think of the fiduciary obligations²¹⁶ he had towards his students as a teacher and I cannot help but flinch. Photos showed him smiling with a group of women. In another picture, also, smiling, dressed in his costume of robe and turban with brownface,

²¹⁶ Earlier in this dissertation, I speak to my fiduciary obligations as a teacher which shaped my understandings of what it means to be a good teacher who not only talks about intercultural competence but attempts to live it.

Trudeau posed with his arms around two Sikh men who also wore turbans but for religious reasons and not merely as part of a costume (Zimonjic, 2019). Trudeau had yet another picture taken of him, this time in blackface when he was a student attending high school (Kambhampaty, Carlisle, & Chan, 2019; Zimonjic, 2019). It was for a talent show where he performed, “Day O”, a Jamaican folk song. When I saw these images displayed on my phone, my laptop screen, and my television set, I was horrified. This man was running for re-election. He was the leader of our country. Our prime minister before, Stephen Harper²¹⁷ had been visible in his racist rhetoric and now it looked like I (along with others) had been misguided in thinking that this man’s, Justin Trudeau’s beliefs were cut from a different cloth. Ultimately, Trudeau did apologize for his past actions noting:

I take responsibility for my decision to do that. I shouldn't have done it. I should have known better. It was something that I didn't think was racist at the time, but now I recognize it was something racist to do and I am deeply sorry.... I think it's well known that communities and people that live with intersectionalities and face discrimination the likes of which I have never personally had to experience is a significant thing that is very hurtful and that is why I am so deeply disappointed in myself. (Zimonjic, 2019, para 5-9)

Trudeau’s apology was very important to hear especially as what he says and does is very much on the public stage, a stage that caters to local, national, and international audiences. As our prime minister, he has the power to shape how communities can look at one another. His ability

²¹⁷ For instance, Harper’s cabinet had instigated a bill entitled, the *Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act*. It forwarded an agenda that openly played upon fears and negative stereotypes about differences in the forms of ‘the foreigner’, a ‘barbarian’ at that, especially in relation to certain immigrants and people of colour, while blatantly ignoring Canada’s history and current record of “barbaric cultural practices” (See Drimonis, 2014; Zhou, 2014).

to visibly make an apology (irrespective of what his actual intentions in those moments were), highlights the possibilities of moving forward in ways which do not dehumanize peoples.

However, while Trudeau apologized for his mimicry and mockery of people of colour, it was NDP leader, Jagmeet Singh's words which resonated deeply with me.

The kids that see this image, the people that see this image, are going to think about all the times in their life that they were made fun of, that they were hurt, that they were hit, that they were insulted, that they were made to feel less because of who they are and I want to talk to those people right now. (Zimonjic, 2019, para 10-11)

Singh who is no stranger to racism, understood what it meant for us to see our own Prime Minister wearing brownface and blackface. He spoke to the hurt and fear we felt for ourselves in this moment and for the hurt and fear we felt for the youth and children in our communities.

I want to talk to all the kids out there. You might feel like giving up on Canada. You might feel like giving up on yourselves. I want you to know that you have value, you have worth and you are loved and I don't want you to give up on Canada and please don't give up on yourselves.

Singh's message goes to the heart of the matter. In that moment and now, thinking about why Singh had to share his message, I query who are our models? Who are we emulating? I think about the diverse children who enter our classrooms who hear stories of themselves that they don't recognize and are made to live or who are animated (Lugones, 1987) in ways which dehumanize and subjugate their sense of shakti, their lived empowerment, mostly out of a sense of someone else's fear, lack of understanding, or worse, loathing. I wonder what is lost when we default to commonly held assumptions or representations of people. Flattening lives in this

manner, ultimately, such characterizations undermine our freedoms as individuals and thus, how we interact and understand each other in our worlds.

Recalling Moments as an Instructor of a Course within Teacher Education

Turning to face the third class and final class of the day, I posed the same question I had earlier of the other two classes: “In your classrooms, have any of your cooperating teachers raised anything with respect to the experiences of Black Canadians or have the intention of doing so?” This query arose from my original wish to encourage these early teachers to think of moving beyond simple understandings of diverse people and their experiences. While Black History Month was coming up, I wished for a deeper understanding of how we might think with the stories of Black Canadians. I had already suggested that we could weave and texturize our understandings throughout the academic school year so that we could better recognize the complexity of people’s experiences.

However, looking at the sea of confused faces, I was disappointed once again. Three out of three classes, this year like the year before, were not taking up the history of Black Canadians in meaningful ways. One’s student’s pithy comment, “We’re doing Indigenous history” had me dismayed. I wondered about this student’s descriptor of “doing” and what it meant and why he had chosen to use that as a response to my question. Did he recognize how he was flattening the lives of diverse Indigenous peoples alongside people of colour? How were the reverberations of our colonial past, present, and future being understood by new teachers? I wondered about the silencing of Black Canadian²¹⁸ voices within our classrooms. I wondered about what it meant to

²¹⁸ I hadn’t recognized how deeply this silencing of diverse stories went and so I was even more appreciative of the efforts taken by Simmee Chung and myself to try and open spaces of dialogue with students in teaching the same

be “doing history” ...how were diverse people’s stories of experience being (mis)understood, (under)valued, (un)heard, and (mis)appropriated? I wondered why diversity appeared to be a problem to be solved instead of an invitation to develop our intercultural sensitivity²¹⁹ with one another.

This memory continues to live with me as I ruminate across and within the different stories shared by co-learners and myself. I am more wakeful to how we have bumped against narratives which make it challenging to sustain healthy stories of ourselves. At the same time, I am more wakeful to how systemic inequalities reverberate forwards and backwards in the stories we live and also, in the ones we tell of ourselves. In the past two years of thinking and working on this dissertation, I was invited by my friend, Simmee Chung to co-teach an introductory course on Social Studies to pre-service teachers who were enrolled in an after-degree program for Education. Simmee and I alternated the days we taught. During the first year of teaching this course, as I prepared for class one week, I found myself in a quandary. Having read the chapter in the assigned textbook for the course, I knew that I wanted to shift our class conversations beyond what was suggested in the chapter. The chapter placed a heavy emphasis on elementary teachers preparing their young charges to adopt multicultural perspectives and was noticeably, in my mind, silent about teachers needing to do the same. Wishing to move beyond this common understanding of multiculturalism which typically sees ethnicities as the signifier of multiculturalism, I wanted to help co-create spaces where we could think about each of us as

course over two years. At the same time, I was also hopeful because I knew there were other instructors present in this post-secondary institute who were doing the same kind of challenging work alongside students in different courses.

²¹⁹ My interests in intercultural competence and intercultural sensitivity were deepened during the research I engaged in for my masters’ capping project. These interests were also contoured in large degree due to my teaching experiences alongside other teachers who too, worked with diverse students. This narrative inquiry is also shaped by these experiences of wishing to fashion bridges of understanding and relation between people.

diverse human beings, where we could recognize that we each had our own stories of heritage, talents, family, friends, learning, loving, and so forth. I wanted us to think together how students and teachers can go about *living* a diverse mindset in our thoughts and in our actions within our classroom communities and not merely, through lip service. I hoped to evoke what Anzaldúa (2015) called a “reflexive awareness” to acknowledge the “destructive stories of self” (p. 138) propagated by ourselves and others. Continuing to think with the stories of experiences shared by my research friends and those of my own, which reached backwards and forwards in time, and across and within, different curriculum-making worlds (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011; Lugones, 1987), I thought about the differing bumping places (as discussed in the previous chapter) and other stories shared through media. Working with adult students in this program, I introduced some guiding wonders, alongside our autobiographical and experiential work, which included: How do stereotyping, privilege, bias, and colourblindness shape our perspectives and the stories we have of ourselves? How do they shape the stories others have of us? What does it mean to move beyond such single storying (Adichie, 2009)? My desire was multi-fold. I wanted to open our talks so that we could think together about the possibilities of what it means to be a teacher in a community of diverse learners and what does it mean to be a human who honours the many-coloured multiplicities of each other’s lives. I wanted to think about how we could honour children like Katrina and Deepika, and their families whose knowing bumped up against more hegemonic knowing.

Imagining a New Canvas: Collaging Stories of the Past to the Now, and For the Future

In a recent report issued by Statistics Canada about reported hate crimes to the police, the author, Moreau (2020) indicated:

Canada's population is expected to become even more multicultural and diverse in the coming decades. The proportion of Canadians who are members of visible minority groups and the proportion who are affiliated with non-Christian religions are expected to continue to increase. In particular, by 2036, more than one in three working-age Canadians (15 to 64 years of age) are expected to be a member of a visible minority group, and the number of Canadians with a non-Christian religion is expected to almost double from 9% in 2011 to between 13% and 16% of the population in 2036. (para 2)

Moreau further reported:

It is also expected that over half the immigrants in Canada will be of Asian origin. South Asian and Chinese populations are expected to continue to be the largest visible minority groups in Canada, while Arab and West Asian populations are expected to grow the fastest over the next two decades. (para 2)

Many events have unfolded since the beginning of this narrative inquiry. Monumental life-changing events such as a world-wide pandemic which forever changed how we live our lives, a reinvigoration of the Black Lives Matter Movement across different nations, by way of the brutal death of George Floyd, an African American at the hands of police officers (McLaughlin, 2020), the Me Too Movement which focusses on the voices and experiences of women who had to deal sexual interference and abuse, alongside a growing recognition that the legacies of our past are living ones which continue to require our attention as teachers, teacher educators, and learners but most significantly, as humans.

This narrative inquiry, I believe, can be seen as part of these much-needed pushes for systematic change and equality. If changes are to occur, then new ways of attending to the lives

of people are needed. The voices of co-participants (and myself) work to disrupt monolithic patterns of knowing based especially on skin colour, privilege, and power. Through interrogating and agitating the patterns in which dominant cultural and institutional stories shape the lives of South Asian girls and women, this dissertation highlights how different institutional worlds such as Western education can feed into structural and systemic forms of discrimination and inequality. The unique experiences shared over the years of this narrative inquiry cast a light on how subversive narratives or what I have deemed, “a hidden curriculum within a curriculum of life” (see Chapter 5) can work against diverse people. These plotlines can advantage certain people’s practices of knowing to the exclusion of others. However, as Anne, Katrina and her mother, Barb, and Deepika and her mother, Vam show through their stories of experience, attending to the artistry of people’s lives can be a beginning step in shaping new stories of community among and within diverse peoples. Through creatively and artfully living their lives, Deepika and Katrina remind me that girls can contribute to our meaning making in rich, knowledgeable ways. Moreover, their girlhood experiences of curriculum making situated within and across their unique worlds point to the need for more inclusive and creative ways of knowing. For instance, female children and youth participation in and with the arts can help empower girls and subsequently, can enrich their lives by taking their views and experiences into consideration all the while helping to amplify their distinct voices. Such educative (Dewey) experiences can also help us to think about how to co-shape inclusive communities that dismantle the rhetorical or surface espousing narratives of valuing diversity to an actual living of such transformative communities in our schools and beyond.

World Building and Shaping How We Live Alongside One Another...

Alongside research friends, through our experiences and stories, I tried to bring into view

the texturized images of our lives. I did so with the hopes of defying only a surface viewing of them. Desiring a deeper engagement, I believed we could read these images while also, interpreting and thinking with them in ethical and pragmatic ways. Diversity as a perspective, when cultivated, can permit us to move past a simple acknowledgement of difference to a true honouring of difference and a recognition of the humanity within each of us. Engaging with other people's stories of history, talent, ability, gender, culture, community, and heritage amidst others, can open spaces for learning to live humanely with another. Acknowledging difference, ought not be a rude pointing out of those traits that make us us, but I believe, instead a true honouring of who we are. That is, an understanding that each of us comes to any given moment with stories of experiences, stories of pain, stories of joy, stories of hope, and stories of wonders. Teacher education programs which allow for such sharing of experiences are needed. Spaces which allow teachers who are currently teaching need to be created so that reflection on practice and pedagogy can be co-constructed with colleagues inside their schools. Families too, need to be invited to be a part of this ongoing process. Children can be invited to share their wisdom and knowledge within their (classroom) communities.

I am drawn close to Clandinin et al. (2006) who propose, "Now we are attempting to attend, in multiperspectival ways, to teachers, children, families, and administrators and the lives they compose and live out in the dynamic interaction of teachers, learners, subject matter, and milieu that is curriculum making" (p. 173). Using Lindemann Nelson (1995)'s understanding of counterstory, Clandinin et al. imagine new possibilities:

Within this complex fluid mix, lives are what become central. Lives, people's experiences, who each of us are, and who we are becoming are central. Questions of person-making and world-making become central concerns in this counterstory we are

composing. By imagining our counterstory and the place of a curriculum of lives within it, we are drawing attention to the importance of staying wakeful to the experiences children and families are living both in- and out-of-schools, to the dreams children hold for their lives, to the dreams families hold for their children's lives, to the gaps, silences, and exclusions shaped in the bumping places children and families experience in schools. The negotiation of a curriculum of lives that stays wakeful in these ways is, then, itself, a kind of living, evolving, shifting counterstory of reform. (p. 173)

This is challenging work and involves looking at our own stories which narrate arrogant perception as well as our experiences in which we are the object of arrogant perception (Lugones, 1987). Through this hard work, we come closer to seeing...hearing...touching our own humanity and the humanity of those—near and far—around us. It is this identification of our common humanity which can direct us from our understandings of who we are now to who we can become. This may be the most important art of all, one which calls upon each one of us to humanely create and live in ways which sustain us, amidst our (dis)similarities, as we craft the artistry of our lives.

Resonating Anew...

I write this heading drawing from what Minh ha (2016) has named “a resonance event” where “the heart links the here, the overthere, and the elsewhere, creating new possibilities not yet, not quite known” (p. 4). This narrative journey has been a resonant event for me and I believe for my research friends. Thinking about how to compose an ending for life-canvases still in the crafting brings forth many feelings. As a work of the heart, as I attempt to find words to

speak of an ending of this dissertation but simultaneously a beginning for other possibilities, I find myself once more turning to the words of Minh-ha (2016) who writes:

Profound dis-ease lies in the inability both to hear all that is there within earshot and to stop hearing what is not there to be heard. To the sound of “Who’s speaking?” that of “Who’s listening?” echoes back. Moving out into the winds of time, it resonates anew in every course of inquiry. When? Where? How? In what tongue and skin, and from which riverbank? (p. 4)

Holding this idea of “moving out into the winds of time” (Minh-ha, 2016, p. 4) close, I asked Katrina and Deepika, from their perspectives, now as teens about to enter their Grade Nine year of school what they thought about their work and experiences in this co-created research. I further asked them if there were any final thoughts they wished to share with readers of this work. And, keeping Minh-ha’s questions of “Who’s speaking?” and “Who’s listening?” (p. 4) foremost in mind, I paid close attention to Deepika and Katrina’s words and found myself learning once more from them.

Katrina shared with me:

You know, how people change as they get older? Their interests and the effects of people in their lives shape them as human beings. Music is still a very important aspect of my life. It may sound cheesy, but, finding yourself is the most important part of growing up. Finding who you are at your core is essential to keep yourself happy and to stay true to yourself and yourself only. Never pretend to be someone you’re not. Embrace your true beauty. All shades are beautiful. (personal communication, August 19, 2020)

Deepika shared with me:

My parents have given me the freedom to formulate my own opinions about the world, a freedom that many other Indian kids lack. I'm more than grateful for this, because what I find unjust may not bother my parents at all. But everyone has different priorities. Which is just as well, because I want to end this by saying that Indian kids are not simply "smart", we're artists, and we're activists, and we're looking at the horizon rather than the immediate road. Just listen to everyone...why hate, or underestimate, when you could look at the world as a cornucopia, with copious amounts of talent, from everywhere, not just select groups? (personal communication, August 24, 2020)

Their words taken together and separately point the ways to “creating new possibilities not yet, not quite known” (Minh-ha, 2016, p. 4) for young women like themselves and diverse others too, wanting to co-create community within heart-full ways.

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Appendix A: Information Letters

Information Letter for Girl Participants

Dear _____,

My name is Jinny Menon and I am a student and researcher at the University of Alberta. I want to learn more about the experiences of South Asian girls in Grades 4, 5, and/or 6 who are attending school in Canada. The title of this study is: *A Multiperspectival Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of South Asian Girls, Mothers, and Teachers Engaging in Curriculum Making In and Out of Schools within Canada.*

I would like to invite you to tell me more about your school and home experiences as you attend school. I would also like to know about your teacher's and mother's experiences as you learn. I will be talking to your teacher separately. I will talk with your mother separately and also have conversations with you and your mom together. I will record some of the conversations. Everything that you share with me *will not* be shared with anyone else unless you give me permission to share.

I will be a visitor in your classroom and will sometimes volunteer there. I will make notes about the conversations, activities, and experiences that happen in the classroom. I will also be visiting with you in other places that you and your mother choose so that we can share our stories of experiences. I will record some of these conversations, and will write notes for myself so I don't forget what I see and hear.

I will always show you what I write and make sure that you give me permission to share my writing with others. Your real name will never appear in any of my writings. As a very important participant in this research, you will be able to help decide what stories of experiences you think should be included in the papers and presentations, and in the dissertation I am writing.

You do not have to talk to me if you don't wish to, or if you don't feel like it. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me them. I will be happy to answer your questions. I am very much looking forward to spending time with you.

Thank you very much!

Jinny Menon
Student/Researcher
PhD candidate
University of Alberta

Information Letter and Invitation for Mother Participants

Study Title:

A Multiperspectival Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of South Asian Girls, Mothers, and Teachers Engaging in Curriculum Making In and Out of Schools within Canada

Dear _____,

My name is Jinny Menon and I am a doctoral student at the University of Alberta. My research study focuses on the experiences of South Asian girls, their mothers, and the girls' teachers as the girls attend school. I would like to work with your daughter and with you. This involves meeting with you and your daughter 8-10 times over the year to hear about and reflect upon your experiences, and your daughter's experiences, as your daughter attends school in Grade 4, 5, or 6 in Canada.

I will be a visitor in your child's classroom. Through notes, I will record conversations, activities, and experiences that occur in the classroom. Over the year, I hope to meet with you and your daughter, and through 8-10 conversations, hear your experiences as a South Asian mother and your daughter's experiences as a South Asian girl learning in Canada. Some of these conversations will be with you and your daughter together and some individually. I will also have conversations with your daughter's teacher separately to hear his/her experiences as a teacher.

My study is entitled: *A Multiperspectival Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of South Asian Girls, Mothers, and Teachers Engaging in Curriculum Making In and Out of Schools within Canada*. Narrative inquiry is the framework I will be using to guide this research. It involves telling stories of your experiences and may involve the sharing of memory artifacts, photography and creative work, and/or the creation of life experience timelines. One-on-one conversations will be held in locations that you and your daughter choose. These one-hour conversations will be audio-recorded and transcribed by me.

Writing based on this research will be used in my dissertation and submitted for publication in journals, and presentations will be made at local, national, and international conferences. What emerges from this research will be shared with you and your daughter throughout our conversations. You will also receive a copy of my dissertation which will include narrative accounts speaking to the experiences you and your daughter have shared, and the experiences shared by your daughter's teacher.

Your privacy is extremely important to me and I will protect it at all times throughout the research. Material collected throughout the research will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality. For instance, all written notes will be locked in a filing cabinet and all electronic data will be password encrypted on my computer. Although, I intend to do the transcription of conversations, in the event I hire a transcriber, he/she will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. Study data, including personal information about you and your daughter, will be securely stored for 5 years after the study is over, and then will be destroyed.

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study. And while there are a few studies about South Asian students or South Asian women, not much research (if any) has been done with South Asian mothers, their daughters, and their teachers within the Canadian context. Please think of this research as an opportunity to engage in the sharing of different stories relating to yours and your daughter's personal, cultural, school, and familial experiences. As a South Asian female and teacher, I am excited about this chance to work alongside you both and hear your stories! Your participation and that of your daughter's in this research will help us to better understand the experiences of South Asian females learning within Canada.

There are no financial costs or payments to you or your daughter for your participation in this study. Participation is voluntary. As well, both you and your daughter are free to choose which questions and topics you wish to respond to (or not) throughout the study. You and/or your daughter have the right to withdraw any time during the study up until June 2017. If you or your daughter withdraws, the data collected from observations, conversations, and other activities will only be used with your permission.

The plan for this study will be reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta and additionally, the school district, school principal, and the classroom teacher.

Thank you for your consideration of this invitation! Your daughter's experiences and yours as a mother are incredibly important in this research. I hope that you and your daughter will accept this invitation to take part in this study, and I very much look forward to meeting you both. If you agree, please sign the attached consent form.

If you need further information about this research and/or possible involvement with the study, please feel free to contact me (see my contact information below) and/or Dr. Jean Clandinin (my research supervisor) at [redacted]. If you have concerns about this study, you may contact the Research Ethics Office, at 492-2615. This office has no direct involvement with this project.

With sincere thanks and appreciation,

Jinny Menon, PhD Candidate

Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (CRTED), University of Alberta

Information Letter and Invitation for Teacher Participants

Study Title:

A Multiperspectival Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of South Asian Girls, Mothers, and Teachers Engaging in Curriculum Making In and Out of Schools within Canada

Dear _____,

My name is Jinny Menon and I am a doctoral student at the University of Alberta. My research study focuses on the experiences of South Asian girls, their mothers, and the girls' teachers as the girls attend school. I would very much like to work with you.

As a Canadian South Asian female, and a teacher, I am interested in learning more about the experiences of upper elementary South Asian girls, their mothers, and the girls' teachers as the girls attend school in Canada. I would like to research alongside South Asian mothers and their daughters to gain insights into the personal, cultural, school, familial, and social narratives shaping their experiences. In this multiperspectival research I would like to inquire as well, into the experiences of the teachers who teach these girls. This involves being a participant observer in your Grade 4, 5, or 6 classroom at different times during the school year. While I intend being present in a research capacity, I am happy to volunteer for various class-based events should the need arise.

My study is entitled: *A Multiperspectival Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of South Asian Girls, Mothers, and Teachers Engaging in Curriculum Making In and Out of Schools within Canada*. Narrative Inquiry is the framework I will be using to help guide this research. It involves telling stories of experiences and may involve the sharing of artifacts, memory artifacts, photography and creative work, and/or the composition of life experience timelines. I would like to meet with you 8-10 times during the year to listen and reflect upon your teaching and schooling experiences. As well, I wish to hear your personal, familial, and cultural stories. Similarly, I would like to meet separately with mothers and their daughters over the year to listen and reflect upon their experiences. Personal conversations will be held in locations of the participants' choosing. These one-hour conversations will be audio-recorded and transcribed by me.

Writing based on this research will be used in my dissertation and submitted for publication in journals, and presentations will be made at local, national, and international conferences. What emerges from this research will be shared with you throughout our conversations. You will also receive a copy of my dissertation which will include narrative accounts speaking to the experiences you as an elementary teacher have shared, and accounts relating to the experiences shared by your student and her mother.

Your privacy is extremely important to me and I will protect it at all times throughout the research. Material collected throughout the research will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality. For instance, all written notes will be locked in a filing cabinet and all electronic data will be password encrypted on my computer. Although, I intend to do the transcription of conversations, in the event I hire a transcriber, he/she will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. Study data, including personal information about you will be securely stored for 5 years after the study is over, and then will be destroyed.

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study. And while there are a few studies about South Asian students or South Asian women, not much research (if any) has been done with South Asian mothers, their daughters, and their teachers within the Canadian context. Please think of this research as an opportunity to engage in the sharing of different stories relating to your experiences as an educator in addition to the personal, cultural, school, and familial experiences which have informed your life. As a South Asian female and teacher, I am excited about this chance to work alongside you and hear your stories! Your participation and that of your student's and her mother, in this research will help us to better understand the experiences of South Asian females learning within Canada.

There are no financial costs or payments to you for your participation in this study. Participation is voluntary. As well, you are free to choose which questions and topics you wish to respond to (or not) throughout the study. You have the right to withdraw at any time during the study up until June 2017. If you choose to withdraw, the data collected from observations, conversations, and other activities will only be used with your permission.

The plan for this study will be reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension, Augustana and Campus Saint Jean Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta and additionally, the school district, school principal, and the classroom teacher.

Thank you for your consideration of this invitation! Your experiences as a teacher are incredibly important in this research. I hope that you will accept this invitation to take part in this study, and I very much look forward to meeting you. If you agree, please sign the attached consent form.

If you need further information about this research and/or possible involvement with the study, please feel free to contact me (see my contact information below) and/or Dr. Jean Clandinin (my research supervisor) at [email address]. If you have concerns about this study, you may contact the Research Ethics Office, at 492-2615. This office has no direct involvement with this project.

With sincere thanks and appreciation,

Jinny Menon, PhD Candidate

Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (CRTED), University of Alberta

Appendix B: Consent and Assent Forms

Assent Form for Girl Participants

My name is _____ . I agree to participate in the research study titled: *A Multiperspectival Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of South Asian Girls, Mothers, and Teachers Engaging in Curriculum Making In and Out of Schools within Canada.* I understand that this research will be carried out by Jinny Menon, a PhD student from the University of Alberta.

I know that Jinny will write about what she sees and hears from our conversations together. I know that she and I will talk about my experiences as a South Asian girl attending school in Canada. I know that Jinny will record our conversations, will write about them, and when our conversations are typed, we will talk about them. I also know that she might use some of my creative writing and art work for her research.

I understand that Jinny will write papers and share with other people what she is learning from our work together. I know that when she writes or talks about me, she will not tell my name or my family's names. I understand that Jinny will listen to my feelings and opinions.

Jinny has talked with me about this research. She has answered my questions. I know that I can stop doing the research at any time and that I don't need to talk if I don't wish to talk. If I change my mind, all I need to do is to let Jinny know.

Name (Please Print)

Signature

Date

Informed Consent Form by Mother for Child Participant

My name is _____ . I give permission for my daughter, _____ to participate in the research study: *A Multiperspectival Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of South Asian Girls, Mothers, and Teachers in Curriculum Making In and Out of Schools within Canada*. I understand that this research will be carried out by Jinny Menon, a PhD student from the University of Alberta.

I have been informed that Jinny Menon will be a participant observer in my child's classroom and that she will write field notes of her participation, and that on 8-10 other occasions, Jinny and my daughter will engage in 30-60 minute audio recorded research conversations, where together, they will share observations, reflections on, and understandings of my child's experiences. During some of these conversations, I will be present. I understand that the three of us (Jinny, I, and my daughter) will negotiate the duration of the conversations, where the conversations occur, and moreover, who will be present during which conversations as the inquiry unfolds. I further understand that some of my child's work may become part of the inquiry. Throughout this research, I know that Jinny, my daughter, and I will discuss what data will be used for the final narrative account and dissertation. I recognize that Jinny will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants.
See: http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID_page=37738.

I am aware that writing based on this inquiry will be submitted for publication in journals and presentations will be made at local, national, and international conferences. I have been informed that my anonymity, as well as the anonymity of others and the school, will be respected. All material collected will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality. Jinny informed me that there will be no financial costs to participating in this research. Further, there will not be any financial compensation for participating in the inquiry. I am also aware there is no risk to participating in this research and that this research can be viewed as an opportunity to better understand the learning experiences of South Asian females in Canada.

My daughter and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and to clarify concerns about this inquiry. I know that my permission for my daughter's participation is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw her anytime from the research up until June 2017. In that event, any data relating to my child that has been collected to that point will only be used upon my consent. I feel comfortable in talking with Jinny Menon about this possibility should it arise. I have been provided with two consent form copies, one to be signed and returned to the researcher, Jinny Menon, and one for me to keep. I know that I can contact Jinny at: [phone number] or her supervisor at: [phone number] if I have any questions/concerns about this study.

Name (Please Print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Informed Consent Form Teacher Participant

My name is _____. I agree to participate in the research study: *A Multiperspectival Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of South Asian Girls, Mothers, and Teachers in Curriculum Making In and Out of Schools within Canada*. I understand that this research will be carried out by Jinny Menon, a PhD student from the University of Alberta.

I have been informed that Jinny Menon will be a participant observer in my Grade 4/5/6 classroom (please circle appropriate grade) and that she will write field notes of her observations and her participation alongside me. I understand that on 8-10 other occasions, Jinny and I will engage in 30-60 minute audio recorded research conversations, where together, we will share observations, reflections on, and understandings of my life experiences and those related to my being an elementary teacher of a South Asian girl attending school in Canada. I understand that some of my work may become part of the inquiry. Throughout this research, I know that Jinny and I will negotiate what data will be used for the final narrative account and dissertation. I recognize that Jinny will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for Protection of Human Research Participants.

See: http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/GFCPOLICYMANUAL/content.cfm?ID_page=37738.

I am aware that writing based on this inquiry will be submitted for publication in journals and presentations will be made at local, national, and international conferences. I have been informed that my anonymity, as well as the anonymity of others and the school, will be respected. I understand all material collected will be safeguarded to ensure my confidentiality. Jinny informed me that there will be no financial costs to participating in this research. Further, there will not be any financial compensation for participating in the inquiry. I am also aware there are no foreseeable risks to participating in this research and that this research can be viewed as an opportunity to better understand the learning experiences of South Asian females in Canada.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and to clarify concerns about this inquiry. I know that my participation is completely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any time without consequences. In that event, any data relating to me that has been collected to that point will only be used upon my consent. I feel comfortable in talking with Jinny about this possibility should it arise. I have been provided with two consent form copies, one to be signed and returned to the researcher, Jinny, and one for me to keep. I know that I can contact Jinny at: [phone number] or her supervisor at: [phone number] if I have any questions/concerns about this study.

Name (Please Print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____