

**PAINTING A PICTURE:
WHY DIVERSE PARENTS CHOOSE CATHOLIC FRENCH IMMERSION FOR THEIR
SCHOOL AGED CHILD**

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By

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DEDICATION

For Bill Halkett.

*Thank you for being my dad
and our children's grandfather.*

You are proof that

family

begins, foremost, in our hearts.

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ABSTRACT

In this narrative inquiry, I examined parents' stories to gain insight into their journey toward selecting a French Immersion Catholic stream of education for their Kindergarten-aged children. As a teacher, I first noticed a pronounced shift in the parents who were choosing Catholic French Immersion for their school-aged children and, then, as I formed close relationships with a diverse range of parents, I became cognizant that many families were deeply rooted in a faith other than that of Catholicism. With my curiosity piqued, I engaged in research to explore what these diverse parents believe Catholic French Immersion schools have to offer them. Utilizing both Joseph Schwab's (1973) notion of curricular commonplaces and Allen's (2007) web of caring as a framework for my research, I demonstrated how important it is that educators invite parent knowledge (Pushor, 2011, 2013) onto the school landscape as they attend to parents' intentions in making particular school choices for their children.

Using a metaphor of painting, and to paint both individual stories and a triptych of stories to capture parents' influences, thoughts, hopes and dreams for their children that led them to Catholic French Immersion, I chose narrative inquiry methodology. I utilized field texts gathered from three sets of parents, including stories, journals, field notes, letters, conversations, and family stories, to paint an intimate understanding of the research puzzle.

In terms of Catholic education, these families value a faith-based school environment but for different reasons. The Nelson family, rooted in Baptist faith, felt it was important that their child be schooled alongside other faithful children and also believed that Catholic schools inherently value the sanctity of each child. The Padrique family, newcomers to Canada, assumed that Catholic education would teach their child important values and that parents in the Catholic system would share parenting philosophies similar to their own. The Larocque family saw that through learning Catholic doctrine in school their children would be provided an opportunity to be exposed to, and to accept or reject, a system of beliefs not taught to their children at home.

In terms of French Immersion, the families understood that their children's ability to speak French would enhance their employment opportunities in the future. Both the Nelsons and the Padriques further viewed French Immersion as a program choice for the more academically inclined. Similarly, the Larocques, whose children have Treaty Status, understood French Immersion as a more challenging program where children become accustomed to working hard. This research will help deepen educators' understanding of parent motivations for choosing this stream of education and more fully attend in their practice to parent intentions and parent knowledge.

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CHAPTER ONE

Painting a Picture Using a Different Medium: The Story of Parent Decisions

Choosing a Subject Matter

When I moved to Saskatoon in 2001, I was a substitute teacher for approximately three years. During this time period, I observed that most of the students who attended Catholic French Immersion programming were from white middle to upper middle class families. This was especially true when I became a Kindergarten teacher in 2003. At this particular school, the children were bussed in from affluent nearby neighborhoods from around the city. Each year, in a class of 20 or so students, one or two children would not fit this description. As years passed, I began to observe that the makeup of students was shifting. More than ever before, the sea of young faces before me was diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, language, and religion. When I moved schools in 2011, to a neighborhood of a different socioeconomic makeup, I found this diversity to be even more pronounced. Some parents came attired in traditional garb, I heard languages that I had never heard before and saw lunches with food I had never seen before. Some of my students and their parents had a tentative grasp of English while others could not yet speak English at all. I saw girls with headscarves, and boys with hair buns. I heard whispers of the word Ramadan or sentences such as, “In my family we believe...”

I found myself in awe of the richness that these diverse families bring to our current “school landscape” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). I wondered how these parents came to choose Catholic

French Immersion programming for their school aged child. I assumed that this was not a decision they made without a great deal of thought. What did they believe our Catholic schools have to offer them, when they are not themselves Catholic? What was appealing to them about the French Immersion program when they are not yet fluent in English, the dominant language spoken in our city and province? What was the journey they took, as parents, which led them to selecting a Catholic French Immersion Kindergarten program for their school aged child? Painting a picture of this parent journey revealed the decision-making process of my research participants and created an image of parent choice regarding school programs that has not yet been unveiled in our current context of increasing provincial immigration.

A Monochromatic Palette: My Lack of Experience with Diversity

I grew up in a small rural town in Northern Ontario during the 1970s where an overwhelming percentage of the town folk were white, English speaking Christians. There were two Asian women, Bessie and Vicki, as well as one Mexican family. I also recall there was a tiny handful of First Nations families in town. Most people worked for the local forestry company or mine and, at the end of the month, likely earned a similar-sized pay cheque. Most of the mothers stayed at home and a few, such as my own, worked in one of the two grocery stores or small department stores. The only group of residents who were considered different was the newly immigrated Portuguese. Most of the parents were not fluent in English and the families were fiercely Catholic. This group was tightly knit because

many had emigrated from the same area of Portugal. Still, in many ways, this cluster was quite similar to other families in our town. The fathers worked for the local mines, and the mothers stayed at home. Their children, many of who were born in Canada, spoke fluent English. Like the majority of residents, they attended one of the local churches and celebrated the same holidays as the rest of the townspeople.

The only time I visited the city was when I was in Grade 8. After a year of fundraising, our teachers took us to Toronto for a school trip. Our class embarked on a twelve-hour bus ride to the city and stayed in a nurses' residence. Toronto was a big city and we were wisely discouraged not to stray from our groups. We visited such places as the Toronto Metro Zoo, the Old Spaghetti Factory restaurant, the CN tower, Ontario Place, and the Science Center. These were all places that were new and different to me. In Toronto, I bought my first record: Billy Joel's *Honesty*. Where I had grown up, the only radio station was the CBC from Thunder Bay Ontario. While these were all rich experiences for a 14-year old who had grown up in a remote community, I now understand that I had experienced "tourist Toronto" and had been sensibly sheltered from the more authentic realities of life in this heavily populated city.

I chose to go to the university that was closest to my hometown. It was almost six hours away. At the time, Lakehead University in Thunder Bay Ontario had students who were very similar to me. It was the 'go-to' university for the small town students of Northwestern Ontario. At the time, the city of

Thunder Bay itself was similar to the small towns, consisting primarily of white middle class people.

When I became a teacher, I moved to a small community very similar to the one in which I had grown up. I continued to live in a bubble where white middle class was the norm until I moved to Saskatoon in 2001. Once I began teaching in the city, I became aware of lower income families, a large First Nations and Métis presence, and Filipino communities.

A Polychromatic Palette: Experiencing Diversity

When Saskatoon started to become more of a hub for immigrant and refugee families, I was thrilled to see the diverse cultures and to hear the different languages. I did, however, find myself in a quandary. I did not know how to relate to people who were outside the norm of my lived experiences. I was concerned that I would say or do something that would make everyone feel uncomfortable. I chose to ignore the differences and to treat diverse students like every other child in my room. My uncertainty as a teacher meant that I was not able to build the close relationships with the parents of immigrant and refugee children in the same way that I had fostered relationships with many of the other parents. In addition, I came to realize that my ignorance meant I was cheating my students, their families, and myself, out of numerous learning opportunities.

In July of 2012, I began working towards my Master's degree in Early Childhood Education with two classes, *Engaging Parents in Teaching and Learning* and *Re/Presenting Families in Schools*. These two classes were instrumental in fueling my desire to write a thesis. First, these graduate classes

invited me to consider the notion of curriculum in a way I had not anticipated. Second, my professor, my fellow students, and the learning opportunities I was privileged to be offered, led to profound self-reflection and a better understanding of who I am as an individual and what kind of teacher I want to be. Third, discussions with classmates and guest speakers provided me with broad-based opportunities I had not had before. I became more comfortable and, combined with the knowledge I was gaining from these first two graduate classes, I immediately set out that fall to build a curriculum in my Kindergarten classroom where all parents were welcomed into our classroom on an equitable playing field. About this time, a question that I had been mulling over for several years was pushed to the forefront of my consciousness, “Why do diverse parents choose Catholic French Immersion for their child?”

Why Paint this Particular Picture? Research Justification

Why do diverse parents, who have little or no English, or who are deeply rooted in another faith, choose Catholic French Immersion programming for their child? Over the last few years, I have heard educators make many assumptions. The truth is, however, we cannot know what is at the heart and soul of the parents’ decision-making processes. This research sought to foreground parent knowledge. Pushor (2010) invited us to accept that parents have a great deal to offer teachers in the education of their child and said, “It is our role as educators to make space in our classroom and schools for all those who accompany them” (p. 7). When parent knowledge is valued, educators are

provided with the ability to understand the child from many different lenses, thus increasing the academic experience and learning opportunities for that child as well as others in the classroom. I wondered what theories we, educators, have that would be affirmed or challenged if the lens was changed to one of parent voice instead of teacher speculation? What could be learned from parents' stories that could help us to better understand our parents and, in turn, help us to teach their children, our students?

Exploring My Parent Knowledge: If Only You Knew Erica the Way I Do

It was a gorgeous March day. The snow, still piled high to the edges of the school window frames, was beginning to melt, offering promise that the cold winter would soon be far behind me. On my way to a parent-teacher interview for Erica, I had no idea that the happiness I was feeling was about to evaporate. I entered the familiar building and waved hello to Marian, the secretary. For the past six years, as one of the only qualified French Immersion teachers in our small rural town, I had spent a great deal of time at Mary May Public School. I enjoyed subbing as it allowed me primarily to be a stay at home mom. My children were the “suns around which I orbit my world” (Alexie, 2007, p. 11), and I could not imagine working full time. Substitute teaching also provided my girls with the opportunity to see me as a career woman who could one day bend the world and make a difference in the lives of others. It was the best of both worlds, and I fully appreciated my good fortune. I knew the time would come when I would take a teaching position, but for now, being a mother was of utmost

importance.

I strolled down the hallway with its brightly decorated bulletins boards towards Erica's Junior Kindergarten classroom. I was excited to hear about Erica's second term in school. Erica loved Junior Kindergarten and on days that I subbed, I would seek her out on the playground and watch her playing with her friends. Inevitably, she would see me and come running, full throttle, and leap into my arms hugging me firmly. "Mommy!" she'd squeal with delight. She would kiss me and then she would promptly wave me off to get back to whatever game she was playing. I would shake my head and wonder how I had managed to create a child who was so perfectly content with life.

Erica was made for school. Unlike the stories I had heard and situations I had witnessed over the years as a substitute teacher, Erica's transition into the educational system was seamless. She exuded confidence. That same fall I had listened to parents describe how difficult it had been for their child to go to school. "She cried and hid behind me," one mom revealed. "Mine was okay until she got to school and then she cried all morning," another mom confided. "Well mine cried every day for the first two weeks," retorted another. There had been none of this anxiety from my gregarious and sweet little girl.

Nowhere was this more evident than at the bus stop on the first morning of school. While her same-aged classmate clung apprehensively to her mom, Erica, by comparison, was running around playing tag with the older kids on our front lawn. She tried to get her classmate to join in. "Wanna

play with us?” she asked. When her little friend refused, Erica went back to playing with her older friends. Dressed in her red jumper with matching tights, she was full of laughter. When the large yellow bus drove up our crescent, she picked up her backpack from the sidewalk and followed her friends to the lineup that had begun to form. I placed her matching beret on her head and kissed her goodbye. Erica’s two wispy auburn ponytails shone in the morning sun. Her eyes were bright and her smile was huge as she turned at the top of the stairs and stood dutifully as I snapped a photo of her. Just then, her younger sister Sierra started to howl, “I wanna go too. Erica, please Mommy.... I can go too?” This was immediately followed by a gut-wrenching cry that startled the bus driver. Without hesitation, Erica ran back down the stairs and took her little sister’s hands in her own. In her gentle nurturing voice she calmly reminded her little sister, “I’ll be back soon, okay CC? I promise. You’ll be okay. I won’t be long.” She hugged Sierra for a few seconds and her sister’s sobbing subsided. The bus driver, whom we knew, called Erica back to the bus. Once again Erica climbed aboard. She found her seat and waved goodbye, her nose pressed against the window.

When the doors closed, Sierra began to cry again. To distract her I suggested, “Let’s go make some cookies!” As I had hoped, she perked right up. “For Erica?” she questioned with delight. “What a great idea! What kind should we make?” I asked her. “Chocolate chip!” she shouted with glee. We got busy with the task of making cookies. That morning, measuring, stirring, pouring and baking cookies with a bubbly three year old helped to diminish the utter sense of loss I was experiencing.

Despite the cautionary warnings from other moms, I was completely unprepared. As I worked hard not to let my feelings bubble over in front of Sierra, I was keenly aware that my firstborn was now beginning a life that was no longer fully centered on our home and family.

I was quite confident that Erica would excel in school. She was wide-eyed and curious. She loved stories, she loved to draw, she had a colorful imagination, and she could even write her name. When Erica's first report card arrived in her backpack that November, I was not worried when her marks were not brilliant. I had sat in the staffroom and frequently overheard teachers talking about the pros and cons of handing out good report card marks too soon. I presumed Mrs. Hawthorne was likely one of those teachers who believed that if she marked Erica too easily there would not be room to show improvement later in the year. When the second report card arrived in March and the results were slightly better, I was reassured that my assumptions were correct. I was sure that by June Erica's report card would reflect just how outstanding she truly was.

I entered the classroom on that promising March day. I was excited for our parent teacher interview. Mrs. Hawthorne had been teaching Junior Kindergarten for a very long time. At the interview she pointed out Erica's strengths: Erica played well with others, and remembered to share and take turns; she enjoyed making crafts; she followed directions well; she was attentive and had excellent classroom manners. "She's a real mother hen too. She can always be counted on to help a child who is feeling left out or sad," Mrs. Hawthorne smiled encouragingly. This was exactly the kind

of child I saw at home too, so I wasn't surprised by her evaluation.

When Mrs. Hawthorne asked if I was thinking about French Immersion for Erica, I knew I would have to weigh my words carefully. Only the highest achieving Junior Kindergarten students were encouraged to enter the French Immersion program. I had often been privy to staffroom conversations as to which children did or did not belong in immersion. "I warned that mom her child did not belong in Immersion – but she was insistent. What's a teacher to do when the parents think they're the experts?" Or, "If only that mom had listened to me! I told her Johnny should be in Immersion. Now the mom is asking for enrichment opportunities!"

I felt that my words needed to be weighed carefully because there were only five French Immersion teachers in our public school and we differed considerably in our beliefs with respect to how a second language should be taught. In addition, due to layoffs at the local mine, many families were being forced to relocate. Consequently, there was talk about triple grading students in the French Immersion program. I did not know what to do. I wanted Erica to be in French, but I also knew that the English stream, which was much larger, had teachers with teaching philosophies similar to mine. Since the English stream was much larger, it would not be immediately affected by the layoffs. I was dreading the decision and the potential fallout it could have. By choosing the English stream I would certainly cause an unpleasant stir among the French Immersion teachers and parents who would likely feel I was deserting them.

In response to Mrs. Hawthorne's question about putting Erica into French Immersion, I swallowed and hesitantly replied, "Well, I'm not sure yet because..." Before I could finish, I was suddenly cut off with Mrs. Hawthorne's large sigh of relief. "That's good Suzanne. That's very good because to put it bluntly, I don't see it." She went on to explain that Erica was not learning at a rate that showed that French Immersion would be a viable option. "You mean she's not doing well in school?" I asked. "She's doing fine but she's not at the upper end; let's put it that way," she smiled. My face must have registered disbelief because Mrs. Hawthorne backtracked and added, "But it's totally up to you, you're French, maybe you can help her."

While I remained calm on the outside, on the inside I was a complete mess. Was she seriously telling me she did not think Erica was smart enough for French Immersion? I was sick inside. I wanted to throw up. I had expected Mrs. Hawthorne to try and convince me to put Erica *into* the immersion program, not the opposite. There was this buzzing in my head which, upon reflection, was probably due to complete shock. I stopped hearing Mrs. Hawthorne and her voice. I do not recall anything else about our meeting. I do not remember leaving the classroom, the school or driving home. A multitude of thoughts flew rapid fire through my mind. Mrs. Hawthorne was wrong! She didn't know my child! How dare she! I can't believe she had the nerve to say that! And finally the most damaging kernel was permitted to take root: What if Mrs. Hawthorne was right?

I was divided. Part of me began to doubt Mrs. Hawthorne's abilities as a teacher and the other

half wrestled with the fact that Mrs. Hawthorne was the expert who had, for many years, successfully streamed students into French Immersion. These were the children I regularly taught from Kindergarten through Grade 8. I did not tell my husband about Mrs. Hawthorne's recommendation. Instead, I chose to bury that conversation deep within my memory bank. In the end, I chose not to put Erica into French Immersion, so it did not really matter, did it? I always said it was due to the possibility of triple grading, but the truth is, Mrs. Hawthorne's assessment significantly swayed my final decision.

Underneath the Paint: My History

That interview, tucked so conveniently away, had significant impact on who I am as a teacher and who Erica became as a child, a teenager, and young adult. Those distant but uneasy memories still weigh me down with both regret and anger – regret that I did not choose French Immersion for Erica and anger, not only towards a misguided “expert” but also towards myself. Intrinsicly, I knew that my little girl should have been in French Immersion. It was very important to me that Erica be bilingual. I did not realize this until much later. Nothing quite prepares you for the stutter that occurs within your orbit, as the realization that you have chosen the wrong path for your child.

To understand *why* I let Mrs. Hawthorne's assessment of my child bear so much weight, an understanding of my journey to that point in time is important. As I mentioned earlier, I grew up in the early 70s, in a rural Ontario mining community. This snow-globe world of roughly 5000 people was so

remote that the nearest city (population 100, 000) was more than five hours away and that is if the roads were not closed due to snow and/or icy winter conditions. There were generally two types of teachers in our rural community: those who taught one or two years before finding a job in a less remote location, or women who were married to miners or forestry workers. I attended a dual stream Catholic School and the principal was a nun who was also in charge of the small convent not far from my school. The vice principal of our French language school was my next-door neighbor, Mme. LaPointe. Other than the local priest, teachers were the most educated individuals with whom I had regular contact. Along with the traditional ‘three Rs,’ my teachers taught me formal lessons about how to become a solid Catholic citizen.

In addition to these qualities, my teachers were the embodiment of hope. They exemplified that, with an education, you did not have to grow up, and work at the mine like your parents did or marry your high school sweetheart and settle for motherhood or a job at one of the local businesses. My teachers helped to shape who I was and who I became. A prime example of this was when my Grade 8 teacher, M. Robichaud, remarked, “*Suzanne, when you get to university you are going to do great!*” I remember thinking, “*Man! He expects me to go to university!*” Quite suddenly that became my goal. Just like that, *Snap*. Why you ask? The answer is twofold: one, it was a good and solid goal; and two, I really valued M. Robichaud’s opinion and I did not want to disappoint him.

My first attempt at university was short lived. I was home by Thanksgiving and for a few years

I struggled with my lowered standards and working for one of the local mines as a secretary in the Engineering Department. Finally, I found my way back onto the path M. Robichaud had mapped out for me a decade before. When I entered Teachers' College at age 27, armed with a B.A. in Psychology earned with great distinction, I believed Teachers' College would teach me how to be the kind of educator I had revered growing up.

Even now, I am surprised by my naïveté. When I graduated, I was of course elated and felt a big sense of accomplishment. However, I also felt slightly alarmed. Did I know what I was doing? Was I ready to teach the minds of the future? I didn't feel like someone with special authority or knowledge in anything. Was I not supposed to know more, to *be* more? Everyone, from fellow teachers, evaluators, staff, parents, and friends seemed to think I was more than ready for this vocation. "You're a natural!" my Grade 1 cooperating teacher told me. "Don't be too hard on yourself. It gets easier!" the Mary May principal said one day when I nervously asked her if she thought I was doing okay. I was quite concerned that I was not going to live up to anyone's expectations, including my own.

My first teaching assignment began in May, as a substitute teacher. I remember that first day clearly. I was going into a Grade 4 class and I was nervous. Future teaching assignments depended on how I handled myself. Could I control the class? Would the children respect me? Would I get all the lesson plans done to the teacher's satisfaction? "I *can* do this," I repeated over and over to myself as I

drove to the school and, once I arrived, I did what teachers before me have knowingly or unknowingly done – I *faked it*. I put on my suit of armor, which consisted of my teacher clothes, my teacher smile and teacher façade. It was sink or swim, and I may have been a novice dog paddler, but I was determined to swim.

Feelings of insecurity are a hallmark of my personality and I was not going to let these emotions overshadow my career. I was treated like an expert by parents, other teachers, and administrators because I was a “good teacher.” I showed up early and stayed late and I genuinely cared about the students I taught. Sometimes I even believed I *was* an expert. The fact that this sentiment was able to flourish within me is directly correlated to the historical structuring of our education system.

The Institution of School: A Protectorate Model

“Educators enter a community with expert knowledge of teaching and learning which they possess over that of parent. It is this knowledge that enables educators to act as protectors within a protectorate” (Pushor, 2001, p. 246). When schools are positioned as superior to parents, parents, by default, become inferior to teachers. Educators wear a “badge of difference” (Memmi, as cited in Pushor, 2001, p. 246). For the teacher, this badge means, “I’m in charge; I have the education; I know how the system works.” Parents are considered “good” when they do not question the system or its decisions. Once the child enters school, the parents become marginalized. “Parents must quickly learn

to release their child and trust that he or she will be well cared for by a perfect stranger” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004, p. 26). For the most part, this structure of education is taken for granted by both parents and teacher because it is the way it has always been (Pushor, 2004, p. 245). Gray (2013), in his work on play and exploration, wrote, “The schools that we see around us are not products of science and logic; they are products of history” (p. 43). He explains that our system of education operates from a top-down model mirroring the organization of the European Church of the Middle Ages and the feudal system of agriculture and land management. Under these highly controlling systems, subjects adhered to the demands of their leaders (p. 54).

For the parent who is a teacher, the system of education can be a thorny predicament. As educators, we must often make impactful decisions pertaining to our students; however, when it comes to our own child, our voices are muzzled. It was not until embarking on my Master’s degree in Education that I began to question the system under which I teach.

Parent Knowledge: A Primary Color

There is a great deal of literature that supports the importance of parents and family in a child’s educational journey (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Moll, Armanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). In 1973, Joseph Schwab, a curricular theorist, identified four curricular commonplaces at play in education: subject matter, learners, teachers, and milieus (p. 502). Subject matter pertains to what is taught in school; learners are the students; and teachers are those who are responsible for designing and

delivering the curriculum. The milieus comprise the inter-related and complex aspects of community, school, and relationships. They also include religion, ethnicity, traditions, beliefs, and family diversity. Schwab stressed that all four commonplaces should share an equal positioning in the curriculum and that neither one should be eclipsed by the other. Parent knowledge is part of Schwab's milieus.

González, Moll and Amanti (as cited in Allen, 2007) use the term "funds of knowledge" to describe the historically collected and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills that parents possess, which can help the teacher understand their child and family's life context. These funds of knowledge are also important to incorporate into classroom curriculum making.

Allen (2007) described a "web of caring" (p. 9) that is created when parents are actively engaged with their child's education both on and off the school landscape (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Henderson and Mapp (2002) and Harris, Andres-Power and Goodall (2009) contend that there is a growing amount of research literature that provides evidence that parent engagement increases student achievement. The co-founder of Head Start, Bronfenbrenner (as cited in Allen, 2007, p. 8), argued that students do better in school when parents and teachers develop a consistent habit of genuine communication. More recently, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (2008) officially documented the importance of parents in their *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Guide*. This *Early Learning Guide* states that quality programs honour the role of parents and that it is critical for educators to collaborate with parents to provide learning opportunities (p. 18).

As both an educator and a parent, I have found that schools ordinarily overlook parent knowledge as a viable form of curriculum making. Knowing what I know now about the importance of parent-knowledge in a child's education, token jobs such as hot lunch helper, library helper, or field trip volunteer only serve to strengthen the hierarchy within the protectorate model of school. I realize that these jobs are important and need to be done; however, these are not the only roles that parents can attend to within our school. Even less enchanting are Meet the Teacher evenings or Three-Way Conferences done in fifteen-minute intervals. Many of these opportunities are designed for individuals who have flexible schedules, and the terminologies that educators use during these encounters can often be unfamiliar to parents. This is especially true for parents who are new to Canada. In his work with immigrant families, Gua (2012) found that while these invitations (to join parent committees, Meet the Teacher Night etc.) are meant to be welcoming and inclusionary, they do not foster equal opportunity among parents. Gua suggests that communications with parents are often insensitive to cultural beliefs and traditions. The study also suggested that because immigrant families may not attend school functions or meetings does not mean that they do not support their child's learning (p. 15).

Looking back to Erica's first day of school and remembering the deep uneasiness I felt, I now fully understand the crux of my emotions: I knew that Erica had begun a journey into a world where my presence would be marginalized and our family would no longer be the sun around which her world

orbited.

Erica blossoms.

“Patience,” said Leo’s mother.

“A watched bloomer doesn’t bloom.”

Leo the Late Bloomer, Kraus (1971)

I cannot go back and change time, but I can tell you about Erica and why, in retrospect, I have grown to regret my decision not to choose French Immersion for her. In her early years, Erica struggled in school. I could tell she was intelligent, but for some reason, this was not transferring to her academic scores. Of her early years in school Erica explained:

I kind of did the bare minimum. I was just happy getting by....Looking back, when I was older, at Kindergarten and other report cards and stuff, I was a “C” student and I thought I was better than that when I was that young. (Personal communication, November 4, 2013)

No matter how hard I worked with her, she struggled. Something that had never occurred to me at the time was that doing very well in school was not a huge priority for Erica. I worked so hard to help her move forward in her schooling only to discover that, in those early years, I was the only one putting in consistent effort! In her Grade 6 year, I took a chance and followed my gut. With her

permission, I enrolled her into an Intensive French program. Things began to immediately change for Erica in a way I had not anticipated.

Those first five or six weeks of the Intensive French program were not only exciting but also exhausting for Erica. She would come home from school and immediately go to bed, waking only to eat supper and then return to sleep for the remainder of the night. I later wondered if her brain was busy carving new pathways because, quite suddenly, when this intense period of exhaustion ended, she flourished academically. I think of the children's book, *Leo the Late Bloomer* (Kraus, 1971). Like Leo's father, who was watching intensely for his son to bloom, I, too, was watching for Erica to bloom. When I stopped waiting, and got on with the business of my own life, my daughter bloomed just as Leo had done. Learning a second language seemed to trigger something in Erica that helped her to learn and retain information much more easily. Without expending any visible effort, she moved from average to excellent. This pattern of little effort with very solid results continued throughout the remainder of grade school and high school. Of this move to Intensive French and the change in her academic ability, Erica said:

I went into Intensive French in September 2005. I wanted to start learning French because I thought it would be a good idea. My mom knew French and was a French teacher so I thought it was important to learn another language. And then I found out that I just kind of blossomed and I just became smarter once I started learning a new language and...I ended up having the

highest average in Grade 7. (Personal communication, November 4, 2013)

It was at this point I knew that keeping Erica out of French Immersion had been a gigantic mistake. I now appreciate that the abilities of many children are not always apparent at an early age. I did not fully comprehend this when Erica was five years old. At the time, educators and administrators suggested that only the most academically inclined students should put their children in French Immersion. Although I knew I could help my child with French, I was also swayed by Mrs. Hawthorne assessment of my daughter

Erica is now 20 years old and a student at the University of Saskatchewan. She is taking courses in French, Spanish, and Linguistics and would like to be an early years teacher — preferably Kindergarten. She has been granted a bursary by *Explore*, a five-week French language program, and will be going to Chicoutimi, Quebec this summer in hopes of upgrading her French language skills. She works part time at the university day care and has spent the last four summers working with children as a caregiver. “Being with kids is the best kind of job,” she explained cheerfully when I asked why she was settling for lower paying summer employment (Personal Communication, April 2015).

Back when Erica was almost five years old I believed that Mrs. Hawthorne had specialized knowledge, and this belief greatly influenced my hopes and dreams for my daughter. I now understand

that I was living out the “protectorate” model of school to which I referred earlier. By heeding the advice provided by Mrs. Hawthorne, I was complicit in a plotline that marginalizes parent knowledge.

Creating a web of caring.

For me, consciously interrupting this cycle began when I undertook my first graduate classes in the summer of 2011. My professor, Debbie Pushor, opened my eyes to the fact that I must extend numerous invitations to parents to share their hopes and dreams for their child with me. By inviting parents into a “web of caring,” (Allen, J. 2007) the education of the whole child, in its broadest sense, takes place. In reality, teachers only have a child in their classroom for a very short period of time, usually ten months. I have come to truly appreciate that parents have a child for a lifetime and discounting their knowledge only serves to weaken my efforts as a teacher.

My invitation to parents to be part of our curriculum is extended on the very first day of school. At this time, families are invited to join in welcoming activities. While enjoying snacks and beverages, they are encouraged to “linger” (Duncan-Cary, 2006) and spend the day with their child. There is never a rush to get the parents, or young family members, out of the room. At the end of that first day, I also send home a letter that requests parents to “tell me about your child.” For example, one mother wrote this year that, “Johnny loves to build” and later on in September I emailed the parents with a short letter and accompanying pictures which demonstrated that I had read and learned from their

letter. “Since your letter talked about how much Johnny loves to build, we have been exploring building tall towers. We have been exploring what makes a tower sturdy!” This is a simple gesture, but it goes a long way with parents. It is laying the foundation for establishing mutual respect and incorporating parent knowledge into our lived curriculum.

I have also chosen to break what Lawrence-Lighthouse (2003) refers to as the “ritualized encounter” of “Meet the Teacher Night” by instead hosting a “Meet the Kindergarten Families Potluck.” This social gathering not only affords parents the opportunity to meet the children and families of our classroom but also encourages a more personal connection between families and myself. My invitations continue throughout the year with “Tell me about your Family” requests, Celebrations of Learning, and more potlucks. During these encounters I also share information about my own life and family. My relationship with parents and their family members is reciprocal. I cannot expect parents to share with me if I am not willing to share with them as well. My ultimate goal is what Mihalicz (2013) described as “a contextualized understanding of each other in which individual and family differences [are] recognized, respected and celebrated” (p. 185). By valuing parent knowledge in my classroom and establishing a genuine relationship with parents, I hope to erase the “badge of difference” to which Pushor (2007) referred.

When I remember the interview with Mrs. Hawthorne, I wonder what would have happened had she “consciously and intentionally chosen to listen instead of tell, to learn instead of teach, and to

follow instead of lead” (Mihalicz, 2013, p. 185). Where would Erica have ended up? Would I have chosen French Immersion despite the philosophical differences in teaching I had with the other French Immersion teachers or would I have chosen the English stream anyway? I will never know because that choice was not offered to me. In revisiting this time in Erica’s schooling I have, however, been afforded a tremendous learning opportunity. It solidifies my determination to shed the badge of difference in favour of a philosophy that invites and honours parent knowledge in our classroom.

An appreciation: Mrs. Hawthorne did not know what she did not know.

Educator JoBeth Allen (2007) said, “The concept of family funds of knowledge has influenced my thinking about connecting schools and homes more than perhaps any other school effort” (p. 42). Like Pushor, Allen challenges educators to create meaningful relationships with parents and to learn about their “funds of knowledge” in order to connect learning on the school landscape with the learning happening off the school landscape, ultimately enhancing a child’s success and achievement in school. There was so much Mrs. Hawthorne did not know about Erica. From the moment she was born, music was the only thing that soothed her when she was upset. Unlike other little girls, she was more interested in the miniature world of Polly Pockets than Barbie or baby dolls. When I listened to her play in her room, I would often be amazed by the rich vocabulary she used in her pretend play. On a chair at the counter, Erica could measure and bake alongside me with ease. Her curiosity was endless,

and she would become mesmerized by documentaries! She was also fascinated, and still is, with Disney characters. She would memorize songs and entire scenes of movies. Erica loved to read from an early age and I would often find her in her room retelling the stories from memory to her younger sister. When she was five, Erica began creating and illustrating her own stories, rich in language and skillfully drawn:

I would draw the pictures and you would write the story about what was going on. I remember that! I would tell you what to write. There would be a picture of me, Tinker Bell and Wendy and they would be hanging out at the Mermaid lagoon.... Then I remember there was an Easter egg one I did in Grade 1 and how I found the Easter Bunny... I liked those books. (Recorded Communication, November 2013)

Parents “want the teacher to consider the unique struggles and strengths of their child and respond accordingly” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004, p. 27). Mrs. Hawthorne did not know my child the way I knew her. The question then becomes, “How could Mrs. Hawthorne have woven a ‘web of caring’ that considered Erica’s unique struggles and strengths, so she could see the Erica I saw?” The truth is that Mrs. Hawthorne did not purposefully set out to deny Erica or any other child she taught. We all simply existed in a time and place where parent knowledge was not yet widely accepted as being part of our education system.

A new picture: Re-imagining my interview with Mrs. Hawthorne.

Knowing what I know now, let us go back to that damaging interview on the gorgeous March day and to the sentence, “That’s good, Suzanne, because frankly I don’t see it.” Here is how I envision the conversation being replayed, given what I understand now about the important place of parent knowledge in the schooling of children:

Me: Mrs. Hawthorne, you are a wonderful caring teacher and I respect your experience. You have so accurately described Erica as a caring, compassionate, and attentive child but there is so much more that I would like to share with you about my daughter

Mrs. H: I am sure there is Suzanne. What is it you think I should know?

Me: She is the little girl who doesn’t want to be the “star” or the one who pleases the teacher by answering all the questions. She prefers to shine when no one is looking.

Mrs. H: Tell me about that....

Me: If you could hear her conversations when she’s alone in her room you would be amazed by her vocabulary and the worlds she travels to.

Mrs. H: I am sure she has great vocabulary, Suzanne. Are there things that you have collected at home that you could bring in to share with me?

Me: I sure do! Did you know she creates and illustrates stories at home? She takes hours to draw each picture. They are actually really good considering she is only five. I would love to bring them to school and share them with you.

Mrs. H: Thank you. I look forward to seeing the special pictures she is drawing at home and the stories she is dictating to you. Without the time constraints with playtime, recess, and lunch, it sounds like she engages in her play and learning differently.

Me: Exactly! At home she just sits there and draws until she is satisfied. Then I have to write down exactly what she says under each page. She has the complete story mapped out with a beginning, middle, and end.

Mrs. H: I'd love to see one of her books! Maybe I could even show one to the class if she gives me permission?

Me: What a wonderful idea! I will ask her. She might actually really enjoy that.

A stronger foundation: Spun from parent knowledge.

These are tentative beginnings in creating a web of caring, a web that supports the teacher's knowledge, the parent's knowledge and family knowledge. It enables each child to thrive, reaching his or her full potential, and permits a vision of the "whole child" from a variety of angles (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2004, p. 27). In a re-imagined scenario such as the one I present here, it is quite possible

that, in the back of her mind, Mrs. Hawthorne still considers that Erica may not be an ideal candidate for French Immersion. However, Mrs. Hawthorne pushes this narrow view of Erica aside, because she now sees Erica from many different vantage points. With a better understanding of what my hopes and dreams are for my child, Mrs. Hawthorne stands alongside me as together we make a decision about the future of Erica's schooling.

Parent Stories: The Chosen Medium

To paint the story of parent influences, thoughts, hopes and dreams for their child that led them on the journey to Catholic French Immersion School, I chose narrative inquiry methodology. As Allen (2007) stated, "Of all the elaborate ways we as educators have devised to 'get parents involved,' we may have overlooked one of the most important: sitting down together and sharing a story" (p. 22). Narrative inquiry research methodology is by its very nature hermeneutic (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 521) as it relies on my interpretations of parents' stories. However, the insights sought could not be achieved by using any other research method. Ciuffetelli, Parker and McQuirter Scott (2010) referred to this qualitative research method as a "move away from the positivist realm...interested in deep understanding rather than predictions or control" (p. 408). Narrative inquiry is about inquiring in depth ways into stories as a form of research. The research looked for common threads in the stories that could be woven together to create a new picture. Narrative inquiry has an inherent duality. Story is both the phenomenon and the method (Clandinin & Connelly, as cited in Murray, 2011, p. 20), both

what is being studied and the means through which it is being studied. It is a qualitative method of research that draws upon field texts, including stories, journals, field notes, letters, conversations, family stories, photographs and other useful artifacts, combined with life experience, to address a research question. The result of such a field text gathering process was to paint an intimate understanding of the research puzzle.

The Principles of Design

Noted philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer, John Dewey (1952), expressed that each experience an individual has will in some way change that individual (p. 27). He referred to this as the “continuity of experience” (p. 27). This philosophy is especially significant to the narrative inquiry method of research as narrative inquiry is justified in three distinct manners. These include the realm of the personal, the practical, and the social (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Personal justification.

I was curious about the reasons that non-Catholic, non-French speaking parents have for choosing Catholic French Immersion for their child. As a young Anglophone child, I was enrolled in a Francophone Kindergarten program. I was one of the only non-French speaking children. I wondered where my parents found the courage and fortitude to believe that I would succeed. The fact that I thrived in this program would cause most people to assume that my children are bilingual, like me.

They would be wrong. Since I did not choose French Immersion for Erica, I did not feel comfortable choosing this path for Sierra. I feel strongly that I made the wrong decision for my girls. Perhaps this is another reason why understanding this research question is so important to me.

With each passing year I found myself increasingly curious about the English as Additional Language (EAL) students and non-Catholic students in my classroom. I wondered why they are here, not because I think they do not belong, but because I understood how complicated choosing a second language program can be. In addition, I imagined that choosing a Catholic school, if you were non-Catholic and solidly rooted in a different faith, would be a choice taken with a great deal of thought. How did parents arrive at the decision? What had they considered? What had been important to them? By learning the story of each participant's journey toward Catholic French Immersion, I came to understand and gain valuable insight into this complex question.

Practical justification.

I believed that what I learned from this research has directly impacted how I – and other educators – will design and teach curriculum. By deepening educators' understanding of parents, and their journey towards Catholic French Immersion, teachers will better comprehend the lives of students and parents. In doing so, we are better positioned to create what Pushor (2011, 2013) refers to as a “curriculum of parents.” Such a curriculum invites parents and educators to work side by side to create

curriculum for children. Throughout this process, a curriculum of parents places the same value upon parent and teacher knowledge. It is a curriculum that fosters mutual respect and acceptance between teachers and parents.

Social justification.

Someone asked me, “Does it really matter *why* these kids are coming to you? You’ve got them, just teach them.” Ignoring this question, after learning so much in my graduate classes, was no longer possible. I knew that it was important to understand the stories that brought my students to our classroom. I knew that, in order to do this, I must understand the parents, as well as their hopes and dreams for their children. Parents were eager to work in partnership with me and to share their stories. A great deal of literature supports the benefits of creating such a partnership (Gaitan-Delgada, as cited in Allen, 2007, p. ix) because it helps us to become better partners. The knowledge parents have about their children is much different than that of the teacher, but “this knowledge can significantly inform the children’s schooling experiences” (Pushor, 2010, p. 8). Teachers work hard to give out advice, write and send home newsletters, and get parents to come to three-way conferences. We do not, on the whole, make this same effort to include parent knowledge in our curriculum. By including parent knowledge, parents are provided with a meaningful place and rightful voice in their children’s schooling.

As noted earlier, parents are a vital part of what Schwab (1973) referred to as the milieus, one of the four essential curricular commonplaces. A web of caring that invites parent knowledge is an essential element of these milieus. It ensures that parents do not have to hide behind the teacher's preconceived notions of family, culture, or religion. Instead, it offers educators, parents, and children the opportunity to live, learn, and teach authentically as equitable partners in their child's schooling. Miller Marsh (2008) stated that it is "our personal responsibility to accept and legitimize the wide range of family...that are represented in our classrooms" (p. 118). The story of *why* diverse parents made this choice shed new light upon an unstudied aspect of Catholic French Immersion.

Since Saskatchewan has become an immigration hub, the composition of students within our Division has changed. This is also true of French Immersion Catholic schools that traditionally schooled white middle class students. In this work, the term diverse families is meant to represent families and their children who differ in race, ethnicity, language, and religion from the previous norm.

Dimensions of Narrative Inquiry

Drawing on Schwab's curricular commonplaces, Clandinin & Connelly (2000) developed the narrative inquiry commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place. Clandinin & Connelly are keenly aware that good research text explores each dimension simultaneously.

Temporality.

Temporality refers to the fact that events are always in transition. Carr (as cited in Clandinin & Huber, 2010) stated that “we are composing and constantly revising our autobiographies as we go along” (p. 3). As such, narrative inquirers pay close attention to their own and their participants’ perspectives as to how they are placed in the world in time (Clandinin & Huber, 2010) – their storied past, their storied present, and their imagined future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Sociality.

Clandinin & Connelly (2000) refer to sociality as the inward space of the personal and the outward space of the social. The personal space includes an individual’s thoughts, feelings, and reflections while the outward space of the social is the interaction between and among individuals in social spaces. Sociality refers to the “conditions under which people’s experiences and events are unfolding” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 436). Equally important to each person’s experience is the social relationship between the researcher and the participant, because the researcher is a central part of the inquiry process.

Place.

Place is the third narrative inquiry commonplace and refers to the fact that all events take place in a particular place and that those places affect the story being told (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

These three “check points” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), which define the dimensions of the inquiry space, cannot be ignored to the exclusion or over-indulgence of the other.

The Narrative Inquiry Phenomenon

As noted earlier, my research puzzle centered on the choice parents in diverse families are making to register their children in Catholic French Immersion programming. Although the research puzzle was known, the “what will I learn” aspect of my research was unknown. This piece of the research puzzle was progressively realized as field text was analyzed, coded, and turned into research text. The narrative view shifted as I moved in and out of the past and the present, and walked alongside my participants and reflected upon what I was learning. Narrative inquiry is a process of analyzing field text to discover interrelated strands of knowledge so that an entire picture can be painted. Through this process, I was better able to understand the research puzzle and uncover new insight into the research question.

Analysis and Interpretation

I foresaw that the parent decision-making underlying the choice of Catholic French Immersion would be complex and multifaceted. Narrative inquiry methodology proved to be instrumental in understanding this research question. It enabled me to foreground the different shades of each parent story and blend them together in a way that shed rich light on the research question. By moving “backwards and forward in time, inward and outward” (Clandinin et. al., 2007, p. 28) in direction, and

located in places, the research question was deeply and thoroughly explored. As a researcher, I was looking for central themes derived from nuggets within the participants' stories. I took these nuggets and explored them through further conversation with participants and by analysis and reanalysis of my field notes. In doing so, I was able to uncover an enhanced and richer understanding of the research question.

Research Design: Participants and the Selection Process

Since narrative inquiry is relational research, I selected parents with whom I had a relationship to be participants in this research study. Since “the researcher’s relationship with participants in narrative inquiry is concerned with intimacy” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 78), I approached parents of students I had taught in Kindergarten. While narrative inquiry is not intended to be representative with its small sample size, I believed the parents I chose all had diverse stories to tell. The Brown family is the first parent pair I selected. Peter is a Baptist minister whose family is obviously firmly rooted in non-Catholic faith. The second family selected was the Padrique family. Jerome and Rosemary are a Filipino family whose first language is Tagalog. The third family was the Larocque family. This is a First Nations family whose children have Treaty Status. As I had anticipated, these parents all had very different stories as to why they chose Catholic French Immersion and their narratives provided me with a richer and broader answer to the research puzzle.

Since I had a pre-established relationship with these three families, trust was already established. Over a period of seven months I met the parent pairs in face-to-face recorded conversations either in their homes, a coffee shop, my school, or in my own home. I met with the Brown parent pair twice for several hours and the Padriques and Larcoques three times. Parents were all given pseudonyms so their identity remains anonymous.

Ethical issues.

Narrative inquiry is unique because of its very personal and relational nature. While ethical review and approval will be sought from the University of Saskatchewan, I adopted an attitude of empathic listening and refrained from judgment and disbelief when attending to participants' stories. Noddings (1986) stated that this "fidelity to relationships" needs to be negotiated between the participants and narrative inquirers at all phases of the inquiry (as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It was vital that each story, or retelling of each story, be presented in a fashion that participants felt reflected them accurately. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) refer to this as the *participant signature*, the global representation encapsulating how the participant wants to be seen by the audience (p. 148). To this end, draft research text was shared with parents before publication, which afforded them the opportunity to read and respond, prior to its being shared more broadly. I took into consideration the participants' thoughts and responses before I finalized the research text.

Field text collection.

Narrative inquiry is a method that requires the researcher to enter the lives of each participant.

As such, the ongoing experience is temporal and is not isolated in time and space. The researcher takes up research in the middle of his/her own life and the lives of the participants. Consequently, at each meeting, the lives of each person will have changed through the very experience of living life itself.

Field text collection is done by recording and transcribing the story of the participants' experiences, composing field notes, drafting and sharing interim research and then, finally, composing research text.

It is also done through the collection of artifacts such as photographs, letters, diaries, and emails as well as other items the participants feel it is important to share.

Field Notes: Learning About the Subject Matter

With narrative inquiry, field text collection is done partially through the recording of field notes. As a researcher I took detailed notes during the interview process and the notes were reflected upon afterwards. These analytic and interpretive notes recorded my thoughts, feelings, hopes, and anxieties as a researcher. The field notes “provide[d] the detail that fill[ed] in [my] memory outline” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 104) and helped me to find the common colours or hues so I could paint my response to the research puzzle.

The information learned from these conversations, when painted onto each canvas, and then examined as a whole, provided me with the necessary details and information which enabled me to

make meaningful connections and understandings of the research puzzle. Since my reflection was based on recollection, it was critical that the notes kept in the field contained rich details of thoughts, actions, feelings, and wonders. New perspectives arose and appeared from the retelling of, and reexamination of, the field notes. This process helped me to grow in my understanding of the puzzle.

Research Text

Research text mirrored the complexity of people's lives and experiences, but also invited the discovery of information that can only be found through the narrative inquiry process. It made room for the "bumping up of participants' lives...with dominant cultural and institutional narratives.... without harming participants' lives" (Clandinin et al, 2007, p. 142). The research text afforded the discovery of connections that in some instances eluded participants. It also permitted the researcher to access her personal knowledge acquired through lived experiences or through literature.

A Picture Yet to Be Painted

My goal in this narrative inquiry research was to foreground parent knowledge, an aspect of the milieu that has often been overshadowed by the other curricular commonplaces of learner, teacher, and subject matter. The goal of my research was to unearth the story of why diverse parents chose Catholic French Immersion for their school-age child. This was a picture that has not yet, to my knowledge, been painted. As stated earlier, Saskatoon has become a hub for immigrant and refugee

families in the past several years. Understanding the journey that brought these parents and their children to our classroom was a critical component of the colour palette.

It is late in the afternoon of registration day. All the parents have registered and already left the building. Accompanied by the Office Coordinator, Regina, a woman walks into my classroom, a huge smile on her face. The chocolate velvet skin of her face glistens. I observe she has symmetrical scars on each side of her mouth. She wears a long dress with a distinct ethnic pattern. She speaks to the boy who is at her side in a foreign language and proceeds to push him forward. Her son looks very apprehensive and fixes his eyes on the classroom floor. Mom pushes him again and then say, "This Yuma. Yuma no wanna talk, but he good boy."

We are singing 'Yes Lord, I Believe' in class. This is a song that we often sing in our school masses. When the song is done, Ingrid says, "You know when we talk about saints? Well in my religion we don't have saints; we have spirits. My mom says that saints and spirits are kind of the same."

These are but two scenarios that have piqued my curiosity over the years. They have been instrumental in driving my research. How do parents' decisions to enroll their child in Catholic French

Immersion programming help to satisfy, in some manner, the hopes and dreams they have for their child? Educators speculate about parents' reasons and it is quite likely that some of these speculations will prove to be correct. However, we cannot truly understand parents' decision-making processes without engaging in purposeful dialogue. In doing so, I am including a vital component of the milieu, a curricular commonplace that is all too often overshadowed or overlooked by educators as they make curriculum for children in schools.

Over the last few years my experiences in graduate classes, creating new practices within our classroom itself, and my own research, brought into focus one sharp reality. It was that overlooking parent knowledge in the education of a child was the equivalent to an artist choosing to eliminate the use of a primary colour in his or her work. It was important that parent knowledge be represented so that the resulting picture was clearer, more representative, and therefore more authentic.

Hypotheses, conjecture, and educated guesses on the part of teacher created a picture of parent reasoning, but bringing to the forefront parent knowledge enabled me to construct a rich and authentic understanding of the research question. Answering this research question directly impacts how my – and others – students are taught. In creating a relationship that values and respects parent knowledge, the research foregrounds “an understanding that the role we play in a child’s schooling facilitates just a small part of a child’s teaching and learning experiences given the broader role parents play in their child’s education as they facilitate wide-ranging and multiple teaching and learning experiences over

their child's lifetime "(Pushor, 2013, p. 9). With each passing year, as I have matured as a teacher and watched my own children grow, this statement becomes more and more significant to me. If we think of a child's education as a canvas, schooling takes up only a small fraction of that canvas. Including parent knowledge about school choice and in school curriculum enables us to fill the space on the canvas that would be left empty, thus creating a more impactful, richer, and more authentic rendering.

CHAPTER TWO

The First Painting in the Triptych

The Nelson Family

It is a grey, windy, spring day as I search for parking on the busy street outside the Nelsons' condominium. I am excited to have my first conversation with Peter and Grace Nelson. As I make my way to the condo, I am conscious of the fact that I am both nervous and excited. I buzz their number and I am let into the building. Peter and his boys open the door to their three-bedroom condo. Grace is still at work and Violet is at school. I feel welcomed into their busy loving home.

Peter is 45 years old, medium height, and has blue eyes. Peter is dressed casually in slacks and a plaid shirt. He is often at home with the children during the day, a luxury of his chosen profession. Peter is a former criminal attorney from Calgary who changed career paths to become a Baptist Minister. Besides his undergrad degree in Political Science, he holds a law degree from the University of Alberta and a degree in Theological Studies from Camrose Lutheran Bible Institute. He is currently working on a second theology degree. Peter's father, now deceased, was a Lutheran Minister. Peter's mother still lives in Calgary. Like many mothers of the time, his mother stayed at home to raise the children. In later years, she became a secretary for the City of Calgary. Peter's younger brother and

his family live in the same condo complex, next door to Peter and Grace. His brother is a Lutheran Minister.

About fifteen minutes after my arrival, Grace walks through the door. She is 37 years old, is petite and her straight brown hair is cut in a medium length bob. She is a Child Psychiatrist at the Royal University Hospital. Grace holds degrees in Philosophy and Medicine from the University of Saskatchewan. Bubbly and warm, Grace grew up in the small town of Middle Lake, Saskatchewan. Her father was the principal of her elementary school. Her university-educated mother stayed at home with the children and, like Peter's mom, later returned to work as a secretary. Grace has two younger brothers. One brother works as a researcher for the University of Saskatchewan in the College of Agriculture, and her other brother works for the Government of Manitoba, informing their anti-smoking legislation.

Grace and Peter have three children. Violet is the eldest child. She is currently in Grade 2 at École St. Paul. Violet is an outgoing girl with big blue eyes and wavy brown hair. As my student in kindergarten, I found Violet to be very curious, compassionate, and animated. Although she had a fall birthday and was one of the younger children in kindergarten, Violet was both mature and eager for academic learning. Violet has taken violin lessons for four years and plays community soccer.

William, their second child, was extremely excited to have me in their home during our first conversation. This inquisitive and highly verbal three-year old filled the time before his mother's

arrival with excited chatter. I soon learned that William had a fascination with trains. I made a mental note of this, thinking perhaps we would study trains in kindergarten should he become my student.

George, a toddler of 14 months was, like many children this age, a busy child. He was much less interested in the stranger who appeared on their doorstep and his escapades required both parents to be alert while we were talking at the kitchen table.

Choosing the Nelson Family

The Catholic choice.

I selected this family for my narrative inquiry into parents' choice of Catholic French Immersion programming for numerous reasons. The Nelson family is warm and friendly, and from the beginning of Violet's kindergarten experience, Peter and Grace were keenly engaged in Violet's schooling. They were one of the first families to visit our classroom when I invited parents to come and tell the children and me about their family. They spoke comfortably to the Kindergarten students. Grace had the children listen to their heartbeats with her stethoscope, and Peter sang songs with us while playing his guitar. They were eager to share and teach us about their lives. Quite often, Peter or Grace would drop Violet off in the mornings or pick her up after school. This afforded me the opportunity to have many friendly conversations with both parents. Talking with both Grace and Peter was both comfortable and informative.

The Nelsons are firmly rooted in their faith, and during religious instruction, Violet was very outspoken and well informed about the topics of discussion. The more I got to know Peter, Grace and Violet, the more I wondered why this very faith-filled, non-Catholic family, made the choice to send Violet to our school. It was a story that I suspected would provide profound knowledge toward my research question.

The French Immersion choice.

There is a vast amount of research literature that points to the benefits of learning another language. A pamphlet put out by Dufferin Catholic Schools (n.d. p.2) speaks to these advantages stating that learning a second language generally improves first language skills, makes it easier to learn other languages as well as provides students with greater educational and career opportunities later in life.

The choice to send Violet to a French Immersion school turned out to be an easy decision for these parents. Both are well educated, have travelled extensively, and understand that French Immersion will benefit Violet by providing her with more opportunities later in life. Being monolingual has proven to be limiting to both of them in their career choices.

Why the Choice of French Immersion Programming

Peter's Story

Peter was exposed to some French in Grades 4, 5 and 6 followed by a big gap without French instruction until Grade 10. At that time, Peter was considering a life in politics or the government. He realized French would be beneficial to his career objective. In university, Peter majored in Political Science and took two courses in French to fulfill his Honours degree. Although he could read and write French reasonably well, Peter stated that his oral skills were lacking, as he did not have an opportunity to speak French on a regular basis.

After completing his undergraduate degree, Peter attended law school. The year before he graduated, he wrote the Foreign Service examination in hopes that he could work in an embassy overseas. The exams were in English, and after scoring in the top two percent; Peter proceeded onto the interview portion of the hiring process.

This interview proved to be a telephone call that took place, without notice, one Saturday morning at 6:00 a.m. (8:00 a.m. in Eastern Canada). Awaking from sleep, Peter answered the phone. Because the woman caller was speaking in French, Peter initially believed the woman was a crank caller. However, as he listened to her, he came to the realization that this was his interview for the Foreign Service.

So I struggled through for about 15 minutes and the person finally said, "Do you

want to continue? There is another 45 minutes!” ...I said, “Well, I’m doing my best.” She said to me, “You don’t speak French!” “No, I never claimed that I did.” But that’s what I needed, to go on...some fluency in French, which I never claimed [to have]. She could tell I wasn’t fluent.... But I thought: That’s what separated me from the possibility of doing something really interesting. At that point, I would have loved to work in Ottawa for the Federal Government or even be sent overseas or whatever.... Yah, it was a door that was closed unnecessarily. So that was a long way of saying that I don’t want something like that to have to happen to Violet. (Recorded Conversation, May 2, 2014)

This ill-fated phone call put an end to Peter’s hopes and dreams for himself in regard to a career with the Foreign Service. Given this experience, it is not surprising that he would like his own children to be fluent in a second language and to provide them with the possible opportunity to live out their own hopes and dreams.

Grace’s Story

Grace studied Core French throughout elementary school and took French in secondary school and university as well. Despite these extensive classes, she described herself as unable to speak French. “I feel like an idiot for only speaking one language. Really. For all the education I have!” (Conversation, May 2, 2014). She felt strongly that, despite their numerous degrees, this is a failing in

Peter's and her education:

It's a real deficit in your education. I mean both Peter and I – for crying out loud – Peter is working on degree number four, five? We just really enjoy learning about the world and ...we know lots of things [about] sports, music, history... But to not know another language is a huge deficit in education to me personally...We love school and we love education, just to not be able to speak [another language] when so many other people in the world can. (Recorded Conversation, May 2, 2014)

Grace explained her belief that immersing oneself in a language is the only way to become fluent. “The only way to really do language is by immersion because we’ve tried. Both of us have tried in other ways to learn it, and we just can’t” (Recorded Conversation, May 2, 2014).

Grace spoke quite animatedly with respect to her inability to converse in French. When Peter mentioned cab drivers in Europe who can speak four or five languages, Grace ardently pronounced that their inability to do the same is “pathetic”. Of their decision to put Violet in French Immersion, she acknowledged that all of these factors - Peter's experience with the Foreign Service, their attempts to learn French, their level of education, as well as their extensive travelling, made them “prone to pick French Immersion” for Violet.

Parents' Hopes and Dreams for their Child: The Interplay of Cultural Capital

Lareau (2000) spoke about the ways in which parents can transmit educational advantages to their children. She stated that social class does affect schooling because it “shapes the resources which parents have at their disposal to comply with teachers’ requests for assistance” (p. 2). Social class, therefore, plays a substantial role in a child’s academic success.

Parenting as a lifestyle choice.

One of the most significant decisions the Nelsons made is how they would like to raise their children. Spending time with them is important. Peter’s profession gives him the ability to be an active and engaged parent. He stated his awareness that being a lawyer would not have afforded him the time he desired with his family:

We have...made some lifestyle choices along the way that would allow us to maximize our time with our kids. So that work is an important part of our lives but not all consuming.

[With] the law that I was practicing in Calgary, you were a lawyer for 60-70 hours a week and thinking for many hours beyond that. It took most people away from their families for

too long. (Recorded Conversation, June 10, 2014)

He explained that many of the men he worked with lost their families to divorce because their careers became more important.

They were married to law basically...and from [my] position [being] four or five years into the practice ...[it is] 15 years before [you] start relaxing and having a better lifestyle...There was a 10 year period in there where I probably couldn't be any good to anybody except my law practice. It was all consuming in not a very positive way.

(Recorded Conversation May 2, 2014)

Peter gave up the big career and the accompanying salary to be a more hands-on parent.

He sometimes thinks about the lawyers he once knew and expressed the following realization:

You know we think about that now and again.... If we had done what so many people do, which is sell yourself to your job for a certain amount of years. I have friends who are considering retiring as they [get closer] to 50. I'm five years from that. That's not something we [can] do. (Recorded Conversation, June 10, 2014)

Peter's words are said without resentment. He seems content with their decision and the path they have chosen. The couple's desire to be more present in the daily life of their children gives their children many benefits that other children do not have. Peter and Grace are often at school events, attend field trips, and are engaged on the school landscape. The "long arm of the job" (Lynds, as quoted in Lareau 2000, p. 2) does not prevent them from participating in Violet's life at school, to the same extent as parents who have less flexible careers.

Their lifestyle choice also makes it easier for them ensure Violet completes her homework.

Grace explains that it is the parents' responsibility to ensure that homework is completed. "I feel so bad for the other kids in her class who don't have their homework done because it's not their fault! It's their parents' fault" (Personal Conversation, June 10, 2014).

They are also able to monitor Violet's progress in her schooling better than perhaps parents who do not have the same balance. "I think we follow up more closely in French though [than we would] in the English system. If she did fall behind for whatever reason you could catch up right away. Whereas there's maybe the idea – whether it's right or wrong – [it would be more difficult] to catch up [in French Immersion] (Personal Communication, June 12, 2014).

For the Nelsons, the work life blend permits them to spend more time with their children and also affords them the opportunity to be engaged both on and off the school landscape in Violet's schooling.

Concerted cultivation: I hope my kids grow up to be....

All parents have hopes and dreams for their children. From their unique position in life and the lessons they have learned along the way, the Nelsons have also made some decisions about the choices they would like for their children. Peter said:

We haven't talked about career too much. More like life possibilities. You know what there is out there...maybe you'd like to do this.... But a lot of people are trying to channel

their kids. I have friends who've done that from a pretty early point and sometimes it can be positive if they're going in the right direction, but other times it can be [not a positive thing]. (Recorded Conversation, June 10, 2014)

Grace extends their thinking about hopes and dreams further, "As long as our kids find their vocation and their calling. We don't know what that is for them yet, but I don't think we have prescribed ideas about what we'd like them to do" (Recorded Conversation (June 10, 2014).

Because Peter and Grace have hopes and dreams for their children and want to ensure that their children find their calling or their vocation in life, they are not leaving things to chance. By choosing Catholic French Immersion programming for Violet, Peter and Grace have begun the process of "concerted cultivation" (Lareau, 2011, p. 2) that is, making a conscious choice about their children's schooling in a manner that provides them with a greater choice of life opportunities. In making this specific programming choice, the Nelsons believe that they have opened doors for their children that might have otherwise been closed had they only been able to speak one language.

Maintaining a pleasurable pace of life.

Most families these days cannot afford to have one parent stay home with the kids. This is not about "lifestyle" or "values." This is an economic struggle highlighting yet again the social costs arising from decades of stagnating or declining wages and growing income

inequality. (Dionne, 2012, para.1)

The above quotation is evidence of the financial struggles facing many families in North America. In order to make ends meet, both parents are required to be employed outside the home. Unlike so many families in North America, the Nelsons are in a position of privilege that makes their lifestyle choices easier to achieve. Although Peter has given up a prestigious and well-paying career, Grace is a doctor, and her earnings are enough that any money Peter would earn as a lawyer would not be necessary income. If Grace did not have such a well-paying profession, a stay-at-home parent would not be as manageable.

Organization of daily life.

“Brian please. Mom is away for work this week. You need to get your boots on. You have to get to hockey practice in 45 minutes. Cara has ballet practice in 20 minutes. Please Brian, don’t argue with me – not tonight. I’m going crazy here, Buddy!” (Field Notes, September 2014).

This father’s sense of panic over the night’s schedule are a common reflection of the life of middle class parents, where, more than ever before, the children’s schedule set the pace of life for the family (Lareau, 2011). Ritzer (as cited in Lareau, 2011, p. 246) refers to this as the “McDonaldization of society.” While parents and children do spend quality time together, the

time is organized and predictable, instead of spontaneous. In many of the middle class families that I teach, especially if there are older siblings, the regimen of daily activities is often the source of parental woes.

Unlike many middle class families in North America, the Nelsons have made a conscious decision to stay away from activities that require heavy time commitments. Although they are very involved in their church, and their children attend Sunday school the younger children are not involved in any other extra-curricular activities. Grace explains, “[We] invest a lot of time in their friends and family” (Personal communication, October 2014). Besides ensuring their children have many opportunities to play with friends and relatives, the family enjoys travelling whenever possible. They also enjoy frequent, but unstructured activities, such as biking and swimming together. Presently, the only structured activity for Violet is weekly violin lessons that she has taken for four years.

Although the Nelsons have, for the time being, put aside the idea of formally structured activities outside of school, they seem to recognize these activities cannot be fully avoided. They understand that, besides becoming more proficient in the activity itself, there are also hidden advantages in structured activities. For instance, by playing and practicing the violin, Violet is also learning the habit of scheduling practice time into her schedule. They also feel that it teaches Violet the skill of persistence and builds her self-confidence.

Still, the Nelsons have decided not to choose the same path for their younger boys and begin formal music lessons at an early age as they did with Violet, “We are freeing ourselves from structured activities until our children are seven” (Personal Communication, October 22, 2014). They want to enjoy as much stress-free time with their family as possible, likely foreseeing that as the children get older they will want to be involved in numerous activities.

Why the Choice of Catholic Education

A Belief That We Are All Part of One Whole

Peter's story.

Part of what led the Nelsons to select a Catholic School for Violet has to do with their open-mindedness and acceptance of different faiths. As an example, when I ask Peter to explain to me the different beliefs of the Baptist and Roman Catholic religions he automatically shifts to what makes both religions *the same*. He explains that both profess faith in Jesus Christ, God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Recorded Conversation, May 2, 2014). Holding two degrees in theology, Peter speaks to the fact that “the differences are getting more minor [and] they have to do with language and ethnicity of history more than anything else” (Recorded Conversation, May, 2, 2014).

Of his career change, Peter stated that his choice to become a Baptist Minister was gradual. It appears to have been an evolution of sorts:

I grew out of [being a lawyer] gradually. There were some happy circumstances and some unhappy ones. There was the product of timing, but I think probably I was always called to do more like what I'm doing now and I was just avoiding that call being in law. (Recorded Conversation, June 10, 2014)

Even before becoming a Minister, Peter appreciated that the various Christian religions are all essentially preaching the same doctrine:

When I moved...here it was because I was intending to become engaged to Grace. I took a job in Saskatoon in the legal field. Grace was living in Regina at the time. On the weekends we'd go to church with her grandma who was then in her late 80s because we thought, *'Well we have to see her on Sunday anyway so why not just go together?'* And I started to go to the First Baptist Church, and I realized it wasn't a whole lot different than my Lutheran Church. The pastor was really good there and...it was a really nice community. (Recorded Conversation, May 2, 2014)

Appreciating the similarities of all Christian faiths is central to who Peter is as an individual. Not only was he open to attending a church of a different faith, he soon realized that the teachings were similar to what he heard in his own Lutheran church. His acceptance of different faiths and his ability to focus on similarities rather than differences were evident in his life even before he became a pastor.

Grace's story.

A willingness to see the similarities of different religions is readily apparent in Grace. As a child, Grace attended a public school in Middle Lake, Saskatchewan in which the students were predominantly Catholic. As a result, once a month all students would attend Catholic mass. Her own parents were Baptist, but they instilled in Grace that Catholicism was "just a variation on a theme...and not anything that is radically different" (Recorded Conversation, May, 2014). Although she could not take communion at mass, the message she was hearing at the service was "something that was very

familiar and very true from what I was hearing in my own church” (Recorded Conversation, May, 2014).

Her exposure to Catholicism continued after secondary school. Grace’s first year of post-secondary education was at a Benedictine monastery. She enthusiastically describes her first year as her “best year of university” (Recorded conversation, May 2, 2014). She has extensive knowledge of Catholicism and has a positive outlook on her faith. At the same time, she expressed belief that people of different faiths need to concentrate less on their differences and more on their similarities:

The monks would come in their robes to class and they were very open...they’d share their faith and invite us to come to vesper with them. I’d go and chant with them...It was just the most positive year of university that I had and really [I came to see] that...in North America the church is becoming less and less relevant. As wealth comes, people are self-sufficient, and they don’t need God... It used to be you kind of assumed that everyone you knew was going to church and now it’s just a shock if anyone you know *is* going to church. We have to stick together, right? We can’t afford to be, ‘*Oh they’re different because they pray to Mary, or they’re different because they do this.*’ ...We just take the good things from all the traditions and certain things that we like. There’s no perfect church on earth. Every church is going to have things that you like or you don’t like.” (Recorded Conversation, May, 2014)

Grace is a faithful person who, like Peter, prefers to concentrate on the parallels within Christian religions. In her mind, the differences are too minor to worry about, especially when religion, as an institution in North America, is at risk of falling by the wayside. This prevailing attitude also predisposes Grace to selecting Catholic education for her children.

Faith as an Expression of Self

For a family that has religion at its core, Violet's ability to share her love of Jesus is significant. The Nelsons embrace the fact that a Catholic school openly talks about praying and celebrates all Christian holidays. Grace explains, "We don't have a lot of kids in our church [and] we wanted her to be around kids with faith who are allowed to express faith. We didn't want faith to be something that had to be "hush hush" (Recorded Conversation, May 2014).

The capability to fully express her love of Jesus Christ, to celebrate the holidays as they were meant to be celebrated, and to share faith with classmates, other students and staff is of tremendous importance to Grace and Peter.

Tolerance in Catholic Education: God is Visible in the Face of Every Child

I would have expected more from a Catholic school," says Fania very sadly, as if she has identified the ultimate sin (Lawrence Lightfoot, 2002, p. 157).

The above quote refers to a mother/teacher who was deeply saddened when teachers at her son's Catholic school were, in her eyes, not doing everything they could to help her son. This quote serves as

a reminder that Catholic schools are held, in some people's opinion, to a higher standard when it comes to how it treats its pupils.

I wondered if Grace and Peter had an opinion on this sense of a higher standard. I posed to them the following question, “Do you think that Catholic schools are more tolerant of people who are diverse or different? Do they handle situations differently than non-Catholic schools?” (Recorded Conversation, May 2014).

Grace’s perspective.

Grace has a very strong perspective on Catholic education. As a child psychiatrist who deals with troubled youth on a daily basis, Grace has a specialized knowledge about what, in her professional opinion, is best for a child. In the following, Grace expresses her belief that Catholic schools are much more likely to support the needs of a child:

In my experience as a professional...I see a lot of children who are autistic or have major behavior problems. I really feel that the Catholic system sees each individual as a person, and they inherently value the life of that person.

Whereas in the public system it tends to be.... that the sanctity of their life isn't held in the same regards. So they [the children] become more of a problem...

[When] I am dealing with kids who are aggressive – who have major problems

– one of first pieces of advice [to the parents] is to send them to the Catholic system..... The Catholic system does better just treating people like they're people and managing behavior problems better...as a whole, as a general rule.

(Recorded Conversation, June 10, 2014)

This perception that Catholic schools value the sanctity of life is one that is reinforced in the school division's vision and belief statement, part of which reads, "We see God in all things, especially our students, who are created by God and loved by God. We teach children how they can encounter God in everyday life" (Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, n.d.). Grace's professional opinion and her extensive experience as a child psychiatrist are evidence that Greater Saskatoon Catholic schools are putting into practice their mission statement of seeing God in all its children.

Peter's perspective.

Peter, as a pastor, interpreted tolerance within the Catholic realm of school with a different approach:

I wondered about the word tolerance. The way it's used in Canadian society generally? A lot of people have a high value for being tolerant of other people, but what they really mean is that they [other people] can do whatever they want...They don't really care about them so that kind of tolerance is more like

indifference....My experience growing up in public schools [was] that it looks like tolerance ...but it's actually they don't really care what's happening in the person's life so they'll deal with them as a problem....Whereas in the Catholic system, because of the Christian values, you'll tolerate someone for whatever they've got going on in their lives, for whatever differences there are, but it's a tolerance that's based on love and understanding rather than indifference. So I see it as more of an active tolerance rather than that lesser kind of tolerance that a lot of Canadians believe is tolerance but is actually closer to indifference.

(Recorded Conversation, June 10, 2014)

Peter and Grace bring to the forefront some important considerations for their choice of Catholic education. Having previous experience teaching in a public school, I believe I understand Grace and Peter's perspectives. While I enjoyed my experience in public education, I found it very difficult to ignore my own Catholic background. Personally, I found it difficult to explain to children why something is right or wrong when I could not speak about Jesus. Now that I am teaching in a Catholic school, the moral compass instilled in me as a child through the teachings of Christ guides me in the majority of my actions with students.

Menawa's story.

I transferred to a Kindergarten position at École St Paul. I was cleaning and sorting my classroom one hot and sticky July day when I laid out my freshly cleaned toys on a beach towel to dry in the hot sun. The playground was empty.

When I opened the door a few hours later I found five children playing happily with the toys. The toys were now covered in dirt. They looked up at me apprehensively. Instead of getting angry, I smiled and sat down to talk with them. I learned that they lived across the street. I went over to their house and introduced myself to their mother, Victoria. Using what little English she knew, she explained that they were new to the neighbourhood. Later in the week, I met an older daughter who told me that they had moved here from Halifax and that they had come to Canada nine years previously from the Sudan as refugees.

One of the children, Menawa, registered in my Kindergarten class that September. I knew he understood English because he had eagerly followed my conversations with his older siblings in July and August, yet, in school he was quiet. He often arrived to school unprepared, wearing two left boots of different colours; an ill-fitting jacket, and quite often he did not have snacks or a lunch. Menawa would run across the street to visit his mom and little sister at recess. Learning the routines of Kindergarten proved to be difficult for him. Teaching him to take care of his belongings became a time consuming and frustrating process. Teaching him to listen in circle time was also challenging. Menawa

did not know how to write his name, nor did he seem interested in learning. At times, I found myself gritting my teeth. I kept telling Menawa, “You’ll get it one day, Sweetie” and I prayed I was right and he would in fact adjust to life at school and our expectations.

Children began to make comments towards Menawa that I found hurtful. Even though Menawa appeared not to understand, I was careful to always have the child who spoke hurtfully apologize to Menawa. Other teachers and some parents commented that “there is something wrong with him.” I brought in a specialist on English as an Additional Language (EAL) and implemented some of the visual cues she recommended.

As time went by, Menawa would occasionally say something in French or in English. These words were said on *his* terms. Asking Menawa anything typically resulted in a shrug of his shoulders. Over the months, however, I observed that Menawa was smiling more. Instead of playing alongside his classmates, he began to play with other children. He began to wander over to the art table when I was working with children on special art projects. He would watch intently and eventually, after many months of observation, he agreed to sit down and work on a watercolor painting. When he saw the final result of his efforts, his smile was huge and his eyes were bright. It was evident that he was filled with pride. Wanting to share his success, I asked if I could hug him. He jumped into my arms and squeezed me tightly. I stroked his head and whispered, “I am so proud of you Menawa, so proud!”

Menawa blooms.

We were at circle time going over our letter sounds. It was late January. Menawa, as usual, was invited to try saying a letter sound. I expected him to say nothing, but this particular day, instead of just smiling at me, he said the correct sound. The other children gasped in excitement! When I invited him say to another letter sound, he agreed. Menawa went through all 26-letter sounds in French without an error. On the next school day, I tried out numbers one to 10 and then to 20. Menawa knew them all! Over the next few weeks, Menawa was speaking freely in fluent English and using the French sentences or words we had learned.

As I consider this breakthrough, I do not believe I would have done or treated Menawa any differently had I been in a public school. I applied patience and love, and hoped that I was reaching him. I do know, however, that because I was in a Catholic School, I was given the ability to bring Jesus into our classroom. That autumn and winter our religion lessons concentrated more than usual on acceptance and tolerance. We talked a great deal about doing what Jesus would want us to do. We talked about the fact that not all flowers bloom at the same time and that late blooming flowers are not any less beautiful. We discussed how late blooming children are as smart as early blooming children. We talked about how difficult it must be to be a late bloomer. What would Jesus want us to do to help a late bloomer? Would Jesus want us to be kind? Would he want us to be their friend?

Peter warmed my heart during our conversation when he said:

You could tell that Violet’s attitude towards them [late bloomers] came somewhat from herself and [from] what you were telling her should be the way to treat them – which I think that is an education about why you would love someone else. It’s tolerance rather than just ‘anything goes.’ (Recorded Conversation, May 2, 2014)

The day Menawa first bloomed; Violet turned to him with a huge smile and pronounced, “Menawa! I think you just bloomed! I think you even bloomed right past me!” (January 2012). She said this without envy. Violet was proud of Menawa. From that day on, Menawa continued to make progress at school.

Peter’s words made me relive, almost two years later, the gift I had given my students that year, an understanding that God wants us to love one another and be kind to one another so that we can bloom and be the person God intended us to be. This is the very reason why Catholic education exists so that the gospel values can be spread.

Why the Choice of This Particular School

The Importance of Community

The Nelsons and I talked about the different options they considered for Violet. They had considered a Christian School but ruled it out because it does not have French Immersion and it was also too far from home. It is readily apparent that a sense of community is fundamental to the Nelsons,

both individually and collectively as a family. Grace explained:

We live in a condo because there is a built in community of people here... We work together. We live together, and it is important to be part of our community and do things in a community. It didn't make sense to bus our kids to an entirely different...zone. We wanted to be part of where we were, where we live. (Recorded Conversation, May 2, 2014)

With their sense of the importance of community, the Nelsons decided to visit their designated French Immersion school.

Information night.

Kindergarten Information Night provides parents with an opportunity to see the school, visit the Kindergarten classroom, and meet the prospective Kindergarten teacher, Principal, and Vice Principal. Formal presentations deliver information to parents about Catholic education and the benefits of a French Immersion program. Parents are given the opportunity to ask questions. For many parents it is their first glimpse of what to expect in a Catholic French Immersion school.

The principal and the Kindergarten teacher.

Grace decided to attend the Information Night held at École St. Paul. The educators she met were able to convey to her the importance of Christ's teachings in our school. By the end of the

evening, Grace realized that, although French Immersion and religious education had begun the night on equal footing, “the faith thing [had] become more important” (Recorded Conversation, May 2, 2014).

It’s a small school: School size.

École St. Paul’s small size, and the number of students who attended the school, also appealed to Grace. “I grew up in a small town and I really didn’t want to send Violet to a school that was jammed to the hills where she would not be known. I really feel that’s part of how kids succeed. If it’s too big it doesn’t work” (Recorded Conversation, May 2, 2014).

Grace’s desire for, and opinion that, small schools are better is supported by Ford & Klonsky (1994) who pointed to the fact that studies show that small schools are better at teaching children. This has a great deal to do with the fact that they tend to be easier to manage and more cost effective. What I have noticed, coming from a larger school of 500+ students, is that I have come to know all the children within the school as well as many of the parents. When students have particular discipline issues the staff is quick to follow the plan of action set out by the administration team. In addition, my administration team does not appear to be overwhelmed, putting out fires because there are, with fewer bodies, fewer fires. Most children know all the other children in the school and the sense of community is much greater than what I have previously experienced. Children do not get lost in the

shuffle because we know our children.

Non-Catholics in Catholic School: A New Story

When I was growing up in my small Catholic elementary school in the early 1980s, it was unheard of that non-Catholics would attend. It was so rare that I only recall one non-Catholic student being admitted to our Separate school in my K-8 experience. This event took place in the spring of Grade 7. Helen had been expelled from the public school. Since there was only one public and one Catholic elementary school in our community, Helen's parents had no other choice but to appeal to the Catholic school for her admission. Helen did not speak French and was placed in the English stream. Our Grade 7 teacher, M. LeRoue, explained that Sister Mildred, the principal, had made a special exception for Helen. We were told that there had been talks with the priest before Helen was formally accepted into our school.

Catholic Schools in Canada: A Brief History

In 1867, at the time of Confederation, in an effort to accommodate the minority English-speaking Protestants of Quebec and the majority French-speaking Catholics of Upper Canada, the Fathers of Confederation guaranteed a Separate school system for Catholic education (McKay, 2002, pp. 33-34). This arrangement worked very well at the time because, for the most part, Canadians were either Protestant or Catholic.

With time, as Canada became a more diverse melting pot, the simplicity of this duality of

religious affiliation was altered, and for many reasons, religious education was no longer legally permitted in Public schools. Consequently, Separate schools found themselves in the unique position of being the only publically funded institution that maintained religion at its core. As a direct result, Separate schools became one of the only viable options for parents who wanted their children to have a religious-based education.

What is a Separate school?

Separate schools provide students with an education based on Christian values. Although they are evangelical, they are also ecumenical. Catholic schools teach Catholic doctrine but they also encourage dialogue with other religions and discover common ground with other Christian communities and other religions. McKay (2002) pointed to the fact that Second Vatican Council's (1964) policy on ecumenism has a great deal to do with allowing non-Catholics into their schools (p.50):

The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only. However, many Christian communions present themselves to men as the true inheritors of Jesus Christ; all indeed profess to be followers of the Lord but differ in mind and go their different ways, as if Christ Himself were divided. [1] Such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel

to every creature. (DECREE ON ECUMENISM UNITATIS REDINTEGRATIO

Proclaimed By His Holiness, Pope Paul VI on November 21, 1964, Introduction 1.)

This Decree on Ecumenism left the door wide open for non-Catholics to attend Separate schools.

However, it was up to individual school divisions to decide how they wished to interpret this new doctrine.

During my first conversation with the Nelsons, Grace expressed her delight that, although they were of Baptist faith, they were being welcomed into the school:

First of all, I was impressed that we were invited to attend this school because my best friend down in Regina really wanted a Catholic French Immersion school for her girls, for similar reasons [as ours]. They were told they couldn't come because they were not Catholic.

(Recorded conversation, May 2, 2014)

This statement truly surprised me. I had assumed, quite naively, that all Catholic school divisions in Canada now embraced and welcomed all families who wished to send their children to their schools. Researching this issue, I learned that not all school divisions in Canada register non-Catholics. In Ontario, only two school boards permit non-Catholics to be enrolled in their schools without restrictions (CTV Kitchener, 2013). For example, in some school divisions, non-Catholic students must have a parent who has been baptized. In some school divisions, officials acknowledge that admission to their schools are made on a case-by case basis while in other schools, non-baptized children are

excluded from religious celebrations (CTV Kitchener, 2013, September).

In the case of Regina Catholic, Ken Loendorf of the Saskatchewan Catholic Society, states that Regina Catholic traditionally had some of “the tightest admission policies” to their Catholic schools (Personal conversation, October 17, 2014). This changed, however, in 2011 when all eight Catholic school boards across the province of Saskatchewan formally agreed to permit non-Catholic students to attend their schools. The only condition for admittance is that parents must sign a declaration. Part of this document was written as follows:

Parents not of the Catholic faith who desire a Catholic education for their children must respect the teachings of the Catholic Church and agree to abide by the policies and procedures of Catholic school divisions relating to religious instruction, and the permeation of faith within all aspects of the student's school experience. However, Catholic school divisions reserve the right to deny admission to a non-Catholic student who will not abide by the policies of the Board relating to religious instruction, religious activities and other such programs specific to our schools.

www.scsba.ca/pdfs/admittance.pdf

For non-Catholic parents who are seeking publically funded religious education, a compromise must be made. In order to receive a faith-based education, their child must learn the Catholic doctrine.

Peter says their daughter Violet would “be hard pressed to say what the difference is between anything Catholic and anything Baptist. It all has to do with God and Jesus and love. At this point

that's fine 'cause why would you complicate that?" (Recorded Conversation, May 2, 2014). The Nelsons who, by their very nature, are ecumenical do not have an issue with Violet learning Catholic doctrine.

Catholic Education: Opportunity

The Nelsons' choice of Catholic education delivers a distinct perspective as to why families, who are deeply committed to their non-Catholic faith, might choose Catholic education for their school- aged child. "We don't have a lot of kids in our church, [and] we wanted her to be around kids with faith who are allowed to express faith" Grace explained (Recorded Conversation, May 2014). For the Nelsons, their decision has to do with giving their child the opportunity to worship with other children.

Having the opportunity for Violet to express her faith on the school landscape was also central in the Nelsons' choice of Catholic education. They expressed the following motives, "We didn't want faith to be something that had to be hush-hush" and "we don't want our daughter to think that going to church or worshipping God is just something that our family does and it's weird" (Recorded Conversation, May 2014). Because I was Violet's Kindergarten teacher, and experienced how God was central to her being, I believe that keeping her personal beliefs in check would have been difficult for her to accomplish. For example, I recall Violet acting out the Christmas story during playtime with detailed familiarity. I also imagine that her inability to share beliefs with peers or teachers would have

been not only challenging but also confusing for Violet.

The opportunity to acknowledge Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter were also central to the Nelson's choice of Catholic education. Grace explained that, "If you do public education now you don't get any religion really...you can't even say [the word] Christmas...anymore." She goes on to explain that, "Religion is part of education and knowledge in the world. And though the public system says they're kind of open to everything, they don't do anything in terms of the spiritual part of [celebrations]" (Recorded Conversation, May 2014). Celebrating the birth of Jesus, the resurrection of Christ and other traditional celebrations of religious holidays, things that are not part of the mandate of a public system, are significant reasons for the Nelsons' choice of Catholic education.

In addition to worshipping with other children, an ability for Violet to share her faith with others, as well as traditional celebration of holidays, fundamental to the Nelsons' views are the fact that, in their personal and professional opinions, Catholic education is able to attend to the needs of the children in a manner that best suits their individualities. Peter details his belief that Catholic schools are more tolerant than non-Catholic schools. He stated, "My experience growing up in public schools [was] that it looks like tolerance ...but it's actually they don't really care what's happening in the person's life so they'll deal with them as a problem." By comparison he says, "In the Catholic system, because of the Christian values, you'll tolerate someone for whatever they've got going on in their lives, for whatever differences there are, but it's a tolerance that's based on love and understanding

rather than indifference (Personal Conversation, June 10, 2014). As Peter is a non-Catholic pastor, and father whose child is currently enrolled in the Catholic system, his observation is significant in understanding the value that Catholic education can bring to the lives of the children we teach.

Grace, who also grew up Protestant and practices Child Psychiatry in the city, expresses a similar view. Because Grace works closely with families who have children who are on spectrums of exceptionality, such as the autism spectrum, she possesses practical knowledge of how schools respond to her patients' needs. She confidently expresses that she has found Catholic schools to value the sanctity of life more than non-Catholic schools. She says, "I really feel that the Catholic system sees each individual as a person and they inherently value the life of that person". She later adds, "The Catholic system does better just treating people like they're people and managing behavior problems better...as a whole, as a general rule" (Recorded Conversation, June 10, 2014). These are profoundly significant statements because, as a child psychiatrist, Grace has experienced that Catholic schools are, overall, more effective in managing her patients in a way supports their individual needs and differences.

The family brings specialized and practical knowledge of the different opportunities that Catholic education can provide its students. Not only can Catholic schools provide opportunities for Violet, the Nelsons are steadfast in their belief that Catholic education is an opportunity for all children to be seen as individuals created by God. Consequently, the programming and interactions between

students and staff will reflect this unique perspective.

French Immersion: Opportunity

Capturing the Image of the Research Questions

As I finish painting the final brush strokes on this canvas I step back and consider the various images before me. I see Peter as a young man who has political ambitions and, because of his inability to speak French fluently, was denied the opportunity to work in the Foreign Service. I imagine how upsetting it was to have his hopes and dreams come to an end. Peter described the opportunities he wants for Violet, “We want her to....see what’s out there and participate....And if she wants to do something not be held back because she didn’t get an opportunity to prepare for it” (Recorded Conversation, May 2, 2014). It is not surprising that Peter would want French Immersion for his child as he feels that he himself had been held back.

Next, I see Grace as a student in various stages of her life learning the academics of French yet failing to master the spoken language. I see how frustrated she is, while travelling through Europe with her husband, and later Violet, and feeling the large void in her own education. As she explained, “To not know another language is a huge deficit in education to me personally because to only be able to think, have ideas and converse in one language!” (Recorded Conversation, May 2, 2014). Grace views her inability to speak French as a personal loss. Like her husband, it is not unexpected that she is predisposed to choosing French Immersion programming for Violet.

As I tilt the canvas to one side, then the other, a dominant image of Catholic education is brought to the forefront of the painting. The Nelsons who are firmly rooted in their Baptist faith wanted Violet to feel open to express her faith with other children. They wanted a school where holidays were centered on the traditional Christian teachings. Yet, as I reposition the painting on the wall, and take a few more steps back, the word *ecumenism* becomes superimposed over the words Catholic Education. By choosing the Catholic stream of education for Violet, the Nelsons are active examples of ecumenism. They are not concerned with the differences between religions but rather with what unites our faiths. Peter explained to me, “The differences are getting more minor. They have to do with language and ethnicity of history more than anything else.” In describing what Violet is learning at school, Peter’s open-mindedness and ecumenical nature are obvious. “I don’t think she perceives it as even being any different [from being Baptist]. It is just part of one whole, which...is good to me,” he stated (Recorded Conversation, May 2, 2014). Like her husband, Grace has very liberal views with respect to the differences between religions. From an early age she was taught by her Baptist parents that, “We *all* believe in Jesus and [Catholicism is] just a variation on the theme.” As a review the painting that stands before me, I am conscious that the Nelsons’ story has a great deal to teach us as Catholic French Immersion educators. The Nelsons’ canvas is truly inspirational and moving. It has created, for me, vibrant new shades of colour that will shape the spirit of our classroom and a great deal of my curriculum and my pedagogy. It has strengthened my own understanding of

what it means to live in God's light and to have the honour of teaching children. It has also reinforced and underscored my knowledge that creating genuine partnerships with parents in the schooling of their children can meaningfully shape the lives of all those involved.

CHAPTER THREE

The Second Painting in the Triptych

The Padrique Family

It is a sunny but cold Sunday afternoon as I pull my car into the parking lot of École St. Paul School. Although it is the month of May, the frozen ground still shows signs of winter. I open the door to the classroom and immediately begin preparing the selection of herbal teas and snacks I have brought with me. Frances and Jerome will be arriving soon. I am most anxious about this conversation, as I know very little about this Filipino family. We first met at our September potluck where the families from our Kindergarten class were invited to come and meet each other. Our next encounter was during the school's Three-Way conferences where, for fifteen minutes, we discussed how Angelo was settling into our classroom. I taught their son Angelo until February when I took an education leave to begin working on my master's thesis.

When I heard a car pull up outside the school, I looked out our classroom window and observed Jerome emerge from the family vehicle. When I opened the exterior door of the school, I was greeted by his huge smile. We hugged each other and I thanked him for coming. Then I saw Frances who, to my surprise, was visibly pregnant! I gasped with delight and I hugged and congratulated her. As we made our way into the classroom and settled in, we discussed the baby's due date, possible names for the unborn child, and Angelo's excitement at having a baby brother or sister.

Jerome stands about 5'7" and has dark brown hair and eyes. He is 30 years old and he works as a nurse in the dialysis ward at St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon. Jerome was recruited from the Philippines by a health-care delegation from Saskatchewan in the winter of 2007. The recruitment was part of the Saskatchewan Party government's promise to bring 800 nurses into the province over four years (Bernhardt, 2008). Besides leaving his wife Frances, he left behind his first-born son, Angelo, who was only two weeks old at the time. He described the situation as follows:

It's very hard because I was praying that I would leave [after the birth of my son] because the first batch of nurses left for August...and [Frances] was due September.... I was praying that I wouldn't leave on the first batch. If they said you have to leave, you have to leave. If they gave you your visa, you have to leave.... But I'm very happy I was there when he was born. (Recorded Conversation, May 5, 2014)

Jerome is the eldest of five children. His father is an electrical engineer and his mother is a nurse. Both Jerome and his mother have experience teaching post-secondary nursing courses in the Philippines. His three sisters are all nurses and his youngest brother is currently in Grade 10. Jerome stated that he always knew he would go to university: "I think that's the culture back at home because once you finish high school [you go to university]. And the parents back at home help. They give everything for their kids to finish university" (Recorded Communication, May 25, 2014). In hopes of becoming a doctor, he majored in biology, but since his parents were paying for his education and that

of his younger siblings, he later decided it would be more cost effective if he became a nurse. His mother gave him the advice, “If you really want to be a doctor, you can start off with nursing, and eventually go do medicine” (Recorded Conversation, November 15th, 2014). In the Philippines, it is not uncommon for the eldest in the family to forego or alter their plans to help fund siblings’ education (Beltran Chan, 1999). Jerome’s professional dreams have since changed, and he now hopes to become a nurse practitioner (Recorded Conversation, November 15th, 2014).

Frances is 30 years old. She is a small woman with long dark hair. She has brown eyes and an easy smile. She followed her husband to Saskatoon, from their homeland, thirteen months after his arrival. Back home, she studied to be a nurse but, like most nurses in the Philippines, she had to go through the long process of volunteerism before she was eligible for employment. This is the norm for Filipino nurses. In their study on the motivations of immigrant nurses, Salai, Nelson, Hawthorne, Muntaner and McGillis Hall (2014) stated that “trained nurses in the Philippines often have to volunteer their services (without compensation, and in some hospitals, even pay a fee for the privilege) before they are employed as nurses” (p. 481). Frances did not move beyond the volunteering phase of her career, and to contribute towards their income, she worked part time as a real estate agent.

As was the case in of Jerome’s family, Frances noted there was an expectation she would attend university, “My father always wanted his kids going to university” (Recorded Communication, May 25, 2014). Frances’s father farms in the Philippines but also has a degree in criminology. Her mother

stayed home to raise their children and has not worked outside the home. Frances is the second eldest of five children. Her older brother resides in Japan where he is a factory worker. Her younger sister is currently enrolled in a maritime program that Jerome explains is much like hotel-management. Successful completion of this program will mean that her sister will be able to work on a cruise ship in a restaurant or as a housekeeper. Her youngest brother is still in high school.

Angelo, at the time of this writing, is Jerome and Frances's only child. He is five years old and attends École St. Paul. Angelo is a very happy little boy who lights up whenever he feels proud of his accomplishments. Angelo's first language is Tagalog. Prior to coming to French Immersion Kindergarten, he spent one year in an English pre-school. Like most additional language learners of his age, Angelo has learned the social language of English more quickly than the academic aspect of the language. Demie (2013) stated that, on average, it takes anywhere from five to seven years to become academically proficient in a second language (p. 59). Jerome described his son as someone who "loves people" and who, even as a very young child, would "wave hello" and say "good morning" to the people in their building, on the street, or in the mall (Recorded Conversation, May 25, 2014).

Frances's mother currently resides with the family. She is on an extended visit from the Philippines. Frances's mother is planning on remaining in the country for as long as two years to help her daughter with the new baby. Frances explained, "She's very excited about the baby. My father [back in the Philippines] told my mother, '*You don't have to leave her now. You have to stay with her.*'"

Because – I’m going to have a baby!” (Recorded Conversation, May 5, 2015).

Further, Jerome and Frances send money back to Frances’s family in the Philippines, which is another reason for her mother’s commitment to helping the couple.

Frances: It’s a big help as well to my family....Because I can support my other siblings. So my brother who--

Jerome: --He’s third on the line ...He wants to go back to school so [Frances’s father] told Frances if she can help [her brother] to go back to school to finish a Maritime course as well. So, we’re helping send money back home.

Suzanne: And in exchange your mother stays [with you].

Frances: Because I can go to work. I can help them. I can help my brother. (Recorded Conversation, November 15, 2014)

For most of his time in Saskatoon, Jerome also sent money back home but, during our last conversation, I learned that his entire family, except for one sister, has now immigrated to Saskatoon and resides in the same building as Jerome and Frances. Providing financial assistance to families back home is a common practice for Filipino immigrants. In fact, financial aid sent back home makes up “over 9% of the country’s gross domestic product...placing them as the second top remittance recipient country worldwide (Burgess & Haskar, as cited in Ronquillo, Geertje, Wong, & Quiney, 2011).

During our initial conversation, the Padriques lived in a one-bedroom apartment in downtown

Saskatoon. Later that year, they moved to a two-bedroom apartment in the same building, thus giving Frances's mom her own bedroom. Angelo (and now Elizabeth, the new baby) sleep in the couple's bedroom. The family home is located close to many of Saskatoon's popular amenities. Frances explained that she loves the location because she can walk anywhere she needs to go. She enjoys the nearby parks, the river and, especially, the Francis Morrison Central Library. Frances described how the library is important to her, "You can find activities to put kids in because there's a lot of papers or pamphlets there, so you can read and you can meet other parents and you can ask them [questions or advice]." Frances also stated that another benefit to the library is that it provides her with the opportunity to practice her English (Recorded Conversation, November 15th, 2014).

Canada has given the family many advantages and opportunities they did not have in the Philippines. Jerome explained as follows:

It's better economically because I earn more compared to the Philippines. I was able to save for both our futures and my children's education, [and] our future education. And also, health wise, if it's better compared to back at home, you don't think of having enough money for if you get sick, you will be able to pay for health care.... Unless you have your own insurance because, back at home; you have to have insurance plus extra money for if ever you get sick, right? If you get admitted [to hospital], even just for checkups and vaccinations, you have to pay for it. Education wise as well, I believe it's better [in

Canada]. Back at home, even though we have public education.... you still have to pay for a little bit, but not too much but I believe here the public education is better... compared to back at home. (Recorded Conversation, November 15, 2014)

The Padriques immigrated to Canada for the abundance of opportunities the country had to offer them. They cite substantial improvements to their quality of life such as earning power, free health care, and a public education system that they view as superior to the one they had in the Philippines. During our conversations, both parents identified the advantages to having postsecondary opportunities within the city as beneficial to their personal goals (Recorded Conversations, May 5th and May 15th, 2014).

Choosing the Padrique Family

The Catholic choice.

I chose the Padriques as participants for my narrative inquiry into parents' choice of Catholic French Immersion programming for several reasons. Although they do not regularly attend Catholic Church, like the large majority of individuals from the Philippines, they are Catholic.

Jerome: We're Catholic, but not purely.

Suzanne: You don't go to church regularly?

Jerome: It doesn't really matter for us. 'Cause, for me, I grew up Methodist.

Frances: I grew up as a Catholic.

Jerome: But my father's side is Catholic and my mother's side is Methodist. Back at home, when you get married you decide which Church we go to get married in and my father gave in to my mother. Then when [Frances and I] got married, she's Catholic, I'm Methodist, and I gave into her. (Laughter) So we're both --

Frances: -- Catholic.

Jerome: Catholic. So it doesn't really matter [if we go to church]. (Recorded Communication, May 12, 2014)

When we first began our conversations, the couple did not attend worship services of any denomination. In November, I learned they were attending Circle Alliance Church. They spoke to the fact that, unlike the Catholic churches they have visited in Saskatoon, this particular church has many young families. Having this youthful and energetic congregation was very important to them (Field Notes, November 15, 2014).

My decision to invite the Padriques to participate in my research stemmed from our first three-way conference in December of 2013 when I learned that Angelo had attended a non-Catholic preschool the previous year. My curiosity was piqued. Why had the couple decided to move Angelo to a Catholic school? What was this family's story and what could I learn from them?

The French Immersion choice.

With the exception of Nunavut, French Immersion programs exist in every province and territory in Canada. French Immersion programming began as a pilot program in a predominantly English Montreal neighbourhood in 1965 (Johnstone, n.d.). Freisen (2013) stated, “Over the last five years enrolment in French Immersion has skyrocketed across the country. It’s up 12 per cent since 2006, according to new figures from Statistics Canada” (para. 3). The popularity of French Immersion is directly attributed to the well-documented benefits of learning a second language.

Studies have shown that bilingual individuals consistently outperform their monolingual counterparts on tasks involving executive control...These effects have been found in all stages of life from the toddler years to the elderly. (Bialystok, 2011, p. 229)

In addition, other benefits include better job opportunities down the road and, according to a study done by the Association of French Canadian Studies, workers who are both French and English also have more earning power (Freisen, 2013).

Like many parents, the Padriques want to provide their son with as many opportunities as possible. They have firsthand knowledge of the importance of a second language. Jerome’s English fluency afforded the family the opportunity to immigrate to Canada. Still, choosing French Immersion for their child whose first language is not English while living in a predominantly English province is a courageous move. I felt this family could provide rich and relevant answers to my research question.

Why the Choice of French Immersion Programming

Jerome's Story

The benefits of being fluent in an additional language.

Canada has two official languages, French and English. This does not mean, however, that most Canadians can speak both languages. In fact Statistics Canada (2011) reported that only 17.5% of Canadians could speak both official languages. The ability to speak French and English, therefore, can create broader employment opportunities.

Jerome has firsthand knowledge of the employment opportunities provided by an additional language:

[The Saskatchewan delegation] went over to the Philippines to recruit nurses ...and one of the requirements is that we can speak in English as well" (Recorded Communication, May 5, 2014). He described how his English was assessed before he was offered a contract to practice nursing: To qualify to practice [in Canada], I needed an accepted English exam... [I] have to pass with certain points for each category [in] listening, reading, writing, speaking. Then [the Saskatchewan Health Region] have their own exam during the hiring in the Philippines [and], if you pass, you proceed to the interview. Then, if you pass, they will offer you a contract. (Recorded Communication, January 12, 2015)

Since Jerome taught nursing at the university level, this proved to be important in the strengthening of his English skills. “One of [the university’s] requirements is, if the subject is in English, as much as possible you have to teach it in English. So I kind of practiced my lessons ahead of time, like what to say” (Recorded Communication, November 15, 2014). Given the opportunities a second language has afforded him, Jerome is appreciative of second language programming for his son. Jerome wants to ensure that Angelo has the same, if not better, opportunities in his life. He recognizes that being educated in both of Canada’s official languages will open doors for their son that might otherwise be closed.

Education and employment qualifications are more recognized.

Jerome’s education in nursing, as well as his work experience, qualified him for employment in Canada. Once he was offered a contract, “[I] came here in Saskatoon and worked as a graduate nurse while waiting to take the Canadian Registered Nurse Examination (CRNE) then, after passing the CRNE, [I am] allowed to practice as a registered nurse in Canada” (Recorded Communication, January 12, 2015). He explained that Filipino nurses are recruited because, unlike so many other immigrant professions, their degrees are more recognized by other countries. He explained:

The Americans introduced the [nursing] education program to us and ...they [made] it standard... just like in the U.S. So it’s all [standardized]. So when we go to the U.S. we

just need to take their licensing exam and the English [exam]. I guess that made it a big difference compared to other professions [that are not standardized]...I guess the standard of nursing is the same; you do [nursing] the same way, [even] if you go to another country.

(Recorded Communication, May 25, 2014)

Jerome appreciates the fact that his degree is acknowledged within Canada, as he is more than aware of the fact that many new immigrants are underemployed. Having an education that is transportable is significant to Jerome because it permitted him to gain employment in his chosen profession outside the Philippines, and he bears witness to his wife's struggles with respect to her own career. Frances must perform a great deal of upgrading to qualify as a nurse in Canada and this directly affects the family income as well as her professional hopes and dreams.

There is also recognition from Jerome that a university degree obtained in Canada is a valuable employment tool. Knowing how difficult it can be for immigrants to find work in their chosen field, it is important to Jerome that his son has an education that increases the likelihood of his employment opportunities no matter when his son goes in the world, "When you study in Canada, your education is more acknowledged everywhere" (Recorded Communication, May 25, 2014). Jerome's belief is reinforced by the Government of Canada whose website states, "A Canadian degree, diploma or certificate is recognized globally as being comparative to those from the United States and Commonwealth countries" (Government of Canada, n.d.). Jerome understands that Angelo's Canadian

education, complemented by French language skills, is advantageous for his son's future livelihood.

Jerome recognizes that immigrating to Canada, with a job already in place, was contingent on his career choice and his English skills. He fully realizes that he is more fortunate than other immigrants, including his own wife, Frances. As a Canadian immigrant, who has chosen French Immersion for his son's schooling, Jerome fully realizes that he has broadened Angelo's career prospects because speaking French will open up many doors that would otherwise be closed, for his son. Jerome's understanding that Canadian degrees are well acknowledged outside of Canada further impacts his French Immersion choice. The impressive combination of French language skills, and a Canadian education greatly ensures that Angelo will have better opportunities as an adult when he enters the job market in Canada or abroad.

Frances's Story

Underemployment.

Unlike her husband, Frances does not work as a nurse. She is employed as a caregiver in a long-term care home. Frances's English is not as strong as her husband's, and she has not passed the Language Proficiency Test required by the Saskatchewan Association of Licensed Practical Nurses (SALPN) whose by-laws state, "All [Internationally Educated Nursing] applicants must demonstrate proficiency in the English language and have supporting documentation provided directly to the

Association from the testing center” (SALPN, n.d.). Frances acknowledged that, when she first arrived in the city, her English was not as good as it is now. “Before, I can’t speak English because I’m shy. I don’t know how to deliver my words. Because I’m really shy” (Recorded Communication, May 5, 2014). Jerome continued:

Back at home, [if] you make a little bit of mistake in your grammar...or how to pronounce [a word] they laugh at you... So she’s afraid to [speak English]... I said to her, ‘*Even though you don’t have the right grammar or... the pronunciation is not right, you have to speak it.*’ (Recorded Communication, May 5, 2014)

Frances’s English skills have improved a great deal since working in the care home where she uses her English daily. Frances is determined to take the necessary steps to practice nursing in Canada. “I want to finish my nursing so *whatever* it takes” (Recorded Communication, May 5, 2014). She anticipates beginning the process of upgrading her English during her maternity leave.

Frances’s experience of underemployment is one she does not want repeated for her son.

Central to her support of French Immersion for Angelo’s schooling is her own personal experiences and knowledge of the benefits an additional language can provide her son.

A Better Life: The Sacrifices of Immigrant Parents

Sacrifice is part of the immigrant story. Many immigrant families experience a drop in their occupation status when they immigrate to Canada. The Globe and Mail (May, 10 2012) stated, “We

now know that one urban myth is true. Overqualified immigrants do drive taxis – though not all of them are physicians. Many are in fact architects and engineers.” The article goes on to state that in a study of 50,000 cab drivers in Canada, more than half of them are not Canadian born. Two hundred of the cab drivers were doctors or had PhDs; an additional twenty percent had a master’s or undergraduate degree. “Most had backgrounds in business, engineering and architecture and are clearly underemployed,” reported the article.

Jerome’s sacrifices.

While Jerome had the good fortune to be recruited for a nursing position, this does not mean that coming to Canada was easy for him. His wife and newborn son, who was only two weeks old when he left, were never far from his mind. In a December 2008 Saskatoon Star Phoenix newspaper article, Jerome, who was then 25 years old, spoke about the difficulty of leaving his newborn son back home, "There's a photo of me near his crib and I tell my wife to put the speaker phone on when I talk so I won't become a stranger to him" (Wilson, 2008). Jerome lost those first precious months with his son. “Every day when I see [Angelo’s] picture, it’s different,” he says with sadness (Recorded Communication, May 12, 2014). In addition, when Jerome returned home to bring his family to Canada, Angelo did not recognize him. “It’s hard for me when I came home to get them. Even though [Angelo] see me in Skype, he was always crying and didn’t want to be carried by [me]. It’s hard, it’s

hard” (Recorded Communication, May 5, 2014). I could hear the pain in his voice as he told his story.

Frances’s sacrifices.

Frances’s story of sacrifice is much different than her husband’s. For the first two years of their arrival in Saskatoon, Frances stayed home with their son. She could not work because the couple had not anticipated a waiting list to get Angelo into day care. Jerome explained, “We tried looking for a daycare [but] we didn’t realize we had to be on a waiting list...So I said [to Frances], ‘*While waiting for the waiting list just take care of Angelo for a while*’” (Recorded Communication, May 5, 2014).

Frances’s story is one of underemployment. She currently works as a care aid in a home for the aged. She has a strong desire to work as a nurse in Saskatoon, but her English skills and current qualifications must be upgraded. I taught one other student whose parents were both nurses and, like Frances, they had to seek other employment (Recorded Communication, July, 2012). I relayed this story to the couple and listened to their interpretation of what they see as newer and tougher standards for immigrant nurses in Saskatchewan.

Frances: That the same in my case....I need to study.

Jerome: [The Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association] became a little stricter after they hired us [the recruits]... I think [other nurses] are complaining about hiring from other countries when....they have nurses over here so they become a little stricter...and one

of the requirements of the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association is for you to have an English exam ...you have to have a specific score to qualify. (Recorded Conversation, May 5, 2014)

Although they are unhappy with what they believe are stricter standards, the standards have not deterred Frances from her desire to pursue a nursing career in Canada. Frances is committed to following her dream and Jerome is supportive of her ambitions. Frances stated, “I have an interview this coming week because I want to finish my nursing – so whatever it takes. I told [Jerome] I *need* to [do this]” (Recorded Conversation, May 5, 2014). Frances is unwavering in her desire to quality as a nurse in Canada. The grit and determination in her voice is unmistakable.

Sacrifice is oftentimes the unpleasant by-product of the decision to uproot your family and career. Immigrants take calculated risks in hopes of building a better life and future for themselves and their children. The decision to immigrate can be costly, emotionally and economically. Sometimes the personal or professional price tag is greater for one family member. As Frances strives to upgrade her nursing and English skills, she is fully aware that the benefits of a Canadian education, combined with French Immersion schooling for Angelo, will likely increase the chances that the challenging experiences she had in gaining employment in Canada will not be the story that her son lives as an adult. She wants to do everything she can to provide him with the opportunity for an emotionally and economically solid future.

The expense of daycare.

Frances had to make an important sacrifice, not only in terms of her career, but also in her desire to work outside the home. Initially, the couple did not have daycare for their son but, when they looked into the expense of daycare, they realized that it was not something they could easily afford.

Jerome: I told her we have to sacrifice because she wants to work as well. But we have to sacrifice and she stayed home for two years. Then....we didn't even bother with daycare because I enquired [about] the one in our hospital so that we can bring him there. It's \$750 for a month and it doesn't matter if he's there all the time. I think if [Frances] is going to work that's going to be all her salary or half of her salary. That's expensive. So I said, "It's not worth it." (Recorded Communication, May 5, 2014)

The Padriques' experience is not unique. Affordable day care is an issue in our country. In Saskatchewan, the window for parents who qualify for assistance is very narrow. For instance, in 2010, there were 3,159 children who received some form of subsidized childcare. Families who are eligible for full subsidy must earn less than \$20,000 per year. Families who earn more than \$36,500 per year do not qualify for *any* form of assistance (Muttart, 2012).

For immigrants, such as the Padriques, who are accustomed to the support of family members in the caring of their children, childcare is a financial hurdle. It led to them re-evaluating Frances's desire to pursue work outside the home. Had Frances's degree been transferable, and had her English been

sufficient, she could have worked as a nurse and the couple could have more easily afforded day care. The duality of Jerome and Frances's position, as newcomers to Canada, brings into sharp focus the advantages of a transferable education and second language skills. The dynamics of living with both the pros and cons of these elements greatly enhances their appreciation of these assets. Understanding what motivated their decision to select French Immersion programming is brought into sharper focus. It is a decision based, not simply on speculation or optimism, but upon their lived experiences.

Isolation from extended family.

A strong part of the Filipino culture is the relationship with both immediate and extended family members. It is not surprising then, that the couple stated that, other than the harsh Saskatchewan climate, the most difficult part of immigration is the isolation from their family in the Philippines. Typically, Filipinos know they can count on their families for financial assistance and emotional support whenever it is required. It is also common for families to share responsibilities and resources (Beltran Chen, 1999). Jerome explained the adjustment as follows:

I think the hardest part is you do not have your immediate family. We know we have friends over here but, when we first came here, we were the only ones. Right, like you're just your family with you. You know that you have a Filipino community that you can access or friends, Filipino friends, as well that you can be with, but it's different when you

have family, that you know that, like even just for in another province, right? Like within Canada. But no, you're the only one here. (Recorded Conversation, November 15, 2014)

Re-establishing those close bonds of solidarity is why the couple worked so hard to bring Jerome's family to the city. Having their family in the same building is something they describe as "awesome," and the couple hopes that Frances's family will also come to Canada one day (Recorded Communication, November 15, 2014).

Frances's family needed financial assistance and the couple needed childcare for Angelo. After two years of staying at home with Angelo, Frances welcomed her mother to Canada to assist the couple with childcare. In return, The Padriques are helping Frances's family. It is a way to balance both families' needs. Without her mother's help, it is likely that Frances would have stayed at home to care for Angelo, and now Elizabeth, and delayed her own educational and career opportunities. Ensuring the likelihood that their children will not be put in a similar position of limited choice, Jerome and Frances opted for French Immersion programming for Angelo. To them, French Immersion signifies opportunity for Angelo. They believe that competency in two Canadian languages provides Angelo with the opportunity to do well in Canada and to have more postsecondary education and employment choices than his parents have had.

It is readily apparent that the couple is profoundly committed to building the best possible life for themselves and their son in Canada. Angelo's daily life is now filled with close extended family

visits, an aspect of life, which was fundamental to Frances's and Jerome's childhoods. While this feature of daily life remains important to the couple, they also recognize that part of building their new life in Canada involves taking advantage of the many opportunities our country has to offer. By choosing French Immersion for Angelo's schooling the couple is consciously creating a life for their son that balances a strong education with a life filled with family. They aspire, like many parents do, for their son to benefit from the richness of home and school.

Weighing the Advantages of French Immersion with the Fear of the Unknown

Parent qualms.

Parent anxiety with respect to their choice of French Immersion is common and certainly something that I, as a teacher, encounter regularly. Parent concerns most often stem from their own inability to speak French. In particular, they worry about helping their child with homework, as well as their child falling behind in English reading proficiency because they learn to read French first. It is important that these concerns be addressed in a manner that satisfies their apprehension so that they feel confident in choosing French Immersion programming for their school-aged child.

The Padriques did not choose French Immersion programming for their son on a whim. They described a decision process that attended to many considerations. First, they balanced their own personal practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) with their hopes and dreams for their son,

alongside the unfamiliarity of a foreign system of education. Second, they took into consideration that most Canadian born parents do not select French Immersion programming for their own children. Third, the couple also expressed concern that, because Angelo is Filipino, he would not fit in to a French Immersion environment. Fourth, they also felt that their decision to choose French Immersion programming is not typical of immigrant parents who do not have English as their first language. In fact, Jerome's sister, who recently immigrated to the city, did not elect a French Immersion school. "She's afraid... because [her daughter] just started to come here, and ...for her to learn French at the same time, and be in an English environment [it would be too hard]" (Recorded Conversation, November 15, 2014). The couple's complex thought process, and how they arrived at their decision to select French Immersion programming for their son, enriches our understanding as educators of why some immigrant parents want French Immersion for their children.

The advantages of learning an additional language.

The Padriques' lived practical experience attests to the value of an additional language. Even with their wealth of knowledge, the decision to choose French Immersion for Angelo was not an easy one.

Jerome: We kind of hesitant at first putting him in French because we don't know if he's going to [be able to] learn French. But somebody told us that it's a good edge for them to

learn a second language. And for me I just realized....we're not going to be here if I don't speak fluent English....At first we didn't like know if it's okay to enter French Immersion. ...And when we first came here we just here to inquire [if Angelo could attend]. We nervous about would there be any other nationalities. Like, we were expecting ...that French is for Canadians or only for French speaking families and most of them are like Canadians, right? And, also, like we know most of the families that came from other countries would be afraid to....bring them to ...a French Immersion school because they don't have any background about it. But I believe that children will learn quickly when they start younger. So maybe I said, *'Let's give it a try.'* (Recorded conversation, November 15, 2014)

The Padrique's decision to enroll Angelo in French Immersion reflects a growing trend in regard to immigrants' schooling decisions for their children. CBC News (May 8, 2013) reported, "A growing number of newcomers to Canada are enrolling their children in French Immersion schools.... [which is] contributing to an enrolment spike at the bilingual schools." A colleague of my husband, who is an immigrant from Iran, summed up their decision to enroll their children in French Immersion as follows, "I think we just come to this country, and we've already taken so many chances. What is one more?" (Field Notes, July 16, 2014). Mohamed's children are now in high school and university and the risk they took in choosing French Immersion programming for their children has paid off exactly as he and

his wife had hoped. The oldest children are in university and hold bilingual certificates from Saskatoon Catholic schools. Holding a bilingual certificate means they have successfully completed 12 or more credits from the 24 French credits offered in Language Arts, Social Studies, Mathematics, and Christian Ethics. Having done so, Mohamed's children are considered fluent in French.

Opportunity, balanced with the fact that risk taking is part of the immigrant's new life circumstances, is central to an immigrant's decision. Some immigrants, like Mohamed and the Padriques, are keen to take another chance, especially when the chance appears to them as obviously advantageous for their children's future. Combine this factor with their personal knowledge of the advantages an additional language can provide and understanding the trend of immigrants to register their children in French Immersion becomes less hazy. Immigrants attend to the value of an additional language closely because fluency can greatly impact their quality of life, level of professional success, and their capacity to provide for their family.

The notion that French Immersion is for bright children.

There is a persistent and prevalent attitude that exists within our Canadian culture that the French Immersion program is for bright children. As a teacher, I have heard such comments, even from the most highly educated professionals. This notion is so common that the Government of Canada has a website entitled, *Myths and realities of French Immersion* (2010) that summarize the

myths and facts of this program. For example, the website addresses the notion that this stream of education is only for high academic achievers, that special needs children cannot be enrolled in French Immersion, and the fact that all children, regardless of socioeconomic standing, are enrolled in French Immersion schools. While the government clearly identifies these notions as falsehoods, the reality of the families who select French Immersion programming for their school aged children, is overwhelmingly the opposite.

In his study on French Immersion in New Brunswick, J. Douglas Willms (July-August, 2008) concluded that French Immersion classrooms do not reflect the diversity found in other Canadian schools. Willms stated that 17% of children in English classrooms required Special Education as compared to seven per cent in French Immersion classrooms. However, “the segregation associated with French Immersion is much broader and deeper than merely that related to special needs children,” (p. 92) he argued. He reported that 60% of children in French Immersion came from the two wealthiest socioeconomic groups while only nine percent came from the lowest. He concluded that this discrepancy is similar to, or greater than, the divide between non-Hispanic whites and African-Americans in the US. He also noted that there were divisions along gender lines as 60% of the students enrolled in French Immersion programs were females (pp. 92-93). Although there has not been a similar study done in our province, based on what I have observed in my own career, and in discussions with colleagues, it is likely that our schools in Saskatoon closely mirror the results of Willms’ study.

Later in the conversation, Jerome explained his thoughts on French Immersion and the type of child who he believes will be successful in the program.

Jerome: It's for smart kids. You can never learn another language if you can't understand your first language, right? Like if you cannot really comprehend your first language and you're going to go to another language you won't be able to – so that's what I believe.

Suzanne (to Frances): Do you also feel that way?

Frances: For me, some kids are slow learners. They need some time. And some kids are faster –what do you call this? Fast learner? They catch [on] more quickly, but some kids need some time to adapt to what they are doing. I think yeah [it's for smarter children].

Like so many people who enrol their child in French Immersion, the Padriques have the impression that the program is for bright children. While this notion is inaccurate, it is a prevalent factor in many parents' decision for choosing French Immersion programming for their school-aged child.

French Immersion: The Elements of Opportunity

The opportunity to provide their son with a possible advantage in the workplace is the overarching reason that led to the Padriques' decision to select French Immersion programming for their school aged son. Within this umbrella of opportunity, however, their personal story paints a complex picture of recognizing the benefits of French Immersion and thoughts of academic rigour.

Understanding these milieus is key to understanding parents' decision-making and to making French

Immersion program stronger and more accessible to all children.

French Benefits

With more than 82% (Stats Canada, 2011) of the population unable to speak both English and French, the Padriques understand that their son's ability to do so will certainly open doors for their son in the future. Understanding the benefits of an additional language becomes even more salient when it has direct impact on your daily life. The Padriques live with both the positive and negative consequences of this factor every day. Had Jerome not been fluent in English, he would not have been hired to work in Canada. Conversely Frances, who struggles with English proficiency, is underemployed and must make a concerted effort to upgrade her skills to become a nurse. This tangible knowledge was at the forefront of their decision to choose French Immersion programming for their son.

The element of academic superiority.

The notion that French Immersion is for bright children also dominates their French Immersion choice. "It's for smart kids," said Jerome when I asked which students he feels French Immersion is more suited towards. Frances thought along the same lines as her husband. She spoke about "slow learners" who "need more time to adapt," and "fast learners" who "catch on more quickly." The Padriques, like so many Canadians, believe the French Immersion is more suited to brighter or more

motivated children. This sense that French Immersion is an academically superior program is an extension of the overarching view held in our society. As recently as February 28, 2015, the Star Phoenix, a Saskatoon newspaper, printed a story, which said, “As the West has become more wealthy, it has become home to more higher-income parents who tend to better appreciate the value of a second language” (p. C9). The article quotes one parent who says that French Immersion schools have “a highly educated populace and because of that high level of education you find that parents who put their kid in French Immersion highly value that education” (p. C9). The philosophy is well entrenched in our society and the fact that it exists within immigrant families such as the Padriques, reflects the enduring connection of academic superiority to French Immersion programming.

The Padriques’ choice for their son to pursue the French Immersion stream of education stems not only from their belief in the benefits of the program but also from the fact that they feel their son is intelligent enough to pursue the program. If they believed Angelo was a “slow learner,” they likely would have not enrolled him in a French Immersion program.

Why the Choice of Catholic Education?

When the Padriques first looked at enrolling Angelo in school, they did not appear to fully comprehend the difference between public and Catholic schools. They believed that, since both school divisions were publically funded, both systems of education would provide their son with the equivalent educational experiences and opportunities.

Jerome: We found [the pre-school] and [Frances] looked at the classroom and she liked it so that's where we started..... At first we said it doesn't really matter, they're all public schools [publically funded]. I tried looking for the Montessori, but I said that's too expensive. ...But one friend told me, '*You're in Canada. Why pay for the education when your taxes goes to education?*' ...If you focus on their learning and help them...it doesn't really matter the institution where they go to. I didn't think it really mattered what school he went to 'cause they were all public schools. (Recorded Conversation, May 25, 2004)

The couple's initial beliefs were challenged once Angelo was enrolled in his preschool program. They became unhappy with Angelo's experience and they decided to actively search for a school that more closely aligned with their hopes and dreams for his schooling. With this in mind, they turned to a Catholic school.

Distinctly Catholic

What makes a Catholic school different from a non-Catholic school? The obvious answer is the school's ability to teach religion, specifically the Catholic religion. Under this umbrella, however, there are many different aspects that separate it from non-Catholic schools. As the Congregation for Catholic Education (1988) stated:

What makes a Catholic school distinctive is its religious dimension, which is found in the educational climate, the personal development of each student, the relationship established

between culture and the Gospel, and the illumination of all knowledge with the light of faith.

(as cited in Convey, 2013, p. 189)

This comprehensive sense of what Catholic education provides is reflected in the mission of Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, where Angelo is enrolled, “Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools: a welcoming community where we nurture faith, encourage excellence in learning, and inspire students to serve others, making the world a better place” (Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, n.d.). In Catholic schools, faith is evident and is expressed in all aspects of the educational community and programming.

The Congregation of Catholic Education (as cited in Convey, 2013) described the initial impression someone should have upon entering a Catholic school. “From the first moment that a student sets foot in a Catholic school, he or she ought to have the impression of entering a new environment, one illumined by the light of faith, and having its own unique characteristics” (p. 189). His description brings to mind a story of one of my daughter’s friends, who attended a non-Catholic school outside the city of Saskatoon. Alicia came to watch my daughter, Sierra, play basketball at St. Joseph’s High School. As we were walking down the hallways after the game, Alicia stumbled. She explained it was because she was too busy taking in all the newness. She was observing, not only the numerous crosses in the building but, the faith-filled catchphrases in posters on the school walls that were specific to the Lenten season. “This is so different than my school,” she said. “I’ve never been in

a Catholic school before and it's kind of strange because it is so different," was one of the comments she made. Entering a Catholic school for Alicia was profoundly different, so much so that she stumbled. She was distracted by an environment unique from her own lived school experiences and one reflective of "the light of faith."

Catholic schools are distinctive in the environment they create as well as in how they teach.

The Padriques wanted a school for their son that was well suited to the type of environment in which they wanted their son to learn. Their views with respect to the purpose of school, to how they believe schools should communicate with parents, and to the students who they feel are likely to attend Catholic schools paint a picture of their hopes and dreams for their son's schooling experience.

A focus on obedience and discipline.

The Padriques believe that school is an institution that teaches both academics and standards of behaviour. Teaching their son respect and obedience are fundamental principles to how the Padriques raise their son. For them, it is essential that their son's school reflect the values they themselves hold. During our first conversation, Frances stated, "I like a school with faith." Jerome expanded, "We believe that education institution that integrates faith in the curriculum would help their children to develop better compared to the one without faith" (Recorded Conversation, May 5, 2014). In our second conversation, I asked the couple to expand on the notion of "developing better" and how they

feel Catholic education can accomplish this for their son.

Jerome: Not only the knowledge aspect it's—

Frances: —it's spiritual —

Jerome: —the behavior and attitude, which is very good, I think for developing that, right?

Like it's not just – everyone would know how to do math, how to do this – those subjects, but I believe the school is also part of teaching them – like good behavior. ...And how to know God, right?

Suzanne: And you believe Catholic education will help Angelo become a better person?

Both: Oh yes! Yes! (Recorded Conversation, May 25, 2014)

Jerome later explained his definition of good behaviour to me as follows:

Good behaviour [means] you're able to listen, and at the same time, obey. Or follow who is talking or telling you, and who are respectful, like if you're respectful. That's what I believe good behaviour is. And just knowing what is right and wrong. (Recorded

Conversation, November 15, 2014)

Frances also spoke to the importance of obedience in the school. “It's important, especially when kids are starting going to school. Because that's their second home. So I think it's better if they discipline the kids as well in the school. Even though I'm not around” (Recorded Conversation, November 15, 2014). The couple defines good behaviour as having the qualities of obedience and respect for parents

and adults. In the Filipino culture, disciplining of children by family members is not uncommon (Beltran Chen, 1999). Since the Padriques view school as a second family, they believe discipline should be part of the school's responsibility.

The Padrique's concept of the nature of Catholic schools is quite accurate. Catholic school educators do strive to teach more than academics. The goal is to attend to the child's spiritual development as well. In his address to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Pope Benedict XVI (May 5, 2012, as cited in Convey 2013) said:

First, as we know, the essential task of authentic education at every level is not simply that of passing on knowledge, essential as this is, but also of shaping hearts. There is a constant need to balance intellectual rigor in communicating effectively, attractively and integrally, the richness of the Church's faith with forming the young in the love of God, the praxis of the Christian moral and sacramental life and, not least, the cultivation of personal and liturgical prayer. (p. 189).

In coming to a Catholic school, the Padriques were actively seeking to nurture not just Angelo's mind but, to use Pope Benedict's words, "his heart." Of primary importance to them is their belief that Catholic schools will be more likely to reinforce the qualities of obedience and respect of others, qualities they perceived to be lacking at Angelo's preschool. This belief was further reinforced and supported through their experiences at École St. Paul School.

The belief that children who attend Catholic schools come from better homes.

The Padriques express their belief that parents who send their children to a Catholic school are parents who value family:

Jerome: For me [with people] who are Catholic I think they are [good parents]. Like the basic unit, it starts with the family, right? You can see the attitude of the kid when you have a good family. ...The first school *is* your family. (Recorded Conversation, May 5, 2014)

Later on, Jerome expands on this notion:

We're thinking because it's...a Catholic school so religion is important to [parents] and it says on the [school pamphlets] that you would be integrating religion into your subjects so parents know that their kid's getting it in school. So, if the parents value [religion], it means that they're good parents, for us. (Recorded Conversation, November 15, 2014)

They express that religious education will not only have a positive influence on Angelo's development, but it will also have a positive effect on the children to whom their son is exposed.

Frances: It's spiritual.

Jerome: The behavior and attitude, which is very good, I think, [Catholic education is] for developing that, right? It's...not [just] how to do Math, or those [other] subjects. I believe the school is also part of teaching them...good behavior... And how to know God, right?

Kind of on the religious side of [learning]. 'Cause the kids learn religion too, right? And right from wrong.

By choosing a Separate school, the Padriques feel they have surrounded their son with classmates, fellow students, and a school community who are, in their own view, people with strong values. This conclusion at which they have arrived has been reinforced by what they observed as notable differences in the conduct of the children since coming to École St. Paul. They believe that, although the behavior of the children is reinforced on the school landscape, parents off the school landscape who share the same values in the upbringing of their children also attend to it more closely.

The importance of good communication between parents and school.

Previously, the Padriques' son was enrolled in a non-Catholic preschool. The couple's decision to move their son to a Catholic school materialized when the couple determined that the expectations of this particular school were incompatible with their expectations for Angelo's schooling. First, the couple felt the environment did not provide enough structure for its students. Second, when problems of bullying arose with their son, they felt that the school was ineffective in how it handled the situation.

They explained the situation as follows:

Jerome: [Frances] find [the pre-school] a little bit more relaxed. She like for him...to have a little more strict [environment]. She wanted...(searching for the correct word)

Suzanne: More structure?

Jerome: Yes. More structure, yes! Right! So she said maybe we'll try a Catholic school.

(Recorded Conversation, May 5, 2014)

They elaborated further:

Jerome: [The preschool] is more relaxed. I'm not very sure how to explain it, but... they tried to let the kids settle disputes themselves. ...Angelo had an experience of being bullied as well...We were just told to tell Angelo to use his words to tell his classmates, but they didn't... I'm not very sure what they did to the other kid, so I'd like to see more information or communication that they talked to the other kid as well, or to the parents of the other kid as well. That this is happening, that this should stop. (Recorded Conversation, November 15, 2014)

The Padriques identified two major issues of concern: a desire for more classroom structure and for better communication when problems arose that affected their son. This prompted their decision to seek out a Catholic school for their son. I asked the couple if their expectations had been met at École St. Paul, and they described a school that is more closely in line with their expectation.

Frances: Because... [at] the other school, the attitude of the kids [was] different.

Jerome: She finds the kids [there] are not as...Catholic... [They were] running around.

Frances: Angelo is always bullied there [at the other school]. There was one big kid that

always had—

Jerome: I'm not sure if he had like acondition? ...It really [was] a big help [coming to a Catholic school] because I saw the difference between non-Catholic and Catholic [and the behavior of the children].

Suzanne: A while back Angelo had a small bullying problem and you emailed us about it.

Jerome: Yes. Like in St. Paul's when I communicated [about the bullying], immediately... there was a response, and the principal got involved as well, and he made immediate action to the problem. That is important to us. (Recorded Conversation, May 25, 2014)

Thus far, their experience at École St. Paul has been positive. They feel the attitude of the students is more positive and that the school communicates effectively with them. These factors have led them to the conclusion that a Catholic school more closely reflects the environment they were seeking for their son's schooling.

Why the Choice of this Particular School?

Word of Mouth

As a newcomer from a foreign country, Jerome sought guidance from colleagues and friends in choosing a school for Angelo. The current location of their home is directly attributed to the advice of co-workers. "I had to move... 'cause [Frances and Angelo] were coming. I work in St. Paul's [Hospital] so I need to find a closer place to live to St. Paul's. And my co-workers said don't go to the

‘alphabets¹’” (Recorded Conversation, May 5, 2014).

Word of mouth was very important to both members of the couple in many of their decisions.

Jerome stated, “I trust [friends/co-workers] because they know better than me” (Recorded Conversation November 15, 2014). Frances also referenced the importance of word of mouth. “That’s what I like more about library..... you can meet other parents and you can ask them [for advice]” (Recorded Conversation, November 15, 2014). When they were dissatisfied with their choice for Angelo’s preschool, Jerome turned to a trusted co-worker who has seven children:

Jerome: I was telling my co-worker, Helen, that....Angelo is going to Kindergarten next year and we're looking for a school and [the co-worker] said....”*Where do you live?*” [I told her our address and] she said, ‘Oh why don’t you try St Paul’s?’ Her kids studied here as well...[and] she has seven kids. So I said, ‘She’s a very good person to ask where to go for school.’ And she’s Catholic as well. (Recorded Conversation, May 12, 2014)

Helen’s opinion of St. Paul School mattered to the couple. She is a Catholic mother who has successfully raised seven children, all of whom had attended École St. Paul. As a result, the couple decided to visit the school. Word of mouth is significant because people believe what they hear from people they trust. A recommendation from a trusted friend and co-worker prompted the couple to

¹ In Saskatoon, avenues labelled A, B, C and so on are on the west side of the city, a side of the city considered by many to be higher in crime rates and poverty and so less desirable as a place of residence.

decide to visit the school.

Blink and It's Gone: First Impressions

There is an old adage that you get only one chance to make a good first impression. In his book *Blink*, Gladwell (2005) argued that our first impressions are usually accurate and stand the test of time. For Frances and Jerome, their first impression of the school proved to be extremely positive.

Cleanliness.

The Padriques are both health care workers and so cleanliness is very important to them. During our conversation, it became apparent that the cleanliness of the school was a contributing factor to the couple's decision to enroll Angelo in École St. Paul.

Frances: When I first saw the school I like it because it—

Jerome: —She loved it!

Frances: When I enter the door, it's very clean.

Jerome: That's why she loves...this school. (Recorded Conversation, May 5, 2014)

Frances: If the school is clean, it means the kids are [clean].

Jerome: And for me, I believe maybe one of the things is that we work in health care. So, we wanted things to be clean so that there's less infection, and germs. (Recorded Conversation, November 15, 2014)

Since the Padriques both work in health care, they understand and appreciate the importance of cleanliness in their child's place of learning.

Physical environment.

Not only is the cleanliness of the school important for the Padriques, so, too, is the physical environment. On two occasions, they talked about deciding against a pre-school located near their home because, although the exterior of the school was lovely, the preschool was located in the basement. "I feel like he's in a prison because it's very dark," Frances explained (Recorded Conversation, May 5, 2014). Frances prefers a classroom that is "more open" (Recorded Conversation, November 15, 2014). Frances's dislike of the closest preschool led the Padriques further away from their neighbourhood as they sought a school with the kind of open space and light they desired for their child.

Jerome: Then she said, 'Okay, we'll try a little bit farther [from home].' So I said, 'Okay.'

I'm the one who's driving him so we tried a little bit farther and we found [a school] and so she looked at the classroom and she liked it and so that's where we started. (Recorded Conversation, May 5, 2014)

The first school chosen for their son was architecturally impressive. The Padriques described it as a "castle school." The fact that Angelo's classroom had open space and was not in the basement of the

school pleased Frances a great deal (Recorded Conversation, May 5, 2014).

A welcoming climate.

“The city of Saskatoon not only has the most bridges per capita in Canada, but is also quickly bridging the gap to the world with its growing diverse economy and diverse community” (<http://www.saskatoon.ca/>, n.d.). The city of Saskatoon is growing rapidly and much of this growth derives from an immigrant population that has made its way into our prairie city. When I first began teaching Kindergarten in the east end of Saskatoon, the students in our French Immersion Kindergarten classroom were bussed from surrounding neighbourhoods from predominantly white middle class families. Over a handful of years, I began to notice a subtle shift and then, as more time passed, there was a more noticeable shift in the diversity of my students. This trend was also reflected in many of my colleagues’ French Immersion classrooms.

I remember when my family and I moved to Saskatoon from Ontario. Instead of feeling confident and comfortable on a previous landscape that was familiar to me, I felt out of place. For example, I did not know to take off my shoes when I entered the building, as this was not expected in my schools growing up or in any of the schools in which I later taught in Ontario. I had never heard the term Three-Way Conferences, and when I began to substitute teach (called supply teaching in Ontario), I had to learn that yard duty was called recess supervision in Saskatchewan. Some practices

in this new landscape were more familiar, such as reporting to the office when I entered the school or informing the teacher when my children were going to be away. Yet, despite being born and raised in Canada, it was a few years before I felt comfortable with the Saskatchewan schooling system.

I know, from my discussions with immigrant parents, that their challenges are much more overwhelming. While creating a welcoming climate is an obvious school goal, it becomes especially important with immigrant parents who come to our schools. One thing that can be learned from the Padriques' story is that their decision to choose École St. Paul was greatly influenced by the warmth and hospitality they felt immediately during their first visit to the school. A second point of note is that their concerns, with respect to the viability of French Immersion for their son, were also addressed that first day:

Jerome: I found it, like, you welcome—

Both: – Everybody.

Jerome: It doesn't really matter who [or] where—

Both: —they came from.

Jerome: Who they are. It's [welcoming].

Jerome: When we first got here, like we saw the different nationalities and even the principal would say, 'Oh we have [Filipinos here] too.'

Both: And they called [a Filipino child] in [to talk to us]. (Recorded Conversation, May

12, 2014)

They remembered with fondness their tour of the school and the different classrooms they visited that first day:

Jerome: We enter and when Monsieur come into the classroom [the students]... say 'Good morning!' to us.

Frances: And they smiling at Angelo. [They are] very friendly.

Jerome: That's the one thing. [We] felt very welcome here. (Recorded Conversation, May 5, 2014).

This warm and hospitable environment proved to be just what the Padriques were hoping to find in a school. The staff and students were able to put the family at ease and create an atmosphere of acceptance, and the opportunity to speak with another Filipino student helped to further reassure them that Angelo would fit into the school.

Information pamphlet.

In addition to the recommendations of others, their first impressions of the school, and a sense of welcoming at the school, the Padriques were also influenced by the information pamphlet they were provided at the school. It seemed to be a tipping factor in their decision to choose French Immersion for their son. "We were kind of not sure at first, but eventually the saying on the pamphlet helped us.

.... It says, “The second language is the best gift that you can give to your children” (Recorded Conversation, November 15, 2014). It is important to note that, although the Padriques toured the school in January, they did not register their son immediately. They took their time making the decision. With the school pamphlet to revisit, and the impact of the pamphlet’s message about second language being a gift to a child, the Padriques were called to register Angelo for French Immersion Kindergarten.

This school pamphlet is significant because it serves as a primary example of how communication and information provided by the school can play a role in the parents’ decision-making process. In understanding the Padriques’ journey, we have evidence that such items can be significant in supporting parents in making the best possible decision for their school-aged child.

Catholic Education: Opportunity

When reflecting upon the Padriques’ journey towards Catholic education, numerous aspects unfold that bring their story into sharper focus. First, in their choice of Catholic education, they saw the opportunity to give their son an education that reinforces their hopes and dreams, not only for their son’s schooling but also for his personal growth and development. Significant to their story is that, initially, the Padriques did not recognize that there was a difference between Catholic and non-Catholic streams of education. “Because both were publically funded” (Recorded Conversation, May 25, 2004), they did not realize that a non-Catholic school approaches the establishment of climate and the teaching

of values in a different way than a Catholic school may approach these elements. Given how they wished their son to be schooled, and learning about the differences between non-Catholic and Catholic education, the Padriques chose a school that has a faith dimension to the curriculum, as they felt such a school would better enhance the development of their child (Recorded Conversation, May 5, 2014).

While teaching Catholic doctrine is indeed what separates Catholic schools from non-Catholic publically funded schools, it is also true that faith permeates our school environment, curriculum, and pedagogy and offers us the opportunity to shape the heart of the child through His word.

The second aspect that comes into focus as the Padriques share their journey is the couple's belief that a curriculum infused with Christian doctrine can better reflect the principles of respect for and obedience to those who are in authority. In their opinion, the children at Angelo's first school were not expected to reflect these principles in their values, in the way in which the Padriques desired. By comparison, they stated that Catholic schools are "more strict." The phrases "not as Catholic" and "running around" were used when referencing students at Angelo's former school (Recorded Conversation, May 25, 2014). For the Padriques, firm rules, obedience, and respect for adults are fundamental to how they wish to raise their son. When they did not see these opportunities unfolding in a manner they wanted in their son's first school, they decided to explore the option of Catholic education.

The third aspect that unfolds in the Padriques' story of their journey to Catholic education is

their impression that students attending Catholic schools have parents who value family in a way similar to their own and, as a result, are committed parents. While this statement may be controversial to non-Catholic educators and parents, the particularity of the Padriques' story makes it evident as to how they arrived at this conclusion. New to Canada, and first time parents of a school-aged child, the Padriques had a yearlong experience that negatively shaped their impression of the non-Catholic stream of education. They felt that the children in Angelo's first school did not exemplify, in the way in which the Padriques expected, respect and obedience for those in authority. Given that these virtues are a significant part of their own upbringing and central to how they wish to raise their son, it was important to them that Angelo have the opportunity to be schooled alongside children whose parents lived out their childrearing philosophies in a way similar to their own.

When the Padriques moved their son to École St. Paul, they had many immediate positive experiences, which further served to strengthen their partiality towards Catholic education. They attributed the difference in student behavior in the two schools to the qualities of Catholic education and to the parents who select Catholic education for their school aged children. They have come to believe, as a result of their particular and contextual lived experience, that parents who send their children to Catholic schools, given that they, too, value spiritual discipline, are more likely to emphasize the qualities of respect and obedience with their children.

The fourth aspect that manifests itself in the Padriques' story of their journey is the belief that

Catholic schools have the ability to deal with discipline issues differently because of their mandate being situated in faith. The couple mentioned that one of the reasons they removed Angelo from his previous school was their unhappiness with the how the school handled their son's bullying issue. Phrases they used such as, "We were just told to tell Angelo to use his words," "I'm not very sure what they did to the other kid," and "I'd like to see more information or communication that they talked to the other kid.... or to the parents," reflect their desire to be better informed as parents regarding the behavior that impacts their son at school. Their belief that Catholic schools respond differently to discipline matters was solidified when Angelo experienced an issue of bullying at École St. Paul. When they contacted the school about the incident, in contrast to their experience at Angelo's first school, they felt their concerns about bullying were addressed specifically. They spoke of how the children involved in the incident were seen by the principal, how the incident was also discussed with the other parents, and how they, as parents, were satisfied, that the children understood what they had done wrong. Jerome spoke positively about the "immediate action to the problem" (Recorded Conversation, May 25, 2014) when speaking about how the school dealt with the matter. For this couple, it was concrete evidence that Catholic schools are attentive in their response to disciplinary concerns.

Capturing the Image of the Research Questions

As I stand back from the canvas and take in the image of the Padriques captured in the painting,

I see the image of a family with a strong sense of purpose and an eye to the future. This family has many experiences that are unfamiliar to me, and likely to most Canadians. In search of opportunity, the Padriques have made many sacrifices.

I see Jerome coming to Canada. How difficult it must have been for him to be on this new landscape, far from all that was familiar to him. I imagine that, on one hand, he felt very fortunate to be given this opportunity, but on the other hand, he was lonely and overwhelmed by the unfamiliarity of it all. While he had the companionship of the other male nurses with whom he shared a house, he missed Frances and Angelo. He yearned to hold his son, whom he saw on Skype. I imagine how difficult it would be for me to see Erica, my firstborn child, and not be able to hold her, or to feel her delicate skin beneath my fingers. I am quite certain my heart would shatter each time. Just as heartbreaking would be the fact that, when I finally did get to hold her, she cried because, despite my efforts, I was a stranger to her. Jerome explained how he coped during these months, “I am always thinking that it’s for them. It’s for Angelo” (Recorded Conversation, May 25, 2015). Jerome’s confidence that he was creating opportunity for his family motivated him throughout these long difficult months in Saskatoon.

As I look towards Frances’s portion of the canvas, I also see opportunity gained through willing sacrifice. First, I see Frances in the Philippines, caring for their son and surrounded by her extended family. I imagine her missing her husband and feeling both excited and nervous about coming to

Canada, leaving her homeland behind her. I next see Frances arriving on the cold prairie landscape of Saskatoon. Her English is not strong at this time and she has a toddler in her arms. Like her husband, she wants to get on with the business of providing for her family in Saskatoon and her family in the Philippines. I imagine how discouraged she must be when this does not unfold as she hoped and she is required to stay home with Angelo. Third, I see a woman who is strong and determined to become a Canadian nurse. I remember how, with conviction, she said, “I want to finish my nursing, so whatever it takes” (Recorded Conversation, May 5 2014). It is readily apparent that Frances has hopes and dreams for herself and she will not be deterred. She will not let available opportunities pass her by.

As I refocus and step further from the canvas the word *opportunity* grows larger and bolder and it convincingly stakes its claim as the dominant theme upon the Padrique canvas. The primary colours all find a home within this word and become key to understanding the research questions.

First, their choice of the Catholic stream of education has everything to do with opportunity. The Padriques actively sought out the opportunity for Angelo to be schooled in an environment that complemented their notion of the purpose of school. They also wanted the opportunity for their son to learn alongside students with similar attitudes and values. Within these opportunities, the Padriques express secondary motives, such as their desire for effective communication between home and school, as reasons for choosing École St. Paul.

Second, the choice of French Immersion is also based entirely upon opportunity. Although

some people might be inclined to believe that choosing French Immersion programming for an immigrant child is a big risk, the Padriques have practical knowledge of the advantages provided by knowing an additional language. Because of this knowledge, they foresee that Angelo's ability to speak French will improve his quality of life in the future, his level of professional success, and his capacity to provide for his own family.

As I step even further back from the painting, I become conscious of the whole work and its significance. It is a painting whose distinct parts merge together to paint a previously untold story. I am satisfied that, in this moment, the palette of narrative inquiry has captured the Padriques' story accurately and effectively. While opportunity is the dominant theme, there is a rich and distinctive story behind this family's choice of Catholic French Immersion schooling that, unexplored, remains elusive. It is in taking time to talk with parents that we form bonds and gain knowledge that can meaningfully and powerfully shape our school environment, curriculum, and pedagogy. When we understand the hopes and dreams, which underlie parents' choices for their children's schooling, it is then that we can truly touch the hearts of the children we teach

CHAPTER FOUR

The Third Painting in the Triptych

The Laroque Family

I arrived early at D'Lish by Tish, a quaint cafe owned by Tish, a former parent at the school

where I currently teach. I was pleased to find that the owner reserved my spot in the far corner as I requested. As I set things up for my conversation with Jessica, I saw her walk in. We greeted each other with a hug and, prior to recording our research conversation, we took time to catch up on our children and our respective lives.

Jessica Laroque is 37 years old with brown eyes and curly brown hair cut in a short in a style. Jessica describes herself as talkative, “outgoing, blunt, and a straight shooter” (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014). Although we no longer teach at the same school, Jessica and I have coffee a few times a year. We are also Facebook friends and privy to the events occurring within our respective families. Conversation is easy with Jessica because she is my friend.

Jessica works for SaskTel Telecommunications Holdings Corporation (SaskTel) a communications provider in our province. She schedules employees who work the phones. Since I have known her, Jessica has gone on-line, to “find classes to see what I like” (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014). She had previously explained, “I am bored stiff, that’s why I’m in school” (Personal, Conversation, November 10, 2014).

Jessica grew up in Bengough, Saskatchewan, which is approximately 90 minutes from Regina. When she was growing up, the community had roughly 600 inhabitants, and she attended the K-12 school. Jessica is part Ukrainian and Lebanese with a bit of Scottish and Polish heritage as well. Although Jessica does not attend church, she identifies as being Protestant, and as a child, she attended

the United church. She has some experience with the Ukrainian Catholic church, as her grandparents on her father's side would take their family to church during special holidays such as Christmas.

Jessica's father, Bill, taught Mathematics from Grades 8-12 in the same school Jessica attended. Before her mother, Julie, married her father, she was employed in Regina as an x-ray and laboratory technician. Once the couple married, Julie moved to Bengough, and while raising her children, she ran a sign painting business from the family home. At the age of 50, Julie came to Saskatoon and attended SIAST Kelsey Campus (Kelsey) to upgrade her previous skills. "She is now employed as an x-ray lab technician in Bengough" (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014). Jessica has two younger brothers: Frank is single and works as a Disc Jockey and with people who have special needs. Joseph is married and works as a Disc Jockey, a comedian, and with Jessica at SaskTel.

Jessica's husband, Troy Laroque, is a tall and lean 40-year-old Dené man. He has a quiet personality and, during our conversations, I quickly realized that Troy is a deep thinker. Troy has black hair, brown eyes, and brown skin. Troy has a certificate in Sports and Leisure from Kelsey. He works for Sask Sport Inc. as a Community Development Consultant, a job he rates as ten out of ten for job satisfaction (Recorded Conversation, November 26, 2014).

Troy grew up in the remote community of Uranium City. Located in northern Saskatchewan on the shores of Lake Athabasca near the border of the Northwest Territories, it was a thriving mining community of almost 5000 people. In 1982, when Troy was nine years old, the fate of the town

changed when, quite unexpectedly, Eldorado Nuclear Beaverlodge Mine closed its doors leaving most of the residents unemployed (Beckett, n.d.). The large majority of citizens left to find work elsewhere, including the Laroque family, who moved to Saskatoon. “Everything [in Uranium City] is literally [like] the day the mine shut down. People literally walked away that day and left. So...their houses are still standing there. The.... workers shut their trucks off...and [walked away]. They are still sitting there” (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014).

Troy is the youngest of six children. His father is in his 70s and he lives in Stony Rapids, Saskatchewan. In the 1970s and 80s, his father was employed as a Human Resources manager for Cameco Corporation, a uranium mining company based in Saskatoon. His mother still resides in Saskatoon. For a time, his mother worked as a nurse in Stony Rapids. Although she did not hold official qualifications, she worked in the operating room of a hospital. Troy explained, “She was paid under the table...It was illegal....She did everything a normal nurse would do. My dad made her quit because she was getting underpaid” (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014).

Troy has four brothers and one sister all of whom live in Saskatoon. His sister is employed as a service supervisor for Dakota Dunes Casino just outside the city. His eldest brother is employed as a construction foreman, another as a laborer, and there is one brother with whom Troy no longer has contact. He also has a special needs brother who resides with his mother.

Troy and Jessica have two children. Mackenzie is the eldest child and is currently in Grade 7.

Jessica described her daughter as “shy and passive” and secure in who she is as a person. Mackenzie loves to read and paint. She is quite social and she currently plays competitive ringette (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014).

Mark is one year younger than his sister and is presently in Grade 6. Jessica also depicted her son as shy, but as someone who was more like his father (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014).

Mark is more of an introvert who, although he has many friends, enjoys his alone time (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014). He also enjoys Lego and building structures and plays competitive soccer (Personal Conversation, February 1, 2015).

Choosing the Laroque Family

The Catholic choice.

I chose the Laroque family as research participants because I felt their perspective on why Catholic education was the right choice for their family might provide insight into why individuals who do not regularly attend church feel inclined to select a faith-based school for their children. Until my research began, I was unaware that Troy had been raised Catholic, but I was aware that the family did not regular attend church services of any kind. In addition, because Mackenzie and Mark are much older than the other children in my research, I hoped to learn if the parents’ initial motives in choosing Catholic education had unfolded in a manner that satisfied their expectations for their children’s

schooling.

The French Immersion choice.

Jessica and I had spent a great deal of time talking during her children's Kindergarten years.

More than once, she spoke about the fact that both children have Treaty Status. She communicated her desire for her children to have all the possible opportunities in life. French Immersion, combined with Treaty Status, was an edge she felt many other children would not have. Consequently, she believed their future employment opportunities would be numerous.

Why Choose French Immersion Programming

Jessica's Story

I am living my dream right now.

At the age of 17, shortly after her high school graduation, Jessica moved to Saskatoon. She held various jobs and obtained a diploma in Automated Business Technology from CDI College and, in the fall of 1997 when she was 21, she began a degree in computer science at the University of Saskatchewan. She met Troy in November of 1997 and recalled it was "love at first sight. University ceased to be a priority for her and she explained, "I stopped going to class because I was more interested in [being] with him" (Recorded Conversation, November 26, 2014).

When the couple met, Troy was working at MacLean Lake in Northern Saskatchewan as a

security guard. His schedule was one week in and one week out which meant he worked up north for a week and returned home for a week. They wanted to get married and have children, but Jessica stated to him “I’m not raising kids with you gone every week” (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014). This prompted Troy’s decision to seek a post-secondary education. To help support them, Jessica worked three jobs. She explained:

By this point, we’d already been together for two years. But we knew we were going to be together for life and we knew that we wanted to be married. Another reason, too, why we took the two-year [diploma route] is we didn’t want to delay [getting married] even more. So we just took the two years. I worked three jobs, kept him in school, then we got married, and a year later I was pregnant with Mackenzie. (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014)

Being a wife and mother was extremely important to Jessica. When we talked about her career ambitions, she stated, “I technically don’t have dreams, because my dreams are already here. I’m a wife and mother. Professionally....I’m just kind of trying classes to see what I like. I would never change [my decision to leave school]. I’m happy [I didn’t finish school]...I don’t wanna be having kids at 30” (Recorded Conversation, November 26, 2014).

Although Jessica is living her dream, she would like to find a career that is more satisfying. As a result, she regularly takes on-line courses through Athabasca University. Working in an unfulfilling

job is not easy for her. During our first conversation, while discussing my decision to pursue a Master's degree, she stated, "I envy you... You have found something that you love so much" (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014). She wants this for herself too. Although I can hear the longing in her voice, she has chosen to prioritize the needs of her family. Jessica's mother, aware of her daughter's discontent at work, has reminded her, "I know you are not totally happy in your job, but it's getting you through because right now your investment is in your children... Your time will come" (Recorded Communication, April 16, 2014).

Jessica's dreams were to have a husband and family. In many ways she is following in her mother's footsteps. When I mentioned this, she laughed and said, "Don't tell my mother that, because that'll just be one more thing to which she can say, 'I told you so!' and, 'You're so much like me!'" (Recorded Conversation, November 26, 2014). We discussed the fact that children seldom want to become their parents when they grow up but, sometimes, the choices our parents made in the past are also the ones that are right for us.

Answering a father's questions.

Jessica's father did not, initially, understand the couple's decision to enroll their children in French Immersion programming. Jessica repeated the conversation she had with her father to me:

Jessica: When.... Mackenzie started Kindergarten, my father asked me why. He said,

“Punkie, why are you putting them in French Immersion?” I said, “Dad, haven’t you always taught me that you want to do for your own kids better than what you had?” He said, “Yeah,” and I said, “Well, I did take French but how much do I speak it?” He said, “None.” I said, “Exactly and furthermore...my kids are already... Treaty, Dad. What would that do for them in this country?” He said, “A hell of a lot!” I said, “Exactly. If I can give them a second language as well, on top of that, I just think it’s a smart thing to do.” And he agreed with me. He said, “Well, yah, of course you’re right.” (Recorded Conversation April 16, 2014).

In Canada, having treaty status, in addition to speaking both of Canada’s official languages, will give Mark and Mackenzie an advantage when they move into their respective careers later in life. Jessica’s reasoning is sound. Sixty percent of parents who were surveyed cited increased job opportunities as a contributing factor in choosing French Immersion education for their children (Herry-Saint-Onge, 2012).

Establishing the Context for Troy’s Story

As a non-Aboriginal person entering the First Nations literature, it did not take long for me to grasp that I had arrived in a bewildering maze of vocabulary. In search of politically correct and appropriate terminology to use in my research, I turned to a First Nations blogger named âpihtawikosisân. This particular blogger is a Métis teacher and lawyer from the Plains Cree speaking

community of Lac. Ste. Anne, Alberta, now living in Montreal. Unless otherwise noted, all definitions and explanations come directly from her blog âpihtawikosisân (n.d.)

Âpihtawikosisân details the often-confusing definitions associated with Aboriginal peoples. The term *Native* does not have a legal connotation. *Status* refers specifically to those Natives who are under the federal jurisdiction of the *Constitution Act* of 1867, section 91(24). Status is a legal term that first appeared in the Indian Act of 1876. This particular Act has often been updated and revised. Only Native people who meet the definition under the *Indian Act* can be called Status Indians. Although the term *Indian* is both outdated and insensitive, it is also a legislative or legal term.

In Canada, the term *Aboriginal* refers to the Indian, Inuit, and Métis people. It first appeared in the *Constitution Act* 1982, Section 35(2). This is a legal term that is Canada-specific. The term *Indigenous* refers to Aboriginals who first inhabited the land before the arrival of the Europeans, but the term Indigenous does not have the same national or legal connotations. Being Aboriginal or Indigenous does not qualify a Native for Status. Those Indians, as outlined in the Indian Act, are the only Natives who can only hold status.

Status Indians are persons who, under the *Indian Act*, meet the requirements to be registered as Indians. All entitled Indians have their names on the Indian roll, which is under the jurisdiction of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development (formerly Indian and Northern Affairs). If a Native has Status, s/he can gain access to certain programs and services that are unavailable to other Aboriginal

people. As mentioned earlier, the Indian Act has undergone many updates and revisions, which have complicated the ability of an individual to gain or retain Status as an Indian.

Jessica refers to Mackenzie and Mark as being Treaty. According to Statistics Canada (2009, April 20), “Treaty Indians are persons who belong to a First Nation or Indian band that signed a treaty with the Crown. Registered or Treaty Indians are sometimes also called Status Indians.”

The definition of a *First Nation* or *Indian Band* is as follows:

This refers to whether a person reported membership in a First Nation or Indian band. A band is defined as a body of Indians for whose collective use and benefit lands have been set apart or money is held by the Crown, or who have been declared to be a band for the purpose of the *Indian Act*. Many Indian bands have elected to call themselves a First Nation and have changed their band name to reflect this. With the 1985 amendment to the *Indian Act* of Canada (Bill C-31), many Indian bands exercised the right to establish their own membership code, whereby it was not always necessary for a band member to be a Registered Indian according to the *Indian Act* (Statistics Canada, 2009, April 20).

For the purpose of my research I will use the term First Nations and Aboriginal interchangeably. Given my study of terminology, I am aware of the issues around these terms and I intend to use them respectfully.

Delving deeper into the backdrop of Troy’s story.

The Aboriginal people of Canada.

As a Dené man, Troy belongs to one of the five official language groups of First Nations in Saskatchewan. The other linguistic groups are Cree, Dakota, (Chipewyan), Nakota (Assiniboine) and Saulteau (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, n.d., para. 1). The arrival of the Europeans had a devastating effect on these societies, which had been self-sufficient for approximately 11,000 years (Stonechild, B., n.d., para. 1). From 1670-1905, First Nations people endured devastating epidemics, depletion of wildlife resources, and government policies intended to destroy their identity and rights (Stonechild, B., n.d., para. 1).

In addition, First Nations peoples were coerced into adopting a culture of Christianity that eventually led to the creation of residential schools system in 1883. The Roman Catholic Church operated sixty percent of residential schools (Canadian Press, 2012, June 2, para. 18). In examining Troy's ancestry, it is important to note that both his great grandmothers married European settlers and lived off the reserve. As a result, both of his parents also lived off reserve (Personal Conversation, August 12, 2015). Although none of Troy's immediate family attended residential schools, his parents were devout Catholics and this faith was a large part of Troy's upbringing.

The Indian Act.

The Indian Act of 1876 was initially created with the purpose of strengthening colonial objectives. The primary objective of this Act was to force First Nations peoples into abandoning their

traditional way of life and assimilating into Euro-Canadian society (Henderson, W.B., 2015, May 25, para.1). Under the Indian Act, an Indian Reservation was a designated piece of land that was set aside for the exclusive use of the Indian Band (Hanson, E n.d., para. 2). Aboriginal elders who signed Treaty agreements, which placed their people on reserves, for a number of reasons, sometimes did not fully understand the significance of the Treaty. In some cases, such as the James Bay Treaty Agreement, officials intentionally misled Aboriginal elders as to the content of the Treaty agreement (Wiens, M., June 27, 2014). In other instances, when it was discovered that designated reserves were situated on fertile soil or resource rich land, inhabitants were forced to move to less desirable locations (Truth and Reconciliation, p. 1).

Over the years, the Indian Act has been amended numerous times in an attempt to move towards a goal of establishing a relationship based on mutual respect and acceptance of each other's cultural beliefs (Henderson, W.B. 2015, May 25, para. 1). Regrettably, as Cooper (2014) suggested, racism runs so deep within our Canadian society it has become "part of our DNA" (January 9, 2013) and there is still a great deal to accomplish in creating these relationships.

It is not surprising that Troy, whom Jessica describes as mainstream and hard working, faces racism in his everyday life (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014). Jessica fears her children will also experience this injustice. "[I worry] about Eric. He's more brown, like his dad" (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014). Her concerns are valid. It took hundreds of years to recognize and

acknowledge the injustice committed against the Aboriginal population and changing society's perspective will take a great deal of time.

Residential schools: A brief history.

As detailed in *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling the Future: Summary of the Final Report on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC)* of 2015, the Aboriginal people of Canada were viewed as culturally inferior and, thus, destruction of the Aboriginal way of life became a priority (p. 2). In 1883, the first residential schools opened in Canada. These church-run, government funded schools had a conscious policy of cultural genocide. The objective was not only to break and destroy children's cultural identity but also to fracture the parent-child bond. In 1883, Sir John A. MacDonald, Canada's first Prime Minister said, "When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents...he [is] simply a savage who can read and write. Indian children should be withdrawn...where they will acquire the habits and modes of thoughts of... white men" (TRC, 2015, p. 3). It is evident from our country's leader at the time that Aboriginal people and their culture were seen as inferior to that of the Euro-Canadian.

Between the years 1930-1980, approximately 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit went through the residential school system. The students who attended these schools were between the ages of 4 and 16. They attended school for a ten-month period and sometimes year round. The children learned academics and prayer, and performed duties to upkeep the school. Away from their families,

separated from siblings, denied their language, and their cultural ways of living, the residential school system “created situations where children fell prey to sexual and physical abuse” (TRC, 2015, p. 3).

Boyden (2013) wrote, “Institutionalized child abuse, not just allowed but encouraged for over 120 years, ...[is a] a festering sociological, psychological, and very human crisis residing in the heart of the nation. And the ramifications? Systemic abuse, even when it physically comes to an end, is going to reverberate” (para. 19). Schwartz, (2015) also pointed to the dangers of living in residential schools. There were over 6000 documented deaths of students who attended residential schools—a death rate that was equivalent to those in the Canadian Armed Forces personnel who fought in World War Two (para. 3).

The Roman Catholic Church operated sixty-percent of the 139 residential schools that existed in Canada. Twenty of these schools were in Saskatchewan. The last school closed its doors in 1996 outside Regina, Saskatchewan (Canadian Press, 2012, June2, para. 18).

Troy: The White Road.

In the 1900s, both of Troy’s great grandmothers married European settlers (Personal Conversation, August 12, 2015). At the time, First Nations women who married non-Aboriginal men automatically lost their Indian and Treaty Status. Aboriginal men who married non-Aboriginal, however, still kept their rights. This injustice was rectified in 1985 with Bill C-31, an Amendment to the Indian Act, which was specifically intended was to remove this discriminating policy. In 1987,

even though both of Troy's parents had grown up off reserve, his mother and father were respectively assigned to the Black Lake and Fond du Lac Reserves.

With respect to residential schools, neither of Troy's grandparents or parents attended these schools. Officers however did attempt to apprehend his mother. There is an audible tone of pride when Troy tells his mother's story and how she, along with other children, were hidden from the officers who came to collect them. His voice falters when he recounts his uncle's story.

They [got] my uncle though. But what they did to him was [when] he turned to talk to one of his cousins...the priest or teacher, or whatever they were, took their encyclopedia and hit him in the back of the head. He got knocked unconscious and, when he came to, he had permanent brain damage. (Recorded conversation, May 23, 2014)

Hearing this story and reading about other residential school survivors, I wondered, 'How can Troy, who possesses rich knowledge of his own Aboriginal history, be so tolerant?' In searching for answers, I found it important to consider Troy's history.

Troy represents the fourth generation of his family who has not lived on reserve. It speaks to why he does not embrace First Nations culture and traditions and follows a more mainstream path. In her conversation with Red, Pushor (in press) tells the story of Red, a First Nation's gentleman who speaks about his decision to consciously follow the "Red Road" or embrace his "Indian-ness." For example, Red spoke of the Sweatlodge, smudging, the use traditional medicines, and looking to Elders

for guidance. This is not Troy's story. Walking the "White Road" is a path that began well over 100 years ago from a "coherent policy to eliminate Aboriginal people as distinct peoples and to assimilate them into the Canadian mainstream" (TRC, 2015, p. 2). This policy, considered along the discriminatory manner in which First Nations women were historically treated, speaks to Troy's "mainstream-ness" or his likelihood of following the White Road.

There is, however, a sad irony that arises in walking the White Road because racism is still part of Troy's reality. Such racism is a direct reflection of Cooper's (2014) statement that racism towards Aboriginal peoples has become part of our Canadian DNA (January 9, 2013). Following the White Road does not make racism disappear. The answer to eradicating this part of our DNA is in acknowledging, accepting, and making amends for the damage done to Aboriginal cultures.

Truth and Reconciliation: A journey of acknowledgement and healing.

Recognizing the damage inflicted by Residential Schools, The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) of 2007 established a multi-billion dollar fund to assist survivors. Arising from the IRSSA was the call for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The six-year study was released in the spring of 2015 with 94 Recommendations (Schwartz, D. 2013, June 2, para. 21).

In their broadest sense, and most relevant to this research, the TRC Recommendations speak to the heart of the cultural genocide that took place for 125 years within the Residential School system.

The recommendations address the need for Aboriginal parents and community to have a voice in the education of their child. They call for the preservation of Aboriginal languages and the development of culturally appropriate education programs for Aboriginal children. The TRC Recommendations invite Aboriginal parent knowledge and funds of knowledge into our classrooms, our schools, and our communities so that all children, not just Aboriginal children, value Indigenous cultures. In doing so, the recommendations call for a web caring that is woven with care and compassion. It is a web whose strands resonate with true acceptance, mutual respect, and understanding for all individuals regardless of race, creed, or culture.

Troy's Story

The reality of discrimination.

I have come to know Troy as a hardworking, loving father and husband. Before our conversations, I had not had the opportunity to have in depth conversations with him. I have learned that Troy is very intelligent, well read, and very funny. I have often laughed deeply when he has used his deadpan sense of humour.

Too often, the first thing people see when they look at Troy is the colour of his skin. This means that Troy experiences discrimination and racism on a regular basis. In describing her husband's experiences and how he handles himself, Jessica said:

He's very secure in his own skin. He has to be because he's always been the minority.

He's always been looked down as the minority. [For example] ...still to this day, [Troy] will say he can always pick out the store people who follow us in the store because he's brown. [They are] watching him to make sure he's not shoplifting, even though he's with a white wife. You think that would stop, but it hasn't. So he is very strong in his convictions. (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014)

Jessica worries about what this discrimination means for her children, especially her son, Mark, who looks more like his father. "Mackenzie looks more white than anything so they wouldn't even think to follow her around...Mark, he's more brown like his dad," she said in a matter of fact voice.

The discrimination towards her husband angers Jessica tremendously. Jessica sees the man Troy *is* and the fact that so many people cannot infuriates her. She says:

To me, [you] can't get more mainstream than him! Frick, he works hard, he put himself through school, we raise a family together....It just boggles my mind that we're still having to [deal with this]... I just don't understand why we still have this prejudice and the racism against – just because you're Aboriginal. What does that mean? He has darker skin! Big deal! There's good and bad in every race so I don't understand why in this day and age there's so much talk about racism. (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014)

As I noted the tears in Jessica's eyes, I began to grasp the extent of her pain. Intellectually, I comprehend the injustice of racism in our society. Yet, witnessing Jessica's tears brought me closer

than ever before to understanding how First Nations people must *live* with the shadow of inequity that can permeate their lives. Far too often, it does not matter that Troy is, as Jessica describes, “mainstream,” or that he works hard and does not fit into the stereotype of the “typical Aboriginal” that society has ignorantly adopted. Even the most elite First Nations individuals in Canada must endure this prevailing attitude of racism.

Turpel Lafond — a Harvard-educated judge from Saskatchewan who is Cree — and her husband George Lafond, a treaty commissioner in Saskatchewan, are arguably at the top of Canada’s meritocracy, and look the part. But even they face racism. “It is painful, I bear witness,” she says. “We see the situation where we’ve gone to the pharmacy and my husband buys mouthwash and they’ve made the point to him, ‘*Please don’t drink it.*’ It’s the reminder that this is how we see your family; this is how we see your children.

(Cooper, 2014)

This example clearly demonstrates that even the most prominent members of society cannot escape the legacy of racism. Cooper (2014) argues that this racism runs so deep within our Canadian society it has become “part of our DNA” (January 9, 2013). Troy knows, even more than Jessica, the reality of the world we live in and the hurdles that must be eradicated from our society. Troy explained that when he worked with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) there was a great deal of discussion on how to end racism:

How do we get more involved in the community so people will understand our culture and what's going on? The one thing they keep talking about is all that mainstream society in Saskatchewan sees are the drunks walking down 20th or all the things that are happening like the armed robberies and the descriptions of them are Aboriginal kids or people. That's all you think about. So when you think of an Aboriginal person you never think of education or – or that they're working or that they're contributing to society. They're free loaders and get tax-free. [Society] doesn't even know what a Treaty card is or what it does. (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014)

Troy is a Dené man who works hard. He knows many First Nations who are like him but still the stereotype remains. Understandably, Troy is frustrated by the misrepresentation of First Nations individuals in society.

Talking to Troy about his experiences as a First Nations man was complicated, however. Again, I assumed he was outraged, or at the very least highly irritated, by discrimination. What I learned, however, is that Troy has what he calls a “tough skin,” a fact he attributed to having older brothers:

I have older brothers that are a bunch of assholes; they were so mean to me growing up...Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny and all that stuff? I have no memory of them ever being real...So from the very beginning, I've always known that. And they picked on me, and they fought with me, and they wrestled me, and everything you could think of. And

growing up with that? So whenever something happens to me outside my family unit, it's not a big deal. (Recorded conversation, November 26, 2014)

It appeared that Troy has made sense of the outside world, and any injustices he has previously encountered, by comparing these to the experiences he endured with his brothers on the home landscape. It is an example of Troy's positive outlook and exemplifies that, as a First Nations individual, racism does not have to become an all-consuming part of who you are as an individual.

A story of resilience.

The Government of Ontario (n.d.) states that resilience is the ability to steer through life challenges and to find ways to bounce back and thrive (p. 2). There are many factors that contribute to resilience, but Troy's life displays a myriad of qualities that merged to shape him into the person he is today. I have chosen some circumstances that we discussed during our conversations that I found to be particularly informative. They are, by no means, intended to be representative of all the reasons Troy demonstrates the qualities of resilience. Painting this picture of Troy is intended to provide greater context regarding the choices the couple made for their children with respect to their selection of Catholic French Immersion schooling.

It always works out.

Troy has a diploma in Sports and Leisure from Saskatchewan Polytechnic, Kelsey Campus in

Saskatoon, and currently works as a Community Development Consultant for Sask Sport, a job, as I noted earlier, that he rates as a “ten out of ten” for job satisfaction. His job entails helping children from less advantaged neighbourhoods to engage in sports or activities in which they would not normally be able to participate:

What we've done is we went into certain core neighbourhoods and collaborated with...[schools] and the local municipalities... We put in a person – a Dream Broker. And what they do is they connect with the kids and families and [we] find funding for them [to participate]...We operate out of 22 schools right now, and we have 13 Dream Brokers spread across five different regions: Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, Yorkton, and North Battleford. (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014).

Previously, he had been a long-term employee of the City of Saskatoon as a Recreation Programmer. He left this job for FSIN, but he grew very unhappy with the politics and decided to leave before he was able to secure another job. He had been unemployed a few months when the current job opportunity revealed itself. Unlike Jessica, Troy was very relaxed about his employment opportunities. This ease has a great deal to do with his positive outlook on life. Troy explained how he came to work for Sask Sport:

Troy: A lady I know works for Saskatchewan Sport...she was trying to get me to come over and work for her... She knew I wasn't happy at [FSIN] because of all the politics and

everything like that, and she knew I was going to leave. I left before she even had a position ready for me, so she was just kind-of scrambling trying to figure out something.

Then... somebody resigned so she told me to come on over!

Jessica: He has horseshoes.

Troy: What do I always say?

Jessica: It always works out. And I used to fight him tooth and nail ...because I'm stressed all the time and I worry about things and blah blah blah, and you know, when you turn into your mother? You never want to admit it because your mother will say, 'I told you so', – you do the same thing with your husband. I do not admit to him, but he's always right. It always works out. So I need to learn not to stress.

Troy: We're good people. It'll work out. Things will be fine. What's the worst that could happen?

Jessica: We eat mac and cheese and bologna! We lose our house! Sell a vehicle or two!

Troy: That's okay. That's just stuff.

Jessica: See, but that's the way he thinks. It's just stuff.

Troy: I love having stuff – don't get me wrong. (Recorded Conversation, November 26, 2014)

Troy's optimism is a quality to which Jessica has made reference numerous times over our conversations. It is a large factor in who he is as a man.

A different reality.

Until Troy was nine years old, he lived in the isolated northern town of Uranium City, Saskatchewan.

Uranium City...accessible only by air and the winter road, it was...very much the frontier, with an intense feeling of community born of isolation and pride in its uniqueness. Summers and winters were spent outdoors, and stepping into the country one felt hundreds, even thousands, of miles of uninhabited territory out beyond the town; at night the Northern Lights crackled overhead like bands of phosphorous. (Becket, n.d.)

Troy enjoyed his life there and he shared that his favourite memory is of sliding down the huge hills in the winter. He also played in the surrounding forests, went fishing, and built forts in the summer.

He remembers how he felt moving to the big city of Saskatoon, "It was exciting. It was a huge change," he said (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014). Unknown to him, he had been, until that point in his life, living in the protective bubble of this remote community (Recorded Conversation, November 26, 2014).

I always tell people that when we moved [to Saskatoon], I didn't realize there was a difference between cultures. Because, where I was from, it was never brought up. And you would notice that people are Chinese or black because they were, but you never thought of it. (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014)

This tolerance and acceptance was something Troy did not, at the time, even think to question. I asked him about the two differing worlds of Uranium City and Saskatoon and he said:

When I came here and... [my race] was almost thrown in my face. There was a lot of discrimination. Right away I heard the term “dirty Indian.” Never heard that before.

Didn't know what it meant. (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014)

School was not the safe haven one would have expected it to be. Troy explained that no one at the school came to his defense:

The teachers...they wouldn't do anything. So I just kept quiet. I just took it. So I went through elementary and high school, and I just took it. And I didn't say anything. There was nobody who would help. I went through high school being the only one...no there was one [other] Aboriginal person in high school at St. Jude's where I went. So we're the only two in the whole school. (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014)

For Troy, teachers, staff, and administration did nothing. He had to depend on himself and his past experiences to discount the words and actions of others. Dwelling on these factors is not something that is in Troy's nature.

Quiet, but thundering optimism.

John Wooden, UCLA basketball coach stated, “The more concerned we become over the things

we can't control, the less we will do with the things we can control" (Hallmark, p. 107). Troy is a solid example of Wooden's statement. In his quiet, matter-of-fact voice he recounted his schooling experience as a First Nations person and the racism he experienced, "I went through elementary and high school, and I just took it," but he spoke assuredly, "As I went through [school], I was fine" (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014). Troy is "secure in his skin" as his wife pointed out and while, at times, people may call him names, follow him around when he is shopping, or women may pull their purses in more tightly as he passes them on the sidewalk (Recorded Conversation May 23, 2014), he remains optimistic even through the most unfortunate events that unfold in his life. As Jessica said:

He will make a comment – and I've always known this about him – about something being negative but [in] the very next breath he is able... he can completely turn it around and say, "This is the worst thing that has ever happened to me! But, on the bright side, I did this, this, and this. It created [an opportunity] so that I could do this, this, and this." He is so positive, it's unbelievable. (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014)

During our second conversation, Troy explained that worrying is not in his character. "It doesn't help to dwell on things that aren't working out. I'd rather just move on" (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014).

Although Troy was unprepared for the racism of his world in Saskatoon, he did not allow this

injustice to define who he was. When he left Uranium City, he understood that he was never going back. He talked to me about leaving his home. He shared, “I left a hand axe in the tree the day we left. Yeah, I remember just sticking it there” (Recorded Conversation, November 26, 2014). The hand axe likely remained in that tree long after Troy left Uranium city. For me, it is a symbol of self-knowledge or a permanence of self that Troy did not surrender once he came to Saskatoon. He was a young boy who, until coming to the city, was unaware of racial discrimination. Although he was unprepared for the discriminatory attitudes he encountered, he was adequately armed with fortitude of self. It is readily apparent that it is simply not in Troy’s character to have a *poor me* approach to life.

Sports.

What did Troy do to try and negate the damaging remarks and racism of others? Troy responded, “I think it was because of my involvement in sports. Team [sports], team games all that kind of stuff. So then they got to know me. They got to know who I was and it helped. If I didn’t do [sports], I think high school would have been hell” (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014). The importance of sport in Troy’s life cannot be downplayed. O’Dougherty Wright & Masten (2013) cite sports as one of the key factors in the successful resilience of youth who are faced with adversity (p. 21). In Troy’s case, sports provided teammates, as well as classmates, with the opportunity to consider Troy in a different light.

I hope my children grow up to be: The opportunity of a second language.

During our first conversation, I asked Jessica about her hopes and dreams for her children. “Oh sure, make me cry,” she laughed. Then she explained, “I want them to be self-sufficient. I want them to be their own thinkers. I want them to be secure in their own skin, and I want them to succeed in whatever they choose to do” (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014). She feels French Immersion will help her children achieve some of these objectives. Troy nodded in agreement when Jessica explained:

I do think that..... [French Immersion kids] know how to use their minds more to switch between the two languages so then possibly...post-secondary might be easier for them because they've already had to learn something difficult all the way through. They know how to tackle it. (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014)

Jessica also did her homework before selecting French Immersion for Mackenzie and Mark. When we began to discuss some of the advantages the program has to offer, she stated, “Oh yeah, I read all those [studies] long before I decided to put my kids into French Immersion” (Recorded Conversation, November 26, 2014).

Ideally, the couple would like their children to take full advantage of the opportunities they are providing for them. Jessica revealed, “I’m hoping that it’s going to give them the big paying jobs. Like ... the high paying \$400,000 a year jobs if they choose that path. Now, if they don’t choose that

path, it's all for not" (Recorded Conversation, November 26, 2014). Jessica brought up a substantial issue - *if* they choose that path. The couple will let their children choose their own paths in life, with one exception: They must acquire some kind of postsecondary education. While the Larocques do not feel the need to pressure their children to go to university, the acquisition of a post-secondary education has been firmly entrenched in their parenting philosophy and within their daily interactions with Mackenzie and Mark. Jessica stated:

I may not force university on them, but I will force them to do some sort of [post] secondary schooling. We always encourage them to excel in what they have interests in. For example, Mark loves to build so we are always encouraging him to use his Lego or building blocks to create. He excels in math and sciences so, when he does, we applaud him for his work. In general conversation, [we] talk about what opportunities he can do with it. Mackenzie is more the artistic type - loves to read, draw and paint – so again, we talk about using those talents to make a job out of it (Personal Conversation, February 1, 2015).

Informing Mark and Mackenzie about the various opportunities available to them, based on their own unique talents and interests, not only encourages their children to consider careers in which they already have a natural aptitude but it reinforces parent expectations of postsecondary education.

French Immersion provides opportunities and, in combination with their Treaty Status, these

opportunities become even more numerous. Troy explained:

Well... a lot of employers, they're looking for diversity in their work force. And when they have people, even myself, even though I don't speak French, it's one of the first things, when I first come in, my first day on the job, they're asking me all kinds of questions from an Aboriginal person's perspective. So they see it as an advantage to have somebody like that working for them, and they seem to value them, and they seem to want to hang on to them if they're a good worker. (Recorded Conversation, November 26, 2014)

There are many reasons diversity is seen as valuable to an organization. Hrcouncil.ca (n.d.) stated when organizations consciously work towards increasing the diversity of employees they are attracting a new audience. McIsaac and Moody (February 2014) specified that organizations, some of which are practicing diverse hiring practices, seek to create a workplace that is "sensitive to the inclusion of diverse peoples, [includes] diverse views in decision-making and [a] respect for difference" (p. 13). It is not surprising then that Troy's First Nations status is seen as desirable by the organizations in which he has been employed.

Why the Choice of Catholic Education?

In terms of identifying with faith, Jessica belongs to the United Church but she no longer attends services. Enrolling the children in a Catholic school was Troy's decision. Since Troy has lived in Saskatoon from the age of nine, while she had moved here after high school, Jessica felt Troy had

more knowledge of the school divisions in Saskatoon. When Jessica mentioned to Troy that there was a choice between Catholic and Public schools, Troy said, “I would prefer them in Catholic because I’m Catholic and that’s what I went through.” (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014). Jessica completely left that decision up to him.

Troy’s Story

Familiarity.

The pull of familiarity is both common and universal. Familiarity is an important factor in why people make decisions. Troy’s parents were devout Roman Catholics and Troy attended a Catholic elementary and high school. He explained that he did not particularly enjoy the experience of being Catholic:

Growing up, I went to every single church thing that was going on. Whatever was happening – some kind of event like Easter, Ash Wednesday, and all that other stuff. We said the rosary every single day as a family and I won’t ever do that to my kids. I hated it.

(Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014)

The decision to put his children in Catholic school had a great deal to do with the fact that neither he nor Jessica had the intention to teach the children about the Catholic religion, yet it was something to which Troy felt they should be exposed:

Like the only reason we put them in was because I knew I wasn't going to put Catholicism on them. But I wanted them to at least have some exposure to it so they understood what it was and they could decide on their own what they believe. Like I have my own beliefs and I'm not a staunch Catholic. Uhm...I'm more of a – let me think – what is that? You believe in God. I went through the Catholic system.... I just take from it what I think really works and I don't totally believe in the papacy in Rome. I could go on about that. I just think it's a gong show. I....tell my kids these things, just in little snippets, just so they understand what the Bible is. [That] there are some good things in it. I tell them they're just stories. They're going to help you make sure that you can make the right decisions. And some people need the spirituality of it – I don't. They're just stories. They're made up by a bunch of old Catholics way back when...That's just my own opinion and ... and I've told [my children], "When you go through the school system," I said, "you can challenge the teachers on what they're saying. Ask questions." That's what I did (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014).

It is important to Troy that the children learn right from wrong and that they understand, should they need it, that the Bible can help guide decisions. Besides exposing his children to formal Catholic doctrine, he encourages Mackenzie and Mark to ask questions and respectfully challenge issues with which they do not agree. He feels this will help them to make informed choices in life.

Troy's mother: Residential schooling.

When Troy recounted his mother's story, I was both fascinated by her experience and saddened by the decisions made by governing bodies who managed to devastate entire families and, at the same time, forbid the practice of so many First Nations' customs and traditions and the speaking of their native languages. As stated in Legacy of Hope Foundation (March, 2014), between 1831 and 1996 there were 139 residential schools in Canada:

For over a century . . . Aboriginal children in Canada were taken from their homes and communities, and were placed in institutions called residential schools. These schools were run by religious orders in collaboration with the federal government and were attended by children as young as four years of age. Separated from their families and prohibited from speaking their native languages and practicing their culture, the vast majority of the over 150,000 children who attended these schools experienced neglect and suffering. The impacts of the sexual, mental, and physical abuse, shame, and deprivation endured at Indian Residential Schools continue to affect generations of Survivors, their families, and communities today. It is estimated that 80,000 Survivors of residential schools are alive today (pp. 2-3).

Troy's mother, unlike so many First Nations children, had the good fortune of escaping the residential school experience. The community hid her, and many other children, in the dense forest. Her

remarkable story was told to me by Troy:

She was in Grade 3 - I think it was Grade 3 and that's when [the officers from the residential schools]...focused on that village and.... half the kids were getting taken of a certain age for some reason. I think it was Grades Kindergarten to Grade 4. And they were taking all those kids. So [they] got taken. And right away [they were] getting abused. Getting hit, getting hurt and so... when they came to get all the kids half the town's [children were] gone. And nobody [in the community] would say anything. They actually hid them. They took them for about two months and these officers kept coming...but nobody would say anything. So....eventually they gave up and kind of left them alone. They [got] my uncle though. But what they did to him was [when] he turned to talk to one of his cousins...the priest or teacher, or whatever they were, took their encyclopedia and hit him in the back of the head. He got knocked unconscious and, when he came to, he had permanent brain damage. (Recorded conversation, May 23, 2014)

In reflecting upon my research question, Why choose Catholic Education for my child? It does not escape me that these residential schools were primarily run by the Catholic priests and nuns. Although Troy's mother escaped the horrors of the experience, like many First Nations individuals, she was raised Catholic and she married a devout Catholic.

Sanche (n.d.) stated that the prevalence of Catholicism amongst First Nations people in

Saskatchewan has a long history. It was the faith practiced by the early French explorers and fur traders. Missions, to serve the Métis and Native peoples, were also established by the French Oblates of Mary Immaculate in 1846. Catholicism continued to thrive when, over subsequent decades, Oblates and religious women arrived in Saskatchewan to establish churches, schools, and hospitals. Catholic schools were also established during this time period and, in 1905, Catholic education rights were established in the Saskatchewan Act of 1905. In the 1800s and 1900s, Catholic settlers from Quebec, Ontario, the Maritimes, and Europe made their new homes in Saskatchewan. The long history of Catholicism within the province, and the fact that it focused on First Nations and Métis individuals meant that many First Nations individuals have deep roots in the Catholic faith.

Jessica's Story

An opportunity: Well-rounded thinkers who do what is right for themselves.

Jessica had, on occasion, attended Ukrainian Catholic with her grandparents but she did not have experience with the Catholic system of education. Exposing her children to the Catholic stream of education has invited them to become well-rounded thinkers:

I baptized them United like myself, instead of Catholic. However, we put them in the Catholic system because I wanted them to learn about a different religion, knowing full well that I would never be the one taking them to church. And this way, they can now have

it so they can make up their own minds. (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014)

It was important to Jessica that her children are provided with as many opportunities as possible and, for her, Catholic education was an opportunity that could help in their development.

Okay, I'll give up chocolate.

Jessica finds that she is learning about Catholicism off the school landscape, with her children at home. She is willing to travel with them in their learning journey:

Mostly they actually teach me. [Such as] when all the holidays are happening and when the school does their assemblies in the gym and they do the four candles before Christmas and Lent and they do all this stuff – the religious stuff. They teach me what it's all about.

(Laughter) I ask them about it too. For example, Mackenzie this year came home at Lent and asked me, “What are we going to give up for Lent?” I said, “You're in Grade 5 and you've never done that before.” She said, “I know, but I decided this year I'm going to try.” I said, “Okay. So what are we going to do?” She said, “I'm going to give up [using my] Kobo [to read and hardcover books].” I said, “Okay, I'll give up chocolate.”

(Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014).

This statement demonstrates Jessica's dedication to her children's desire to explore Catholicism.

Although the pair did not stick to their Lenten promise for the entire forty days, Jessica saw

Mackenzie's desire to *try* as a positive indication that her children are open to exploring new possibilities. She explained:

It only lasted like a week and then we both caved. But at least she thought about it in that sense because she came home from school that day and, of course it was talked about in general assembly type thing, so she decided to try it. And that's the whole reason why we put them [in a Catholic school] – because [we] want them to make up their own mind and...make their own decisions. (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014)

For Jessica, the choice of Catholic education invites Mackenzie and Mark to consider and explore new ideas. In doing so, she feels they are learning and able to make decisions that best reflect who they are as individuals. She already sees evidence of the Catholic teachings, working in chorus with who Jessica and Troy are parents. Their schooling enhances their children's development and enhances their ability to make appropriate choices. Jessica explained her thoughts:

I can already see that they have some of those characteristics in them. In terms of [being] secure in their own skin or [being able to] think for themselves. [For example] when Kenzie talks about a couple of girls in their class being mean to other girls, or asking her to do something that she really doesn't care to do..., she just tells them, "No, I don't want to do that," and she goes off and finds somebody else to talk to. I say they're like their dad, they have his security, and they have his strength. I think everything that they are learning

in combination [with] the general [religion classes] and assemblies...the learning [of a] second language, that gives them confidence. They probably don't realize it yet but it does build confidence because they can speak two languages. To me, that's huge. That I can't do. (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014)

Why the Choice of this Particular School

Word of Mouth

Troy and Jessica chose this particular school for their children based on the recommendation of Jessica's best friend:

[My friend] just told me so much about the school. How much she enjoyed it and loved it, that Troy and I decided to take her up on her reviews and we wanted the kids to go there. [She spoke about] how the French Immersion school and the Catholic system [work] and how... well rounded an education that children get. And that it opens up their minds and makes them think for themselves. (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014).

Word of mouth is likely one of the most significant influences for parents when choosing a school for their children. For this family, the school was so highly recommended they actually purchased a home in the area so their children could attend that specific school. In addition, observing their friend's child, who was a few years older than Mackenzie, doing well in French Immersion programming was a strong influence on their decision-making process.

Catholic Education: Opportunity

When considering the reasons why the Laroques selected the Catholic stream of education for their school-aged children, several explanations can be rendered. Familiarity with the Catholic stream of education is a dominant theme. Since Troy had been schooled in Catholic schools in Saskatoon, when Jessica inquired as to his preference for the Catholic or non-Catholic streams of education he said, “I would prefer them to be in the Catholic....because that’s what I went through” (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014).

A desire to expose their children to formal religious doctrine was another key factor. Although Troy was raised in a Catholic home where faith was a dominant part of the family, he has no desire to repeat this experience with his own children. “We said the rosary every single day...I won’t ever do that to my kids....I hate[d] it,” he declared (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014). Yet, he and his wife see Catholic education as an opportunity to expand their children’s learning opportunities. Part of the opportunity the Laroques see presented by Catholic education is for their children to challenge and ask questions when they are uncertain. “That’s what I did,” (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014) he said. Jessica spoke to Catholic French Immersion as providing a “well-rounded education” and that “it opens up [the children’s] minds and makes them think for themselves” (Recorded Conversation, April 16). Troy explained that “at this age they’re learning all their skills and their likes and dislike [and] we’ll just steer [them]” (Recorded Conversation, November 26, 2014). Troy recognized that he

would not formally participate or instruct his children in Catholicism because he has “his own beliefs” but he stated that he “wanted [the children] to at least have some exposure to [Catholicism] so they understand what it is and they can decide on their own what they believe” (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014). Therefore, the Laroques believe the choice of Catholic education, learned on the school landscape, enhances their children’s education as well as provides Mackenzie and Mark with a perspective that is not formally taught at home.

French Immersion: Opportunity

In their choice of French Immersion programming for their children is also unveiled the signature of opportunity. Like the choice of Catholic education, the Larocques consider French Immersion schooling as an educational opportunity. Jessica stated, “The more opportunity I can give them when they’re young, the more chance – hopefully...the more opportunities they’ll have when they’re older” (Recorded Conversation, November 26, 2014). Although the couple considered French Immersion viable for all children, Jessica did express that French Immersion children have an advantage over those children who are not in French Immersion “because they know how to switch between two languages” and high school and postsecondary “might be a bit easier for them because they’ve already had to learn something difficult all the way through [and] they know how to tackle it (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014). Her notion is supported by Stuart (n.d., para. 6) who stated, “Many large-scale studies, including the 2001 Canadian Modern Language Review, have proven that

French Immersion students perform just as well -- or better – in math, science and even English.” This statement brings to the forefront two meaningful comments made to me that informally support these studies. During my daughter Erica’s first year of university she mentioned that she was obtaining 70s in university as opposed to the 80s and 90s of high school days. She noted that the French Immersion students who were in her university classes were *still* getting the 80s and the 90s (Personal Conversation, December 2012). Second, Bruce, a high school physical education teacher attended a Kindergarten Information Night at École St. Paul the first year I was teaching at the school. He remarked that he was choosing French Immersion for his daughter because he had observed that French Immersion students in his high school, overall, tend to do better academically. (Personal Communication, January 2013). Granted, these were casual remarks, however, Erica and Bruce experientially assessed and interpreted the trend they observed in their own academic settings. Jessica’s beliefs that French Immersion students perform better academically in high school and in postsecondary education are supported by both formal and informal data.

Employment opportunity was also a key factor in choosing French Immersion for Mackenzie and Mark. Combined with the children’s Treaty Status, the couple anticipated that their children would have many more employment prospects than that of peers who do not possess these two significant qualities. Troy noted that employment of First Nations individuals is “a lot different from my Dad’s [experience] a generation ago...It wasn’t like that in the 60s and 70s” he remarked (Recorded

Conversation, November 26, 2014).

In contrast to his father's experiences, Troy stated that employers are now "looking for diversity in their work force." He referenced the fact that, "Even though I don't speak French...[employers are] asking me ...questions [about] an Aboriginal person's perspective. So they see it as an advantage to have somebody like that working for them, and they seem to value them" (Recorded Conversation, November 26, 2014). Troy has firsthand knowledge that First Nations individuals are highly desirable employees who have a great deal to offer employers. He anticipates that his children's Treaty Status, combined with their French skills, will greatly enhance their future marketability.

Capturing the Image of the Research Questions

As I place this painting on the easel, I reflect upon the various images before me. The Larocques are a family with a unique story from which we can learn a great deal. For this couple, the choice of Catholic French Immersion had to do with the opportunity to provide their children with as many experiences as possible. As a First Nations family, their story brings to the foreground the various opportunities the couple was hoping to achieve for their children by choosing Catholic French Immersion schooling for their children.

As I look to Troy's image on the canvas, at first I see him as a child, without a care in the world, playing in the forest of Uranium City. Next, I see him coming to live in the big city of

Saskatoon. He is full of anticipation. In the next moment, I feel the sting of racist words cast upon this young boy. I see teachers and other adults who fail to help. These images, however, are pushed to the background because more powerful images of Troy begin to govern the canvas. They are the images of optimism and resilience. “This is the worst thing that has ever happened to me! But, on the bright side, it created [an opportunity] so that I could do this, this, and this” (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014). Troy is, by all accounts, extremely positive and sees unfortunate incidences that unfold in his life as possibilities to learn and to grow. His attitude brings to mind the children’s book, *Beautiful Oops* by Barney Saltzberg (2010); it is an inspirational art book about making mistakes, and turning them into something beautiful. It reads, “When you think you have made a ~~mistake~~. Oops. Think of it as an opportunity to make something beautiful” (n.p.). His general outlook on life and his ability to put aside First Nations stereotypes are inspirational. From Troy we learn to not let the opinions of others influence our self-worth and to turn unfavorable circumstances around to our advantage. I see Troy actively seeking out opportunity in his own life and modeling this valuable life skill for Mackenzie and Mark.

Next, I turn my eye to Jessica’s image on the canvas. In Jessica I see determination. Like many women, Jessica has willingly made sacrifices in her journey as wife and mother. “I technically don’t have dreams, because my dreams are already here because I’m a wife and mother,” (Recorded Conversation, November 26, 2014) she stated. She worked three jobs to put Troy through college, and

she is currently employed in a job that she finds unsatisfactory. She does this work without complaint because she knows, as her own mother explained, her job is an “investment in your children [and] your time will come” (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014). She takes on-line classes to keep herself sharp and so that, when the time comes, she can pursue a different career.

I am keenly aware of Jessica’s role as mother on the canvas. She knows that a good relationship with her children’s teachers is important and she takes the time to get to know them on a personal level. She is engaged in her children’s schooling. For example, when her daughter was having difficulty with Math she “got the English textbook sent home...[so they] could follow along and it helped all the better. I wanna help my child succeed so I’m going to help them” (Recorded Conversation, April 16, 2014). When I think of Jessica’s image on the canvas, I see a mother bear who is unwavering in her desire to protect her cubs. She is determined that her children will have the best opportunities she can provide for them.

I also observe another image on the canvas. It is an image of Mackenzie and Mark as young adults. They are self-assured and successful individuals who have the inner strength of their father. I imagine, as predicted by Jessica, when faced with any unwarranted comment, they “turn a blind eye and walk away – it [doesn’t] even bother them” (Recorded Conversation, May 23, 2014). Buttressed by the excellent role models of their father and mother, and by their various educational opportunities, the pair stands on a solid foundation as they move into adulthood. They are proud of themselves and

who they have become.

As I step even further back from the canvas, the significance of the Larocques' painting becomes obvious. Every family is different and every family has its own story to tell. While opportunity is the over-arching theme of this complex canvas, it is in taking the time to get to know parents that we as educators learn *why* the opportunities provided by Catholic French Immersion are important to them. In doing so, a treasure trove of knowledge is gained and lasting relationships are created. Listening to parents' stories and understanding their reasons for choosing Catholic French Immersion has the potential to shape ourselves as teachers, our students, the curriculum and the milieus in which all of these commonplaces exist.

CHAPTER FIVE

Framing the Triptych: Reflecting Upon Three Paintings as One Whole

The three paintings are complete and hang as a triptych on the wall. The piece challenges me to find meaning as I consider three works as one whole. The knowledge garnered from each parent story reveals both deliberate and subtle reasons as to why diverse parents choose Catholic French Immersion for their school-aged child. It is the softer images painted upon these three canvasses that have the most to teach us about the research question. These gentle hues highlight the fact that educators often render a modest sketch when considering why parents choose the Catholic French Immersion stream for their school-aged child. The new artworks clearly suggest that understanding parent stories creates the possibility for better supporting a child's schooling and building more meaningful relationships between home and school.

Why Does Parent Choice of Catholic French Immersion Schooling Matter?

There is a great deal of research that supports parent voice in matters of curriculum. In 1973, prominent curriculum theorist, Joseph Schwab proposed that curricular knowledge must be equally comprised of four curricular commonplaces: the learners, the teachers, the subject matter, and the milieus. Knowledge of the learners referred not merely to a comprehensive knowledge of the age group but also to who the students are as individuals. Knowledge of the teacher referred to not only the teacher's academic knowledge but also to who the teacher is as an individual. Knowledge of the

subject matter pertained to the academic material with respect to the subject and grade level being taught. Knowledge of the milieus emphasized a broader more extensive knowledge of the school, classroom, family, community, and cultural elements such as religion and class. Schwab also argued that no commonplace supersedes the importance of the other. Seeing curriculum in this light brings into sharp focus the personal side of curriculum. It is not merely a document that has been written, but a relationship that must be developed between all parties involved. By their very nature, these commonplaces are mutually *inclusive* to one another.

Parent Knowledge

Parent knowledge is a dynamic and fundamental segment of the milieus. There is a great deal of evidence supporting the fact that a child's academic performance increases when parent knowledge is supported in their schooling (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Moll et al., 1992). Specific to Saskatchewan is the *Saskatchewan Play and Exploration: Early Learning Guide* (2008), which speaks to the importance of parents and teachers sharing knowledge with each other. It invites educators to honour the role of parents within the curriculum and to collaborate with parents to create meaningful learning opportunities.

Various researchers, writers, and educators have put forth approaches to addressing the milieus. Pushor (2001, 2007, 2010, 2011) cited the necessity of giving parents a voice within the schooling of the child. She asked educators to interrupt the cycle that situates us as experts and to incorporate the

knowledge parents can provide us to enhance their child's schooling. More specifically, Pushor (2007) spoke to the definition of parent involvement and parent engagement. Involvement has traditionally been the most common way parents participate in school. Involvement is an action almost anyone can do. It is largely passive and decided by the school. It includes being an audience member, fundraiser, organizer, or homework helper (p. 2). Alternatively, parent engagement implies a more intimate collaboration between parents and educators. It is a mutually beneficial relationship between parent and school where the knowledge of parents and the teacher are included in decision-making, curriculum and planned outcomes (p. 3). Parent engagement removes the dominant role of school in the parent/school relationship.

Allen (2007) proposed that educators develop a web of caring that supports the notion of parent engagement. She argued that parent involvement does little or nothing to increase student achievement (p. 6). Instead, she invited educators to probe more deeply the types of relationships between parents and educators that truly make a difference in the lives of our children. A web of caring, she proposed, must support and embrace "each child, each teacher, and each family, so that all children can learn to their full potential" (p. 9). Allen invited educators to "spin the strands of communication" (p. 9) so that this web of caring can be created between educators and parents both on and off the school landscape.

Funds of Knowledge

Student, teacher, and subject matter are the taken-for-granted commonplaces inherent in schooling. When an individual thinks of school, the image that most likely comes to mind is one of classroom teacher and students, engaged in the study of mathematics, science, or social studies.

Missing from this image is the commonplace of the milieus. So what, then, did Schwab intend with his notion of milieus? The work of Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzáles (2005) is helpful here. They use the term “funds of knowledge” to describe the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 72).

Such “household knowledge” (p. 72), as they describe it, includes knowledge of such things as career/s, economics, religion, culture, language, health, and household management. Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg (2005) argued, “public schools often ignore the strategic and cultural resources ... that households contain” (p. 47). They believe that such funds of knowledge provide a basis for understanding the cultural systems from which children emerge and further serve as assets to the teacher in the classroom. Given that these funds of knowledge reflect who the children are, where they come from, what their lived experiences were and are, and what comprises their education off the school landscape, funds of knowledge can inform classroom curriculum-making, teacher practice, and the development of policies.

Everyone, regardless of their age, possesses funds of knowledge. This knowledge accumulates as we go through life. It is knowledge acquired both consciously and unconsciously, through study or through being awake in the world. Funds of knowledge can be considered as comprising the realms of personal, practical, and professional and/or craft knowledge (Pushor, in press).

With respect to personal funds of knowledge, this is knowledge that arises from the circumstances in which we live. Garnered through the process of living our daily lives, personal funds of knowledge are not static. This body of knowledge is accumulated from our past and present experiences and is forever changing. For example, growing up in rural Ontario means I have different funds of knowledge than had I grown up in Paris, France. As I experienced moving from Ontario to the Canadian Prairie city of Saskatoon in my mid-thirties, my personal funds of knowledge were altered significantly. Over time I learned to drive in a city. I adjusted to having many different stores from which to buy groceries and other necessities, and I picked up unfamiliar terminology used by people in the Prairies, such as bunny hug for a hooded sweatshirt and substitute teaching instead of supply teaching. My personal funds of knowledge grew from the move to Saskatchewan.

We also possess practical funds of knowledge that reflect the knowledge we have gained from our engagement in our varied and multiple life roles – from our practice of them or from doing them (Pushor, in press). When I want to paint, for instance, I know what steps I must take to prepare the canvass. I have learned to add colour to the white gesso so that I do not miss a spot when I am priming

the canvass. I have also learned that, to have a very smooth finish, I should apply several thin layers of gesso and lightly sand each layer after it has dried completely. Following these steps ensures that the paint adheres to the canvass in a manner that suits me.

We are also holders of professional or craft knowledge (Pushor, in press). This knowledge can be both formal and informal learning from our job or knowledge we obtained in pursuit of our various hobbies or interests. Pushor (in press) stated that “one’s professional and craft knowledge is often the knowledge which is used as an identifier by others.” When asked to talk a bit about myself I might say, “I am a Kindergarten French Immersion teacher who is wrapping up a Master’s degree in Early Childhood. I also love to paint, read, and travel.” For all of us, our knowledge shifts and grows as we learn and mature and, as a consequence, our funds of knowledge are constantly in flux.

While every individual, from virtue of being alive in the world, holds funds of knowledge, there is knowledge that is particular and specific to parents. Through her research, Pushor described parent knowledge as the intimate and personal knowledge that parents know about children that can inform educators both in the classroom and in the development of policy on the school landscape (Pushor, 2010).

For example, when Erica was in Kindergarten I knew that she was bright and I also knew that I wanted her to be in French Immersion. Even though I was an educator, I was complicit in the plotline that marginalized my parent knowledge. I wish I had been invited to share my knowledge of Erica

with Mrs. Hawthorne. I would have been able to tell her that Erica preferred to shine when no one was looking, or that she had a rich vocabulary, and loved to create detailed stories with beautiful drawings. I would have enjoyed being invited to share her stories to better inform Mrs. Hawthorne's knowledge of my child. It is quite likely that, had my intimate and personal knowledge carried equal weight to Mrs. Hawthorne's on the school landscape, Erica's story would be much different today.

Using funds of knowledge and parent knowledge within our schools.

Parent knowledge.

As I referred to earlier, in schooling, there exists a long history that positions a teacher's professional knowledge as more privileged than that of parent knowledge. For example, Mrs. Hawthorne had already determined, prior to our interview in March, that Erica was not a suitable candidate for French Immersion. My knowledge of Erica and my hopes and dreams for her were not considered relevant.

As a Kindergarten teacher, I fully realize that parent knowledge can shorten the learning curve when it comes to understanding our students and our parents' hopes and dreams for their children. For example, one year in a Tell Me About Your Child letter, a mom wrote me that her son Christopher would often hide when he felt someone he cared about was disappointed in him. Because of her sharing this knowledge of her son, I did not panic when Christopher went missing after being gently reprimanded for roughhousing in the classroom. Instead, my students and I searched for him and we

eventually found him camouflaged under my desk, behind some boxes. How I chose to handle Christopher's disappearance that day was much different than had I not had parent knowledge to support me. I remained calm and focused. When Christopher was found, I reacted with compassion. I shoed the other children away and, with his permission, crawled under the desk and took his hand in mine. We had a long talk and when we both emerged from under the desk, Christopher was happy and reassured that I still loved him even though he had broken some of our rules.

This story illustrates the importance of parent knowledge and how it can inform teacher knowledge in the classroom. The fibers spun in our web can better support the child because they resonate harmoniously with everyone's voice. Such a web of caring is woven with mutual respect and understanding and it firmly displaces the hierarchical notion that teacher knowledge is more privileged in the schooling of a child.

Parent funds of knowledge

I regularly invite parents into our classroom to share their funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzáles, 2005) with us. Every year, most of my parents take me up on the invitation. Last year, Stanley's parents, Ken and Jen, came to Kindergarten to talk with us about their jobs as denturists. They arrived with different kinds of dentures and the children were able to touch them and ask questions. Among other things, the students wondered why these dentures needed to be made and Ken and Jen were able to talk about the importance of dental hygiene and wearing mouth guards when

playing sports. We were shown how to clean our teeth and we were given toothbrushes. The children also wondered how dentures were made and, anticipating this question, the couple had brought the necessary supplies so that the children could make impressions of their index finger. At the end of the day, the Kindergartners took their creations home and most were able to explain to their parents how the impression was made.

This particular day, Stanley was able to see his parents in a new light. He was so proud of his parents and the knowledge they brought with them to our classroom. The other children and I were able to see Ben and Jen, not just as Stanley's parents, but also as individuals who had something valuable to teach. Equipped with the mould of their index finger, the Kindergartners were able to take their new knowledge home to their parents and, as a result, parents learned from their children. These types of visits explicitly seek to create a web of caring where the teacher's funds of knowledge are not the only funds of knowledge that count in the schooling of the child.

Parent Knowledge as a valued fund of knowledge.

Parents possess intimate and intense funds of knowledge with respect to their child. It is a knowledge specific to them as parents, and a knowledge gained through being parents (Pushor, in press). In her book *I'd Know You Anywhere My Love*, Stillman (2013) speaks to the heart of parent knowledge, "There are things about you quite unlike any other....things always known by your father or mother" (p. 1). Parents have a different way of knowing their child than we do as educators. Their

emotions are forever connected to their child. The day Erica was born, I became conscious of an invisible thread that linked my heart to hers forever. When things are going well for Erica, the thread floats freely and happily in the wind. But the thread is ever sensitive to Erica's physical and emotional well-being. When Erica was two, she found a bottle of Graval that she somehow managed to open up. I could not determine if she had taken any of the pills and, as I was on the phone with 911, the thread linking our hearts was electrified and possessed a frenzied terror. When Erica was 11, and she was cut from the Division One soccer team, the thread was heavy with her sadness and her tears. When, at 15, I heard her sing flawlessly at Music Festival the thread vibrated with pride. As an adult now, when we disagree, the thread can sometimes be an arrow that pierces my heart only to be released when things are made right between us. Well before Erica was placed in my arms at birth, this invisible thread was already weaving its intricate strands of connectivity. My knowledge of Erica cannot be duplicated by anyone. When schools choose to consciously or unconsciously ignore this relationship between parent and child, the web of caring that is spun is fragile and cannot fully support the child.

Whether we are young, old, university educated, a tradesperson, unemployed, homeless, a fledgling musician, or a pro athlete, there exists in us funds of knowledge. We have a way of existing and knowing that has been shaped by our past and present life circumstances. We all have something we can teach each other and we can all learn from one another. All parents hold such personal, practical, professional/craft funds of knowledge. Further, they possess the knowledge that only a

parent can possess, knowledge gained from living with a child in the complex context of a home and family. The funds of knowledge, and in particular the parent knowledge, that parents possess are of tremendous worth. Parents' knowledge can influence how our curriculum is taught and how our policies and practices are shaped within our schools.

For example Moll et.al., (1992), who worked with Latino parents in Arizona, proposed that educators must think more broadly about the resources available to them. These researchers detailed the importance of including “the funds of knowledge available in local households” (p. 467) in curriculum. They speak to the fact that when educators value parent knowledge, parents feel more comfortable with their place on the school landscape. When this happens, parents are then more likely to contribute to the curriculum. Academic performance of children has proven to increase when such genuine partnerships are developed.

This research demonstrates the important contribution of parent knowledge in raising the level of academic performance of students (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005). By understanding parents' journeys towards Catholic French Immersion, teachers can create environments within schools that better honour our families' hopes and dreams for their children, which are reflected in their choice of Catholic French Immersion schooling. Often educators do not stop to consider parent reasoning underpinning their choice, or educators over-simplify parent reasoning. Yet, understanding why parents choose Catholic French Immersion for their school-aged child can build bonds and create

meaningful relationships with parents that benefit all of us.

Enlightening conversations.

My conversations with parents have taken me into milieus, an aspect of curriculum often overshadowed by the other three commonplaces. Through this research, I have identified various aspects that serve to better inform educators as to why some parents might choose Catholic French Immersion for their school-aged child. In doing so, it is my hope that a curriculum and pedagogy that is inclusive of parent knowledge will be created.

Shifting Shades of Opportunity: The Choice of French Immersion

The parents in this research viewed French Immersion as an opportunity for their children. While the triptych revealed that each parent pair hoped French Immersion would greatly increase their child's future employment opportunities, it is the more subtle shades of opportunity that provide the richest understanding of parent knowledge.

The shades of opportunity provided by French Immersion speak to the heart of the decision making process. The desire to protect and ensure their child's future employment possibilities dominated parent reasons for pursuing French Immersion schooling for their child. A characteristic of our society is that parents often want to provide their children with more opportunity than they themselves had and this proved to be dominant in all the parents' stories in this research. These

parents, it appears, do not want to leave anything to chance. Imagining their child unable to pursue a path towards their dreams, because of a choice they failed to make on their behalf, was an important motivator. As a mother who chose, regrettably, not to enroll her children in French Immersion, I can identify with their reasons.

Shifting Shades of Opportunity: The Choice of Catholic Education

The choice of Catholic education for the parents in my research also had to do with opportunity. As with the opportunity to learn French, the opportunity to learn Catholic doctrine entailed different qualities of possibility for each parent pair. So often I hear teachers speak to their belief that diverse parents choose Catholic French Immersion for their children so that their children can be exposed to and acquire the morals associated with Catholic religion. This was not the case for the three parents in this research.

The hues before me in the triptych give voice to an abstract pattern and design that clearly illustrated parents' motives that are not specifically linked to acquiring Catholic faith or Christian morals. Instead, the pattern reveals a derivative or extension provided by Catholic education. The triptych clearly calls our attention to the fact that, while the instruction of Christian morals is considered beneficial to, it is not the fundamental motive for the choice of Catholic education for the parents in this research.

Lessons Learned

The French Immersion Painting

Through this research, I have come to realize that there is still a great deal of work to be done to challenge a long held educational practice which constructs the offering of French Immersion as an elitist program intended for bright and academically inclined students. A 2009-10 study by the Toronto District School Board provided a picture of the uneven and potentially inequitable demographic within French Immersion programs. Huthings (2015) stated, “23 per cent of all French Immersion students came from families in the top 10 per cent of income. Meanwhile, only four per cent of French Immersion students came from the bottom 10 per cent of family income” (para. 15). Though this study was performed in another province, by a non-Catholic division, I suspect the majority of schools within our province have a similar demographic. Based on the students I have taught since arriving in Saskatoon in 2001, these figures do not surprise me.

Let us acknowledge that the existence of this elitist structure benefits both French Immersion educators and parents of French Immersion children. Let us also acknowledge that changing this educational practice will greatly alter the diversity of students currently in French Immersion programs. Yet, if both educators’ and parents’ views with respect to French Immersion were transformed so that it is seen as a viable option for all students in our Division, and across Canada, the impact would be momentous. While it is recognized that bilingualism has tremendous employment value, there are

other positive considerations that could potentially shape the future of children who are not typically enrolled in the French Immersion stream.

The perpetuation of this elitist practice in regard to French Immersion Kindergarten is discriminatory and damaging to our youngest citizens. Presently, students not identified as candidates for French Immersion are missing out on the benefits of learning a second language and the opportunity to be schooled alongside the typically high-achieving children who are currently enrolled in French Immersion. As more time passes, and French Immersion programs evolve to include more non-traditional students, a greater percentage of students would enjoy the benefits provided by French such as higher order thinking skills, better math and science skills as well as more job opportunities as previously detailed.

The first step towards inclusion of a diverse range of students within Catholic French Immersion programs is to formally determine the demographics of students currently served by these programs in our Division. I suggest that the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools consider a similar demographic study as performed by the Toronto District School Board, so that a better understanding of the children and families served within our schools is achieved. Once this quantitative study is completed, the data can be placed alongside the numerous studies that exist with respect to the value of French Immersion for all students to better inform parent choice. The information can be utilized to begin the process of altering the elitist nature of French Immersion education.

Painting a different picture.

How might changing the elitist nature of French Immersion be accomplished? How might prospective parents become aware that French Immersion is a feasible option for their children? While there is a significant amount of literature both online and in libraries across Canada that supports French Immersion schooling for all children, the selective practice within French Immersion continues to exist.

Given the powerful influence of media, more rigorous work could be done through this venue to promote the viability of French Immersion for all school-aged children. Social media campaigns are inexpensive and can reach the general masses. Twitter, Facebook, and email campaigns have the potential to reach every family in our province. Our provincial Ministry of Education and our school divisions could undertake such campaigns. It is an issue of ethics. It is an issue of making it well known that French Immersion is a viable option for all children.

Painting the Catholic Portrait

Educators make assumptions about families that sometimes ring true and other times miss the mark completely. It is known that there are many students of other faiths who are part of school populations across the Division. For many families, the primary motive that they choose Catholic education is because they are committed to Catholic education and the teachings that are commensurate with that education. From this research, I have also become aware that this is not the case for all the

families served by Catholic education. My research indicates that these parents view other factors, such as a faith-based environment, the freedom to express their love of God, and/or exposure to, but not necessarily integration of, the doctrine as more important in their choice of education/schooling for their child. Given the parent stories expressed in this research, it is possible that such a rationale exists for many other diverse families within the division as well.

Ecumenism: Are we doing enough?

The importance of this finding in the research brings to the forefront the issue of ecumenism. Catholic schools have numerous pupils whose registration forms identify them as “non-Catholic.” While parents have signed a consent form for their child to learn Christian doctrine, as I stand in front of the triptych and view the paintings, I cannot help but wonder, “Are we, as educators, doing enough to honour our parents and families? Do children and parents feel free to speak about their own religion and cultural beliefs? In what ways might we be signaling to them that we expect them to remain silent?”

Tolerance calls for respect, open-mindedness, and acceptance of others. Catholic divisions have been granted the constitutional right to Separate schools, and we have taken steps to be more inclusive of others. We accept students and families of many faiths into publically funded Catholic schools. Is there more we can do? How can we both protect Catholic education and honour the diversity of parents who choose Catholic education for their school aged child?

This question intersects with the scope of my research because it is well documented that when parent knowledge is included in curriculum making in schools, the academic performance of students rises (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005). Since Catholic education permeates *all* facets of our curriculum, this is a significant consideration. Is there a way in which Catholic educators can include this particular facet of parent knowledge on the school landscape?

Why ecumenism now? Pope Francis.

In December 2014 Pope Francis was quoted as saying, “For me ecumenism is a priority” (Tornielli, 2014, n.p.). He also said, “I believe in God, not a Catholic God. ... Jesus is my teacher and my pastor, but God, the Father, Abba, is the light and the Creator. This is my Being. Do you think we are very far apart?” (Vultaggio, 2013, para. 2). How do we establish within our schools this ecumenical perspective that the head of our church has clearly recognized? How can we speak to the heart of Catholicism and the spirit of ecumenism within our schools?

In July of 2013, Pope Francis chose to personally address the Muslim faith at the end of Ramadan in a talk entitled, *Mutual Respect through Education*. Pope Francis spoke specifically about the roles of the media, family, schools and, religious educators in achieving a foundation of mutual respect. Specifically he stated, “We have to bring up our young people to think and speak respectfully of other religions and their followers” (Hafiz, 2013, n.p.). Following the teachings of our Pope, it

becomes our responsibility as Catholic educators to teach and model ecumenical practices. I am drawn to wonder, “How might Catholic schools better promote the values of ecumenism espoused by Pope Francis?”; “How might Catholic schools demonstrate respect for other faiths being lived and practiced by enrolled students and their families?”; and “What is the role of Catholic school educators in developing an understanding of these different faiths?”

A quiet revolution: All fish swim in water.

The term Quiet Revolution (*Révolution tranquille*) refers to a time in Canada during “the 1960s when Quebec's church-based education system became a focal point in a series of rapid, sweeping government reforms” (The Quiet Revolution). A “quiet revolution” is a different kind of revolution within our society, a revolution where political, institutional, social, and /or cultural changes occur without violence. With respect to social or cultural changes, quiet revolutions generally desire to change the predominant status quo.

In terms of ecumenism within Catholic schools, a quiet revolution would involve formally providing diverse parents with the opportunity to share their beliefs within our classrooms in a manner that still supports and honours our Catholic faith. The manner in which this is done would depend on the age level of the students. As a Kindergarten teacher I regularly make room for parents to share with us and I invite them to address their religious differences in a manner that focuses on our

religion's similarities.

The Nelsons visit Kindergarten.

I had invited parents to come and share with us in the classroom about some aspect of who they are or what they do. The Nelsons were one of the first families to come and talk to us about their families and their professions. Peter is a Baptist Minister and Grace is a child psychiatrist. How does a Baptist Minister address his career in a Catholic School? He explained that he is a Pastor in a Baptist church — which is not Catholic — but that we have a great deal in common, especially our love of God. He talked about how he teaches a children's Bible study group and helps them learn about God. He took out his guitar and we sang songs such as, *This Little Light of Mine*. Since Grace had already talked about her career, we had a delicious snack and soon afterwards the couple left with their two younger children. That was it. The lesson, although simple, was very significant. It was the beginnings of teaching ecumenism to our youngest students. It was an experience that honoured our Catholic faith and the faith of our parents as well.

Mahabbah visits Kindergarten.

In November 2012, a Muslim graduate school classmate of mine, who was working on her PhD, offered to make a presentation to the children in our classroom. Mahabbah arrived dressed in her festive Pakistan apparel. She looked beautiful! She had shiny threads and sequins woven into her

clothing that immediately captivated the attention of my Kindergarten students. Mahabba laid out various cultural items to which she referred when she spoke to us. She talked about her country, its weather, her manner of dress and food. She even sang for us! I was surprised that, when given the opportunity to ask questions, my students did not ask Mahabba about her hijab. They were ignoring it completely. Were they being respectful or were they too shy to ask? This resulted in Mahabbah having the children speculate as to why she was wearing the covering on her head. Once she called attention to her hijab, the children excitedly started to speculate. “Because you like to look pretty?” “Because your ears get cold?” “Because you have messy hair?” and “Because it’s very cold outside?” were but a few proposed explanations by my Kindergarteners. In response, Mahabbah directed their attention to the cross that hung in our classroom. She explained that Catholics have crosses to show their love of God and her headscarf was how she shows her love of God. The children nodded in understanding. “So that’s *why*,” said a young boy. It was a simple and beautiful explanation. She concluded her presentation with some wise words. “All fish swim in water. All people breathe air. We should all be able to live in peace.”

Later that day the girls were busy playing “Mahabbah.” They had taken scarves and tablecloths from our dress up center and placed them over the heads. They played house and, when I asked the girls why they were being Mahabbah, one insightful girl explained, “Because she is beautiful and I like the way she loves God!” The impact of Mahabbah’s visit was strong. While I was touched by my

class's initial decision to respectfully or shyly ignore Mahabbah's headscarf, I was thrilled that my students had gained a greater understanding of the Muslim culture.

These narratives are gentle examples that invite tolerance, acceptance, and an ecumenical spirit. They create room for the brushstrokes of parent knowledge and of our diverse community. By stretching the canvass in a manner that makes room for all nature of brushstrokes — whether bold, delicate, coarse, or uneven — the painting becomes authentic and insightful.

A conversation with Heather.

I was having coffee with Heather, trying to make sense of the various aspects of my research. Heather is a university-educated woman who is a former Catholic, turned Mennonite. All of her children attended Catholic school in the Division. “So I have been struggling with the question of how to honour diverse beliefs in elementary schools in a way that is still respectful of Catholic education,” I revealed to her. Heather grew visibly tense and answered, “But I don't think you *have to*” As she talked, she explained how she and her husband had prepared the children for Catholic school. For example, they had explained to their children that in school the Hail Mary would be prayed and, while they were not to recite the prayer, they were to always be respectful of Catholic beliefs. The children were never to talk about their own beliefs at school or challenge Catholic beliefs. She expected them to remain quiet and respectful. “So how do you believe that is respectful of *your* faith?” I asked. She

explained that, by allowing their children to be schooled in the Catholic stream, the school “really didn’t have to.” I posed to her the following question, “Do you ever wish that your children could have talked about their beliefs in a manner that would have been respectful to the Catholic faith?” She replied, “Why would you do that in a Catholic school? The whole purpose is to teach Catholic beliefs.” I responded, “But isn’t it our job to teach tolerance and ecumenism too as Catholic educators?” In response she said, “Well yeah, but this is Catholic school. You can’t expect school to teach that – it’s my job to do that [as a parent] because I chose Catholic school for them.” I recounted to her some of the visits we were having in our classroom and how I hoped I was making a difference in the lives of children, their parents, and in teaching tolerance and an ecumenical spirit. As I talked, her body relaxed and she said, “Yeah I guess so. It’s baby steps, but I would really have liked that for my kids” she said (Personal Conversation, April 17 2015).

A conversation with Max.

I was at the Mendel Art Gallery, and I ran into Max, a parent at our school. I had previously taught his son Garret and his twins will be coming to the school next year. The family is Greek Orthodox and Max began to talk to me about how excited Lily and Felix were about coming to Kindergarten. “We’ve already started to plan our family visit,” he said, referring to the fact that I regularly invite parents into the classroom to teach us. During our lengthy conversation we spoke

about his religion and I asked him, “I’m curious, Max. Can you tell me why you didn’t mention your religion in your visit last time?” He looked at me surprised, “Isn’t that kind of taboo? You’re a Catholic school!” I then recounted to him how other families were addressing their own faith within our classroom. “Yes, that is very good to know. And it teaches kids to be more accepting,” he nodded. He then told me about his older daughter Carmen whom classmates sometimes criticized for doing the sign of the cross incorrectly. He spoke of how grateful he was that her teacher would come to her defense. “But maybe if the students were taught in Kindergarten that this is part of our religion, it wouldn’t always be a big deal or an issue for kids?” he asked excitedly (Personal Conversation, April 18, 2015).

Since honouring parent knowledge has been shown to raise the academic performance of students, a valuable question to pose is, “How can the different religious beliefs of our families and community be honoured in a manner that still respects the integrity of Catholicism within our school?” Naturally, the degree to which this is accomplished will be dependent upon the age of the students. Calling attention to different faiths in a gentle manner addresses student curiosity, and begins to lay the foundation of tolerance, acceptance and a spirit of ecumenism.

The Final Brushstrokes

The triptych is complete. Conscious of creating a web of caring that is inclusive of all students and families on the school landscape, I have made room for diverse brushstrokes. I am cognizant of

the fact that the brushstrokes are always changing and evolving because they are part of the ever-shifting milieus to which Schwab (1973) referred.

While this research poses difficult questions, with respect to French Immersion and Catholic education, they are questions that merit consideration. Shifting the current selective practice of French Immersion can truly change our schools, the lives, and possibilities for our children. The French Immersion canvass is ready for a more inclusive coat of paint. As educators, we possess the knowledge and skills required to accomplish this work and, with a steadfast commitment, this work can be achieved. This new canvass has the potential to refocus French Immersion towards a path that could elevate the success of many future students, should their parents choose this stream of education for them.

In terms of Catholic education, there are some educators who are painting beautiful pictures that are inclusive of parents who have different faiths. However, in my discussions with teachers and parents, both inside and outside my formal research, too many educators and parents seem at a loss as to how to begin this process. There also exists an inherent fear that inviting this canvass to be painted might somehow threaten the very premise of Catholic education. No matter what the reasons are, however, the research painting is vivid in its portrayal of this omission. In not making a conscious effort to formally attend to the diverse faiths of those children who populate our schools, something very important is lost. It is in spinning a *full* web of caring that we become inclusive of all children in

our schools.

Spinning this full web of caring – for children and families from diverse contexts and with diverse beliefs – will be challenging and it will take time. To shift or change the school landscape to be more fully inclusive will require a new emphasis within preservice teacher and administrator education and inservice professional development, an emphasis which challenges and informs educators’ beliefs, assumptions, and understandings of families and children. Pope Francis said:

How often is Jesus inside and knocking at the door to be let out, to come out? And we do not let him out because of our own need for security, because so often we are locked into the ephemeral structures that serve solely to make us slaves and not free children of God.

(Pentecost Vigil, May 18, 2013)

As Catholic educators, we are called to do the work of Christ. Doing what is just requires us to ask ourselves, “What would Jesus do?” As I imagine a full web of caring, and doing the work of Christ within structures that serve a broad range of children and families, I ask myself, “What would Jesus do?” While I believe he would be pleased that we have embraced non-Catholic families within our schools, he would also ask the question, “What *more* can we do?” He would ask us to consider how we can be more inclusive through diversifying the ways in which we honour each child, each family, and each family’s beliefs, as well as their hopes and dreams for their children within our Catholic schools. In honouring all children and families in this way, we are true missionaries of Christ.

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