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# Stories of crossing borders: identities, place and culture

Yosep Bambang Margono Slamet  
*University of Iowa*

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STORIES OF CROSSING BORDERS: IDENTITIES, PLACE AND CULTURE

by

Yosep Bambang Margono Slamet

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in  
Teaching and Learning (Language, Literacy, and Culture)  
in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

December 2013

Thesis Supervisors: Associate Professor Carolyn Colvin  
Associate Professor Renita R. Schmidt

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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To my wife, Maharesmi, and my sons, Adiwignya and Widagda:  
No journeys in my whole life are more worthwhile than having journeys with you.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank my advisor and thesis co-director, Dr. Carolyn Colvin, because this thesis would not have been possible without her guidance and support. Thank you for teaching me how to be a critical reader and better writer and encouraging me throughout my entire graduate studies and especially through the process of my thesis writing. It has been a privilege to have her as my academic advisor and a thesis co-director. Her support, encouragement, patience, expertise, and advice are beyond measure. She has always been there for me and sacrificed much of her time to see me through. A very special thank you also goes to Dr. Renita Schmidt, my thesis co-director, who has given me critical feedback, challenged my ideas, and showed me the right path to take in my thesis writing journey. Her expertise was tremendously significant in guiding me through the process of writing. Without the synergy between these two excellent people of scholarship, I would have never crossed the finished line. I thank the other members of my thesis committee, Dr. Linda Fielding, Dr. Scott McNabb, and Dr. James Elmborg, for all the feedback, comments, and suggestions during the research process. In addition, through the classes I took from them during my entire graduate studies, they shaped my thinking and opened broad perspectives on the scholarship I am pursuing.

I would not have been able to complete my graduate studies, especially this thesis writing, without the support of my family and friends. My wife and sons—who are also the participants in this study—were always supportive of me. During the process of writing this thesis, I was always in contact with them. We discussed a lot of things, disagreed with many things, and finally were in agreement about what I had to write about us. Their willingness to be without me during the process of this research means a lot to me. Thank you guys for your sacrifices. To Indonesian friends and their families in Iowa City, thank you so much for being there for me. Our gatherings and your delicious Indonesian food always made me feel at home.

A big thank you also goes to Clarence and Rae Holtkamp, Laura Holtkamp, and Kate Frary for our friendship over the last seven years. It is truly a blessing to have met you all. We had great moments on many Thanksgivings and Christmases. My family will always cherish the moments that we had together. To Marguerite Miller, thank you for sacrificing your lunch breaks to listen to me in times of trouble. To Dr. Carol Severino, Matthew Gilchrist, and Mitch at the University of Iowa Writing Center, thank you for the great sessions I had with you all. Thank you to Jose Miguel who always “checked on” me from Venezuela. Your “How is it going?” and “You can do it, Yosep” always made my day. Last but not least, I extend my gratitude to Agnes DeRaad for doing the final editing and formatting of the manuscript. You made my life much easier.

May God bless you all!

## ABSTRACT

When international graduate students and their families participate in study abroad experiences, there are many challenges and opportunities that accompany these experiences. Depending on the context of the study abroad experience, some might be characterized as both opportunities and challenges. International graduate students and their families experience cultural and linguistic challenges/opportunities while also facing conscious (and unconscious) decisions of assimilation and acculturation. Education opportunities are rarely neutral and may be accompanied by uncertainty, discontinuities, and result in identities that shift and change in the course of crossing boundaries that are geographic, educational, emotional and metaphoric in nature. The ways in which international graduate students and members of their family take advantage of opportunities and address the challenges is the focus of my research.

In this study, I draw on Akkerman and Bakker's theories of learning in the context of boundary crossers and boundary objects to document and describe my family's journeys between Indonesia and the United States while in pursuit of educational goals. Data sources for this qualitative study involve stories documented in field notes and recorded in email exchanges between family members. These stories illuminate tensions and dilemmas we faced as a transnational family as each of us dealt with issues of acculturation, assimilation, linguistic and cultural differences in the context of international moves from 2001 until 2012. I use narrative analysis in order to understand the deeper meanings of family experiences captured in stories we told, recorded in writing, and shared with each other. These stories reveal our transitions and interactions as boundary crossers.

Central to my study is the use of books as boundary objects to address the dilemmas and tensions my family faced in the midst of our transnational journeys. Books, in the form of children's literature, often served as the means to create figured or "as if" worlds and provided the means for prompting dialogues among members of my family so that we could explore and discuss the cultural tensions and dilemmas that face many transnational families. In particular, one book served as a critical moment in my family's transnational experience. In order to better understand the value of this book as a boundary object, I made use of content analysis to understand the larger themes and document the role of the book, in family discussions as we anticipated our return to Indonesia.

The methods of my study as well as the findings I describe may serve to benefit other international students who explore educational opportunities abroad while accompanied by their family. I document the ways in which identities of my family are dynamic and changing in the context of our transnational journeys. The use of books as boundary objects situated at the intersection of geographic, cultural, and emotional boundary crossings may provide transnational families with dialogues to explore dilemmas and tensions. Finally, the process of recording family stories may serve international students and families as they become cultural and linguistic boundary crossers themselves.



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

I was born in a remote village in Central Java, Indonesia. My father and mother were elementary school teachers. It was from my mother that I first learned how to read and write. She also liked to tell me bedtime stories. When I was in elementary school, books and reading materials were scarce. In addition to learning to read at first at home and then later in school, I learned how to read from old magazines and newspapers that my mother brought home. When I was in the sixth grade, my school began to have a library. However, story books for children were a luxury. There was only a small collection of story books for children—about 15 to 20 books and most of them were folktales. Some of those stories, such as “The Origin of Rice,” “The Legend of Banyuwangi,” and “The Story of Sangkuriang” are still popular today. My wife, Maharesmi (all names in this dissertation are pseudonyms), and I read these stories in the English version with our sons, Adiwignya and Widagda, now 14 and 12 years of age, when we lived in Iowa City.

In a short time, I read all the available story books in my school library’s collection and until my graduation, no new books were added to the collection. My graduation from elementary school was a farewell to children’s story books. In the ensuing years of my schooling, I was busy with classes, homework, tests, and examinations. In college, I chose English language and literature as my major, and I began to read English

and American literature for adults. Graduating from college, I taught this literature to my students. Children's literature was no longer on my agenda. It had been a forgotten literature for me until I came to the United States in 2001.

It was in Athens, Ohio that my wife and I often took our young son, Adiwignya, to the public library. I was amazed at the books for children. In the United States, books for children are abundant in quantity and represent various genres, starting from ABC books and counting books to wordless picturebooks and story picturebooks as well as others. We checked out children's books on a regular basis and amid our busy lives as graduate students, Maharesmi and I took turns reading them to Adiwignya. Our experiences reading to our son brought back memories of my childhood when my mother told me bedtime stories.

Our second son, Widagda, was born while we lived in Athens. As parents, my wife and I developed a passion for children's books. Reading to our children was a joy. When we left Ohio in the summer of 2002 to return to Indonesia, we brought children's books with us for them. In case we were not able to return to the U.S., we had samples of what we believe were very important and precious –children's books in English—books that were rare in Indonesia at the time. We continued reading to our sons in Indonesia. By doing this, we wanted to teach them English and introduce them to stories. We wanted them to love stories in the same way we did.

We wanted them to learn about their childhood, about children's lives, about other cultures, and about life in a broad sense from children's books. In 2006, Adiwignya, Widagda and I joined Maharesmi who was attending graduate school at the University of Iowa. Our regular visits to the public library became an important agenda for my family. We took turns reading children's books. On one occasion, Maharesmi and I read to the boys and on other occasions, they read to us. Again, amid our busy lives in Iowa City, we devoted particular times to reading children's books. Sometimes we had long conversations on certain books. When a story was related to our life, we could have heated discussions about both the story and our situation. (See the opening story of Chapter Four as one example.) During book sharing, each of us was learning. My wife and I learned about how Adiwignya and Widagda understood things from their perspectives. They learned from us about what is important for us, our beliefs, customs, traditions, etc. Thus, reading children's books with our sons were rewarding events. For all of us, reading children's books and expressing our opinions about them are examples of intellectual activities, entertainment, and moments that strengthened our bonds as a family. At some points, our situation as a transnational family determined our choice of books because we did not only read stories to Adiwignya and Widagda but we also taught them about language and culture. From a cultural perspective, thinking about our sons' situation positioned our family at a crossroads. Adiwignya was 6 years old when we came to

Iowa City and Widagda was 4 years old. Adiwignya had learned the Indonesian language because he went to kindergarten in Indonesia.

Widagda had not yet attended kindergarten when we came to Iowa City; therefore, he had not officially learned the Indonesian language. He picked up certain words that we used to communicate. In the U.S., Maharesmi and I wanted to teach our sons the Indonesian and the Javanese languages, but it was not easy. Every time one of us spoke to them in Indonesian or Javanese, they always replied in English. Even though Maharesmi and I communicated mostly in Javanese and Indonesian at home, that did not give them enough practice to speak these languages. They always spoke (and they still do) in English.

What happened to each member of my family is not unique. However, for us, living and raising our two sons in two different countries has been a worthwhile and challenging experience. Our sons' experiences learning English are examples of the challenges we faced. In Ohio we helped Adiwignya learn English and exposed him to U.S. life and culture through television programs, movies for children, and children's books, and taught him how to get along with people in daily life. Then we returned to our home country. In Indonesia, despite communicating in Javanese and Indonesian, we continued to teach him English and we did the same with Widagda. We thought that this was especially important for Widagda who was born in Ohio. We knew it would be unusual if as an American citizen he could not speak English and did not know about the life and culture of

the United States. This was one of the major reasons when we returned to Indonesia that we brought books, videos, and movies for children. At our home in Indonesia, we spoke three languages: Javanese, Indonesian, and English. It is because of these experiences with learning and language, a part of each of us sees ourselves as culturally an American.

However, after living in the U.S. for the second time, we experienced another kind of anxiety: What if our sons forgot all the Indonesian and Javanese words they had acquired? This worry was plausible because they lacked exposure to these two languages. My wife and I were so busy with our studies, work, and helping them with their homework and extracurricular activities that we did not have time to teach them. They soon spoke English, read English books, and watched television programs broadcast in English. To help with their homework and school projects, we communicated in English. Our concern became reality when finally after several years of living in the United States, neither of them spoke Indonesian and neither was able to read and write in Indonesian even though Maharesmi and I wanted them to remember the Indonesian language, tradition, and customs. If only there were Indonesian schools like the Chinese and Korean schools in Iowa City, we would not have been so worried. We would send them to Indonesian school to learn the language and customs. But this was wishful thinking.

We did not object to Adiwignya and Widagda's learning English and learning more about life in the U.S. and details of society and culture. We



wanted them to learn both American and Indonesian traditions, because they are border crossers. One's race and ethnicity cannot be changed, but cultural orientation is more subtle and complex. As their parents, we were happy to expose them to broad perspectives about people from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. Every time Widagda says: "I am an American," I just smile. Legally, he is. Culturally, he is. At least, part of him is an American, and the same is true of his brother. On the other hand, he is also a Javanese, an Indonesian. These are the kinds of identities that our sons have. I see these multiple identities as both a challenge and a benefit. Let them be what or who they can be and will be. This is my story of how Maharesmi and I used storybooks to introduce the culture and language of the U.S. and Indonesia to our sons. It is a story that sheds light on what it means to cross cultural and linguistic borders. In my story, I show how stories capture the complexity of crossing borders and may also serve to illuminate new understandings.

Raising children in two different countries made my wife and me aware of the importance for knowing the culture of both countries. We considered books as a major tool to teach them about American and Indonesian culture. Hunt (1994), Nodelman and Reimer (2003), and Price (1997) suggest that stories have educational value and are influential to children. In their research, Nodelman and Reimer discuss different ways children's literature informs readers and teaches values and ideas; therefore adults should be selective when choosing books for children. According to Hunt, children's storybooks may reflect ideologies and worldviews possessed by adults. Meanwhile, Price discusses

the power of traditional stories like folktales, lullabies, songs, and rhymes to teach values and culture to children. Price contends that in every culture, stories, songs, lullabies, and rhymes told and sung to children serve as a fundamental way for children to learn about basic language patterns, values, and culture. From the work of these scholars, I am persuaded that story books can be used to teach children about culture. (I discuss this in more detail in Chapter Two). In the reading of story books with our sons, my wife and I were able to have important conversations with them about culture and cultural issues. In this dissertation, I focus on the ways that reading books to children and engaging them in conversations around topics of worth can also reveal how international parents can assist their children as they learn across cultural and language borders.

Raising children in Indonesia and the United States was both a challenge and a benefit for us. We saw it as a challenge because there were many cultural tensions and dilemmas that we faced. For example, the following story is an event that stands out as a representation of the tensions our family felt as we crossed and negotiated cultural borders.

As soon as arriving from school, my son, Adiwignya, sat on the couch and turned on the television set. While watching his favorite program, without looking at me, he said, “Can you get me a drink?”

As a Javanese and an Indonesian father, I was perplexed and replied,

“Excuse me? What did you say?”

“Can you get me a drink?”

I was not ready to respond to such an attitude. In Java, what he did could be considered as parental disrespect. As far as I can remember, I never did

that to my father. But then I realized that I no longer lived in the old days of Java. Even in Java, many things have changed. We were not in Java; we lived in the U.S.

From the perspective of parents in the U.S., what Adiwignya did would be considered an example of parental disrespect as well. In Java, parents also take this behavior very seriously. I was perplexed mostly because I was caught between cultural norms that I understood (Javanese cultural norms) and the cultural norms of a society I was learning to understand (cultural norms in the United States). Both of our sons immersed themselves in and were exposed to American ways of being and living. I thought it would not be wise to blame Adiwignya for what he did because he barely knew Indonesian customs, traditions, and values.

Another example of the challenges we faced is when Widagda spoke to one of our Indonesian adult female friends when a group of Indonesian families gathered on a social occasion. He asked her for a drink by addressing her by only her first name. I noticed that my wife was not happy about this but she did not say anything to him at the time. At home, after the gathering, she talked to him about this in particular.

“Widagda, you cannot address an older person just by his or her name,”

Maharesmi said to him.

“Why?” he asked, puzzled.

“Because that’s not the way we do it in Indonesia. You need to start by saying Auntie ... or Uncle ... when addressing my friends and Bapak’s friends.”

“But we are in America.”

“Yes, but we are Indonesians and when you talk to our Indonesian friends, that’s the way you are supposed to do it.”

“I am an American too. I can just say their names when I talk to Americans.”

“But don’t you always say Mr...., Mrs. ...., or Ms. ... when you talk to your teachers?”

“Yes, because they are my teachers. But when I talk to John, Mary, and Paul, I can just say their names,” he mentioned the names of some of our American friends.

“That’s the way people do it here and they don’t have any objection. But Indonesian adults do not want to be addressed by their names only.”

“But she said nothing.”

“Let me tell you. If your friends address me by my first name only, I don’t like it but I will not say anything.”

In spite of having lived in the United States for some years, my modes of thought and worldviews are predominantly Indonesian. Consciously or unconsciously, my worldviews consistently emerged whenever I was in settings with others, especially when other Indonesians were present. Meanwhile, Adiwignya’s and Widagda’s modes of thought and worldviews were more in line with what they experienced and had come to know in the U.S. For Widagda, there was nothing wrong with addressing an adult by his or her first name. As he understood it, when people he addressed by their first names did not say anything, they did not have any objection. In general, Indonesian people may not

say anything even though they object to something. Widagda did not know about this Indonesian cultural norm.

My wife and I began to wonder how to teach them about being Indonesian. We talked to them about manners from the Indonesian perspective, about things that children could and could not do or say to their parents and to older people. The example I have described raises larger questions related to how parents face challenges when dealing with situations related to cultural values and beliefs. While international students face unique dilemmas in this regard, these cultural challenges are not exclusive to international students. In many ways, all parents are likely to face tensions like these. Many parents wonder how they will help their children develop awareness of different cultural perspectives. It is these topics that I explore in this dissertation.

The benefits for international border crossers like me and my family include opportunities for all of us to be immersed in the society and culture of the United States, and this includes the English language. This could be important for our futures. After returning to Indonesia, my sons would become immersed in Indonesian culture, customs, traditions, and the Indonesian language. Our children, as young as they were, had already become transnational children in some respects because their identities were partly formed based on their negotiation between and across cultures and languages (Bradford, 2011). Adiwignya and Widagda had to negotiate between and across Indonesian language/culture and English language/American culture in ways similar to what we, their parents, had learned to do. We all worked to negotiate across cultures and languages to understand each other. This also happened in our relations and interactions with other people.

In this dissertation, our identity is an important concept I describe, particularly as it relates to how Adiwignya and Widagda engaged with the stories we told and read to them. In Chapter Two, I discuss the concept of identity in more detail. Even though many times Adiwignya and Widagda experienced confusion in negotiating between and across cultures, their transnational identities would prove to be beneficial for them in the context of building relationships with people from diverse backgrounds later on in their life. As for us, their parents, this challenge and benefit positioned us with cultural dilemmas. I address the cultural dilemmas in the discussion of the books that we read together both in Indonesia and the United States.

The concept of transnationalism is complex and contested in the scholarly community; however, for purposes of this research, I draw from Vertovec's (1999) definition for transnationalism that refers to "multiple ties and interactions linking people and institutions across the borders of nation-states" (p. 447). Accordingly, definitions of transnationalism reveal a close relationship between transnationalism and globalization. Definitions of transnationalism point to the rapid and increasingly regular expansion of cross-border transactions in all areas of life.

The notion of culture is also a central concept in this work and like transnationalism, it is a complex term not easily captured in one definition. However, for purposes of this research, I draw the notion of culture from Söderberg and Holden (2002) who regard culture "as based on shared or partly shared patterns of meaning and interpretation ... culture is also seen as being made up of relations, rather than as a stable system of form and substance." (p. 112). This definition suggests that culture is dynamic. According to Söderberg and Holden, people repeatedly produce the shared patterns,

identify with and negotiate them through social interactions. This changes how people identify with and create affiliations with different cultures. In this conception, national and ethnic cultures are subject to change. Thus, the boundaries of cultural communities become fluid and contingent because they are conceptualized as symbolic practices that can only come into being in relation with or contrast to other cultures. Consequently, culture is neither stable nor fixed. The construction of people's cultural identities is dependent upon context.

It is in this conception of culture that I consider my family an example of the concept of transnationalism. When we were in Indonesia, we were in the comfort zone of our own values, norms, and traditions. Even though national and ethnic cultures are subject to change, in our own culture we experienced these changes gradually and to some extent in a subtle way that we might not realize the changes. But when we were in the U.S., we felt the changes were drastic. Crossing geographical and cultural borders, we were out of our comfort zone and placed in a zone of discomfort in which we encountered new people, new languages, new norms, traditions, etc. We experienced discontinuities which made us uneasy, uncertain, and worried. Then we formed relationships with other people: Head Start teachers and staff, elementary school teachers and administrators, university professors and administrators, and other members of the local cultural setting. These relationships helped to shape our identities in the new place. We were no longer the same persons because of the different social, cultural, and relational contexts; a part of each of us was already in the zone of culture of the U.S. We began to identify ourselves based on new patterns and our negotiations and interactions with other people. On the other hand, at least at our home, we maintained our comfort

zone by being Indonesian and speaking our native languages. We also maintained our contact with relatives, colleagues, and friends in Indonesia. But because of our experiences in the intersections of cultural boundaries and in the multiple ties and interactions with other people and institutions across borders of nation-states, we became transnational individuals.

To organize this chapter, I describe the background of my study and include a timeline of our journeys between Indonesia and the United States. I also discuss the transnational dilemmas my wife and I experienced including concerns about language, culture, and a new life; acculturation; books that served as boundary objects; and the figured worlds of reading and telling stories. After sharing the background of my study, I describe the purpose of my study. I close this chapter with the research questions that guide my research.

#### Background of the Study

In this dissertation, I describe different trips I made with my family from Indonesia to the United States from March, 2001 until November, 2012. I share a brief timeline for clarity related to my family's journeys over an 11-year period of time. Following this introduction, more details of our trips to the U.S. will emerge.

#### *The Timeline*

March, 2001-July, 2002	Athens, Ohio
August, 2002-July, 2006	Indonesia
July, 2006-July, 2012	Iowa City, Iowa
August, 2012-November, 2012	Indonesia



*Transnational Dilemmas*

During the years of our stay in Iowa, between 2006 and 2012, there were eight Indonesian families in Iowa City. Once a month we all gathered and we took turns hosting other families. Sometimes we had a specific agenda, such as observing holidays and celebrating Indonesia's Independence Day. Even when there was no specific agenda, we still gathered on a regular basis. The gatherings were special because while we were enjoying Indonesian food, we discussed issues ranging from what was going on in Indonesia to our daily life in Iowa City as families of international students. In Indonesia, it is tradition that the host is obliged to provide food and drink for guests but in the United States each family brought food (in this respect we adopted American practices by incorporating the potluck idea). In addition to sharing food, we shared our experiences living in the U.S., being far away from our homeland and relatives, and discussed how to raise our children—whether we would teach them Indonesian culture and language or allow them to be immersed in the host language and culture. For those who were former students but remained in Iowa to work and become U.S. permanent residents or citizens, some did not bother teaching their children Indonesian culture and language. They said that when they had opportunities to visit Indonesia, their children would learn about Indonesian language and culture in Indonesia. For families planning to return to Indonesia after graduation, they described teaching their children Indonesian language and culture but they did it casually and informally.

People use language to communicate and it shows their cultural orientations because language reflects cultures, modes of thought, and worldviews (Bradford, 2011). Individually, there were frequent opportunities for the adults to speak Indonesian, but our

children regularly communicated in English among themselves and also with us, the parents. This is an example of the tensions and balances that we, Indonesian parents, tried to manage. We sought to maintain connections with our language and culture while our children were adopting practices that were consistent with English speakers in the U.S.

Among Indonesians in Iowa City, we adults were oriented to Indonesian culture and language; our children were oriented toward language and cultural practices they experienced in the U.S. As adults, we had learned to be code-switchers so when communicating with individuals in the U.S., we understood how to cross cultural borders and represent an identity that was consistent with American cultural practices. We did this consciously and we knew when to switch our orientation. At home, we parents spoke both Indonesian and English to our children but their replies were almost always in English. This was one of the factors that made it difficult to maintain the balance in terms of Indonesian language and culture because our children lacked exposure to Indonesian language and culture. I did not have high expectations that Adiwignya and Widagda would speak Indonesian and Javanese fluently while we were in the United States. It was not that we did not want them to do so, but given that they had few opportunities to learn and use those languages for communication, it was too much to expect them to speak Indonesian and Javanese. However, in terms of customs, traditions, and cultural values, Maharesmi and I believed that we could create opportunities to introduce them to our sons. This idea became a necessity when we knew that we could not stay longer in the United States and we had to return to Indonesia. Maharesmi and I started to read Indonesian folk tales written in English (Bunanta & MacDonald, 2003) with our sons and created dialogues with them about Indonesian customs, traditions, and cultural values.

*Concerns about Language, Culture, and a New Life*

Our eventual return to Indonesia forced us to take action to prepare Adiwignya and Widagda for life in Indonesia. We considered our options and we began to talk to them in Indonesian more intensively. To help them learn the language, Maharesmi created “wall magazines” containing numbers, days, colors, and items we have and use in the house—all in Indonesian language. We asked the boys to learn about those things and we tested them. I wrote many short passages in Indonesian and asked them to take turns reading the passages every night. These efforts reflected our concerns with the Indonesian language: What if our sons could not communicate with others when we returned to Indonesia, and what if they could not do well in school? But then we realized that we could not force them to learn the Indonesian language in a short time. They would learn it from their relationships and interactions with other people in Indonesia. Thinking about this, I recalled the first day I took Widagda to his Head Start program in Iowa City.

It was 8:05 a.m. on a sunny day in early September, 2006. Adiwignya just left for school. I asked Widagda to get ready. It was his first day at Head Start. He was on the waiting list and we received the notification that he could enter after the academic year had started. He was excited and had been waiting for this moment. He walked cheerfully to the car, with his backpack on his back. As soon as he buckled up, I started to drive and in less than 10 minutes, we had arrived at the Head Start center.

A lady in the front office welcomed us cordially. Smiling to both of us, she asked Widagda a question, “What’s your name?”

“Widagda.”

“Are you excited?”

Widagda looked at me. I repeated the question in Indonesian. He nodded.

The lady smiled again and told me that I could leave but Widagda did not want me to leave. He was uneasy and afraid. His excitement was gone.

The lady said to me that he would be alright and insisted on my leaving him. Before leaving, I said to her, “My son does not speak English but he understands simple, common words used for daily conversations.”

She smiled and said, “Don’t worry. He will be fine. He will speak English in 6 months.”

She was right. In about 6 months or so, Widagda spoke English fluently.

Reflecting on that experience, we finally decided that we would discontinue teaching them the Indonesian language. They would speak Indonesian later when we returned to Indonesia. They would be immersed in the Indonesian language and culture just as they had been immersed in the U.S. with the English language and culture. They would learn about elements or aspects of Indonesian culture while they learned the language. This thought made us less worried about how they would face a new life in Indonesia. But we also realized that they would experience discontinuities during the transition period. We did not know how long it might take.

Nonetheless, we decided that it was necessary to introduce Indonesian customs, traditions, and cultural values to our sons before we left the United States. In doing so, we decided to read books about Indonesia that were written in English. Ideally, we needed books written in Indonesian; however, because they knew very little about the

language, it was easier for us to read books with them in English. We worried that their receptive Indonesian (they understood Indonesian but were unable to speak it) probably would not be enough to understand the message if we chose books in Indonesian. To make the teaching and learning process relevant and to make our approach less didactic, we used fiction more than nonfiction. We used Indonesian folktales as a way to introduce Indonesian customs and traditions to our sons. Our choice was based on the premise that in every society folktales contain customs, traditions, and cultural values (Lee, 2011; Price, 1997).

I am interested in understanding how reading to children can serve as a way to open important conversations between children and parents, satisfy children's curiosities, encourage them to develop their thinking and imagination, and create understanding of the worlds around them. I am interested in more deeply understanding how international parents might use books to help their children develop awareness of their home culture, language, and country. In this study, I discuss how the acts of discussing and reading books aloud to children can teach them about different people and cultures.

#### *Acculturation*

Our journeys as a family to the United States are examples of crossing borders of sociocultural difference between Indonesia and the United States (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). We entered a society and culture that were new and different from what we knew in Indonesia. We anticipated there would be new experiences, challenges, and even surprises. When we arrived in the United States, we acculturated into the society and culture of the U.S. In order to be successful in what we were striving for, we had to accommodate to the culture of the United States, as a consequence of crossing cultural

borders. As defined by Gans (1997), acculturation “refers mainly to the newcomers' adoption of the culture (i.e., behavior patterns, values, rules, symbols etc.) of the host society ...” (p. 877). My family, as newcomers, adopted behavior patterns, values, rules, and symbols shared by the people of the U.S., especially those in Iowa City. These include interactions with people in daily life, obeying the rules and laws, observing and celebrating holidays, learning from their ideas, etc. Examples include understanding how to drive in the U.S. (the driving rules in Indonesia and the U.S. are similar but the practices are different), how our sons behaved in school, and how they interacted with other students and teachers. For my wife and me, as students, we learned and obeyed the rules of academic conduct, interacted and communicated with other students and professors, wrote academic papers, and avoided plagiarism. The lists of the ways we acculturated are endless. These involved learning processes as we acculturated into the U.S. society and culture. On the other hand, as an Indonesian family, we maintained our languages and culture. My wife and I spoke Indonesian and Javanese at home. We read online newspapers in Indonesian language and I read Javanese magazines on a regular basis. In other words, we maintained ties with the home country. We communicated routinely with relatives at home in Indonesia. During our stay in Iowa City, we participated in family gatherings with other Indonesian students. In other words, we built relations across local, national, and global boundaries. By having relations with both the societies and cultures of the U.S. and Indonesia, we became committed to acculturation and moved away from assimilation. We wanted to learn both cultures and languages and did not want to experience the loss of our own culture and languages. The very act of

choosing to acculturate brings with it both challenges and opportunities. In this study, I describe the challenges and opportunities.

Upon our return to Indonesia, we again became border crossers. This time we returned to our home culture. We realized that we had come to understand and interpret life in terms of how we lived in the United States. My wife and I were supposed to feel at home as soon as we arrived in Indonesia. But that was not the case. Our true feelings were that we left our “home” in the United States and arrived in a place that was familiar but to us it was also strange. We had gotten used to hearing everybody speaking English and we were suddenly in the middle of people speaking Indonesian and/or Javanese. In the United States, the traffic was in order, but in Indonesia to us it looked chaotic. To get on a bus, people stood in a line in the United States, but in Indonesia people did not do that most times. These were all familiar and we knew that we expected all these things but on the first days, they looked and felt unfamiliar to us and even more to the boys.

Here is one example:

On the third day we arrived in our home town in Indonesia, Maharesmi and I took the boys to their new schools by bus. It was morning rush hour and the traffic was busy. There were buses, cars, trucks, motorcycles, bicycles, and becak (tricycles) on the streets and they were all very close to each other. Suddenly a motorcycle traveling at a high speed overtook our bus and many other vehicles on that crowded two-way street.

“Look, Bapak, that guy just cuts everybody off!” Widagda screamed, pointing to the man on his motorcycle, “Doesn’t that guy think it’s dangerous? He could kill people or get killed.”

Many people in the bus looked at us. I guessed they did so because they heard somebody screaming in English which definitely sounded strange for them. Besides, to them, the experience was nothing out of the ordinary view because it happened every day. For the boys, however, it was a shocking incident because they had never seen anything like that in the United States. I could not say anything because I was also terrified. After 6 years of living in Iowa City, I couldn't believe what I saw. I just couldn't. It took us almost 2 months to get used to it.

All of us, especially the boys, took time to adjust to life in Indonesia even though the adjustment was easier for Maharesmi and me. I understand this experience as a transnational experience not only in terms of geography but also in terms of language, culture, and ways of living and being. According to Akkerman and Bakker (2011), we became sociocultural border crossers because we experienced transitions, interactions, and discontinuities across two different sites.

### *Books as Boundary Objects*

I draw on the work of Akkerman and Bakker (2011) to inform my study. In the section that follows, I briefly describe the theory they propose related to boundary objects and boundary crossing. Akkerman and Bakker draw on the work of Bakhtin and explain that learning and understanding are dialogical phenomena and depend on learners being in dialogue with each other where multiple perspectives and multiple participating parties signal how learning occurs. These scholars suggest that powerful learning may occur on a boundary where sociocultural differences exist because it is at the boundary where learners often experience fragmentation and discontinuity. And in these moments of



fragmentation and discontinuity the authors suggest that learning is possible, even heightened. According to Bakhtin, learning is most productive when individuals are in dialogue with one another. In later chapters, readers will see the moments where my family and I used dialogue with each other to address moments when we faced the challenges and opportunities of boundary crossings.

When we were in Indonesia, there were few boundaries we had to confront and sociocultural differences, as we understood them, were few. Culturally and linguistically, we felt comfortable because our environment was familiar. We took most everything for granted. To some extent, my wife and I had become members of the community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) because of our sociocultural status in Indonesia. Lave and Wenger (1991) define communities of practitioners as those individuals who possess a mastery of knowledge and skill that allowed individuals to navigate across boundaries (p. 29). In Indonesia, my wife and I were among the educated population and enjoyed a standard of living that was comfortable. Because of our reading, education, and knowledge of the world, we could envision a figured world (according to Holland et al., 1998, an “as if” world) of living in the United States. When we came to the U. S. we crossed geographic boundaries and metaphorical boundaries. From Lave and Wenger’s perspective, we became newcomers in communities of practice that existed in the U.S. Lave and Wenger would name our learning experiences in the U.S. as moving toward legitimate peripheral participation, especially in terms of the learning we were to experience from a social, cultural and academic perspective. This was true for us and for our sons. As new members of a community, initially we were positioned on the boundary where our lives felt fragmented and uneven. Over time, we moved forward to the center

to assume full membership in the new communities of practice. What matters is not whether we became full members of the community of practice. The point is that the processes of learning helped moved us toward the center. Along the way we experienced challenges and also understood opportunities made available to us. The longer we stayed in the U.S. the more comfortable we were culturally and socially, and the more we learned to master new aspects of the culture, language, and ways of being in the U.S. – a reflection of a larger set of relations at play. We developed new identities as a result of these experiences, and these new identities are reflections of our learning.

Two related concepts central to the discussion of boundaries are boundary crossing and boundary objects. Akkerman and Baker (2011) suggest that boundary crossing is a term used to describe transitions and interactions (dialogues) among people across different sites whereas a boundary object is a term used to describe artifacts that do the crossing. In other words, boundary objects are objects that fulfill a bridging function. For purposes of my study, I use their theory of boundary objects and boundary crossings to understand my family's transnational journeys of crossing borders. The stories I share and the books we read together are examples of boundary objects. Our dialogues with one another reveal the kind of learning that occurred in critical moments.

The books that we read to our sons are artifacts that function as a bridge across these two sites. In using books as a bridge that connects our transnational journeys, our dialogues reveal the kinds of learning that occurred for my family. According to Holdaway (1979), reading books to children

... opened a new dimension of fantasy and imagination, allowing them to create images of things never experienced or entities which do not exist in the real world. By these means they are able to escape from the bonds of the present into the past and the future. (p. 48)

By telling stories and reading to them, we intended that our sons would engage in dialogue with the stories, with us, with themselves, and with the world. In Indonesia, we wanted our sons to make connections with the U.S. and while living in the U.S., we wanted them to connect with Indonesia. In reading to our sons, we encouraged them to become sensitive to new ways of experiencing life and engaged them in discussions of understanding relations between and among people, culture, and countries. Finally, we hoped that they would understand how language and culture works in moments of crossing borders.

In my dissertation, I focus on conversations between my wife and me, and our sons, in which the books are at the center of our conversations. In Bakhtinian terms, we created dialogues when reading books with our children (Bakhtin et al., 1994) that allowed us to develop as thinkers and learners. We learned to see things from new perspectives, and, according to Rosenblatt (1978, 1938/1995), we transacted with texts and meaning to understand what we were reading. These dialogic transactions were guided by certain purposes we set for our reading and discussions. Dialogues allowed us to experience worlds that were available only in books. These conversations and our experiences in these discussions are described in greater detail in Chapter Four.

#### *Figured Worlds of Reading and Telling Stories*

Besides creating conversations, reading with our sons created what Holland et al., (1998) call “figured worlds”—the imaginary worlds that offer possibilities for children to learn and develop as learners. So, for instance, the books we brought from the U.S. and read to them in Indonesia created a figured world, an “as if” world (p. 14) that allowed us to reconnect with the life we lived in the U.S. Those books allowed us to create imagination, enriched our memories, and created paths to relate to the past, present, and future. Similarly, we used the books about Indonesia to create an Indonesian figured world allowing us to imagine and remember life in Indonesia.

In the literature review in Chapter Two, I discuss in detail the concept of figured worlds and the role of books in creating figured worlds. In Chapter Four, I situate the stories and books we read with our sons at the center of our dialogues as we explore issues of culture and border crossings as a transnational family.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to describe how the use of books and stories can serve as effective tools for use by parents and children to engage in dialogues about culture, border crossing, and transnational journeys. In addition, I describe how books and stories may unearth cultural tensions and dilemmas parents might have in raising children who are developing transnational identities.

More specifically, in this study I share data in the form of stories and dialogues that my wife and I had with our sons as a way for us to discuss issues related to culture, transnationalism, and identities that arose while raising them in two different countries, Indonesia and the United States.

#### Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study include: 1. In what ways does story serve as boundary objects? 2. How can story serve as a mediating tool to teach children about culture? 3. How can story serve as a mediating tool to explore cultural tensions and dilemmas?

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

When I read one of Frost's poems, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" in Indonesia and in the United States, I had different conversations with the poem. I read and reread this poem and I recalled that I first read it more than 15 years ago when I was in Indonesia and had never seen snow. The poem took me to another world, an "as if" world: the snow covered woods, the frozen lake, the darkest evening of the year, no house nearby. In my imagination, I tried to see and feel all of those sights and sounds mentioned in the poem. It was "as if" I were there. I knew that snow is white, that winter is cold, and that a lake can freeze during the coldest time of winter. Reading the poem made me feel as if I were the one stopping by the woods in the dark and alone with my horse. I got lost in the poem. After that, for a long time I always thought about "the winter wonderland" in this particular poem by Frost and the same questions came to my mind: Would I ever experience winter? What is it like to be alone in the woods in the evening during the winter, with the frozen lake ahead and no house nearby? How cold is it? How dark is it? How will I stand the cold? How beautiful or awful is winter? There were so many questions left unanswered. Often I imagined I was "really there," trying to feel the atmosphere. It was not easy though because I was in Central Java, Indonesia, where there is no snow and the weather is almost always hot and humid, a place where I can say there are no more woods,

and houses are close to each other. I just wondered if someday I could see and feel the world described in the poem. The world in the poem became a dream; it made me obsessed. One day, I had to be there, to see the “winter spectacle” with my own eyes, to feel the cold and the sensation of the winter. That meant I needed to be in Europe or the United States or other countries that have snow in the winter.

One winter, many years later when I was in the United States, I reread the poem, again and again. Sometimes, as I read, snow was falling outside of my apartment. Still, the poem took me to an “as if” world. The difference, however, is that in these subsequent readings of the poem the imaginary world in the poem seemed to be more real to me. I was in Iowa where winter is almost always severe. I had experienced winter several times while living in Ohio and Iowa. I already knew exactly how cold it feels when the lake is frozen; how quiet it is to be alone in the woods in the evening when there is nobody else nearby.

### Introduction

In this chapter, I review theory and research related to the topic of my dissertation, which is how the use of books and stories can serve as effective tools for use by parents and children to engage in dialogues about culture, border crossing, and transnational journeys. Any acts of individual reading, like my own readings of the poetry of Robert Frost, are already complex. In this study, each of my family members transacted with books, and when we discussed the book we were reading, each of us brought our transactions to the discussions. To understand this phenomenon, let me begin

by discussing my readings of “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” a poem by Robert Frost.

My readings of the poem are an example of the acts of individual complex relationships between an engaged reader and a text. Every time I read the poem, I had dialogues with the poem and its author. What does the poem mean? How did Robert Frost create this beautiful poem? What message(s) did he want to convey? Was he himself the man riding the horse? At the same time, I transacted with the poem to create meaning, and the poem became a tool or a mediator for me to the worlds described in it. With this statement, I want to suggest that discussions of the reading of literary works, whether they are individual readings or family readings in which parents mediate meaning for children, involves the theory of dialogism by Bakhtin (Bakhtin et al., 1994), mediation and the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), personal response theory (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995), figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998), and boundary crossings and boundary objects (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). These are the main theories I will incorporate in my work here about the acts of reading and discussions in which my wife and I acted as mediators for our sons. My wife and I decided to read storybooks (children’s literature) to and with our sons because we wanted them to become engaged readers and be able to make connections with what they read, as I made connections to the poem by Frost as described in the opening story above. As I will explain, we believe in the power of transaction related to building ideas about the world (Rosenblatt, 1978).

In addition to these theories, I also review theory and research related to parent-child book sharing in which I discuss the roles of parents, children’s literature, and parent-child dialogues before, during, and after the acts of reading. Because the acts of

reading in my family included reading picturebooks, it is important for me to discuss research related to picturebooks including definitions of picturebooks, elements of visual arts, and the synergy between the words and pictures. In the final sections, I discuss theory and research related to culture and identities. The discussion of these two topics is important to understanding how I view my family's lived experiences in two countries, Indonesia and the United States.

### Dialogism

For the discussion of dialogism, I draw on Bakhtin's theory. Morris (Bakhtin et al., 1994) defines dialogue in the following manner.

Dialogue is perhaps the basic trope in all of Bakhtin's thought. There is no existence, no meaning (q.v.), no word (q.v.) or thought that does not enter *into* dialogue or 'dialogic' ('dialogicheskii') relations with the other, that does not exhibit intertextuality in both time and space. (p. 247)

This summarizes Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. For Bakhtin, there is nothing that stands alone without a relationship with something else. Bakhtin imagines that all individuals have social relationships that bring meaning to their lives. Bakhtin notes that an individual having inner speeches is still in dialogue with his or her society, "inner speech is best understood as dialogue; a continuous two-way interaction between the subjective and the social" (Bakhtin et al., 1994, p. 49). He suggests that individual consciousness exists only as a result of interaction between individuals in a society.

Bakhtin emphasizes that dialogue can occur in direct, face-to-face, verbal communication between people but dialogue also exists in a broader sense comprising any type of verbal communication. He describes a book as "a *verbal performance in print* is also an element of verbal communication" (Bakhtin et al., 1994, p. 58, italics in original). According to Bakhtin, a book is at the center of dialogues from various perspectives. As a result of the dialogues between its author, his inner speech, and his worlds, a book is read by readers who read it responsively—these readers have different



perspectives or points of view because of their social and cultural backgrounds. This example emphasizes Bakhtin's thoughts about how ideas of readers who may not know each other might be connected by the author's work. In other words, every individual is connected with another. For Bakhtin, no individual lives in isolation without connections to his or her society.

McCallum (1999) and DeSantis (2001) endorse this idea, stating that dialogism is central to Bakhtinian theory. McCallum asserts that dialogue happens as the result of the relationship between two positions such as dialogues between the self and others, between the subject and language or society, between two ideologies or discourses, and between two textual voices. Based on McCallum's proposition, our stay in the U.S. was evidence of Bakhtin's theory of dialogue because we were in dialogue and in relationships with different cultures, people, and ideas. Meanwhile, DeSantis (2001) posits that Bakhtin's dialogism is especially related to his thoughts about "the world of social relations, between individuals or cultures ... dialogue is a metaphor which Bakhtin used to describe all life" (p. 4). DeSantis sheds light on how I have come to understand my family's lived experiences as ongoing dialogues.

Based on these theories, I see that from the Bakhtinian perspective the relationship between readers and texts is a form of dialogue or is dialogic. In reading texts, readers are in dialogue with the texts they are reading—they speak to the texts and the texts speak to them. How readers speak to the text is influenced by their conception of society and culture, in the sense that they will bring values, ideas, and beliefs to their readings. In addition, readers will also bring their knowledge as a result of their dialogues and relationships with other people. In this line, Dressman (2004) writes:

Bakhtin's use of *dialogue* (italics in original) is much broader than our contemporary notion of "conversation," and embraces any fully contextualized, living process of exchange between an author and his text, between readers and a text, and between the text and the society of which it and readers are a part (p. 45).

In my readings of “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” in Indonesia and the U.S., I spoke to the poem differently depending on the context of my reading. At one moment, it spoke to me about the winter wonderland and I spoke to the poem about the world that initially I could only imagine but later it was the world that I could experience. My dialogues (or transactions) with the poem were different with different readings. Similarly, when my wife and I read storybooks with our children, each of us had dialogues with the texts. Individually, each of us spoke to the book we were reading based on our knowledge and learning processes that are inseparable from the society in which we lived. Again, in Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, there is nothing that stands alone without a relationship with something else. An idea is always in relation to other ideas; our reality is in relation to the worlds that we socially and culturally construct (Holland et al., 1998). Closely related to Bakhtin is Vygotsky’s theory of the zone of proximal development and mediation.

#### Mediation and the Zone of Proximal Development

Mediation and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) are central in Vygotsky’s (1978) ideas related to learning and development. According to Vygotsky, human psychological processes are mediated by psychological tools including language, signs, and symbols. Children’s learning and development develop and become more complex when they use the tools of language, signs, and symbols as mediators. Vygotsky believes learning is not only psychological and individual but also social and cultural. The social and historical contexts for learning influence an individual’s learning. So learning, according to Vygotsky, depends on one’s history and the social context for learning. Learning is mediated in that people learn from others.

In a similar manner, my readings of the poem by Frost were influenced by social and cultural contexts. The first time I read the poem, I realized that it was a poem and poet outside my culture. The meaning I could make in the poem depended on taking into consideration factors such as how people analyze literature (especially poetry in this

case), and the society and culture of the United States. Because I am Indonesian, my readings of the poem were shaped by my social context and culture. Thus the meaning made of the poem was not in isolation but within my social cultural context as reference.

In Vygotsky's theory, social and cultural influences are central to learning. Parents teach their children language, signs, and symbols in the context of joint activity (Karpov & Haywood, 1998). The joint activity between parents and children is social activity in that parents can teach their children these tools because of their previous learning of how to use these tools from their parents and their society. In fact, the interaction between parents and children itself is a social activity. Thus, learning is social and cultural. Individuals are part of their society and they learn from their society. On the other hand, society comprises individuals who together determine the culture. According to John-Steiner and Mahn (1996), the interdependence between society and individuals is the power of Vygotsky's ideas. Although language, signs, and symbols are mediators for children to develop their learning ability and conception about the worlds around them, parents also act as mediators when teaching these tools to their children so that they understand how to use these tools for their more advanced developmental level.

Seen from this perspective, parent-child book sharing is a mediated action. In the act of reading, both books and parents act as mediators for children. Parents are often mediators for children to understand the message or the meaning of the books. With parents' explanation and modeling, children internalize these routines and understand that the books can "function as mediators of the children's more advanced psychological processes" (Karpov & Haywood, 1998, p. 27). In Akkerman and Bakker's (2011) term, in this context books function as boundary objects or objects that fulfill a bridging function—they bridge between children and the new knowledge they learn. This is how I view the acts of reading in my family. When my wife and I read to and with our sons, we acted as mediators for them. We helped them understand the message and meaning of the books with our explanations, questions, and answers to their questions. When the boys

were young, our mediation and discussions were more didactic and monologic and shifted as the boys became older.

Like the concept of mediation, Vygotsky's concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD) has influenced our understanding of how learning occurs. Vygotsky (1978) defines ZPD as

*... the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.* (p. 86, italics in original)

Simply stated, adults (parents or teachers) and more capable peers could utilize the skills, capabilities, and knowledge children already possess and create spaces for those in various stages of learning to further their understanding, create investment, and encourage involvement in the tasks at hand. In other words, children will be able to know or do more with the help of adults and more capable peers. Children develop their potential in relation with their society and culture. Thus learning is a social and cultural act. With regard to ZPD, Vygotsky also emphasizes the importance of play. According to him, for children, play creates ZPD. In play, a child creates an imaginary situation and to do so, often a child needs tools, for example, "a piece of wood begins to be a doll and a stick becomes a horse" (p. 97).

If play creates imaginary situations for children, then reading might also be viewed as play. In reading, children also create imaginary situations and thus create ZPD. Drawing on this idea, when an adult and a child read a book together (a social activity) the adult often mediates the transaction—helping the child to create meaning. This act of reading is important for a child's development. When my wife and I read to our sons, we were the mediators for them to understand the story or the meaning of the story. With our guidance, their imaginations were expanded which enhanced and expanded their learning development and encouraged their personal responses and transactions.

### Personal Response Theory

For the discussion of personal response theory, I draw on Rosenblatt's (1938/1995) work. Rosenblatt affirms that the meaning of texts is in the transaction between readers and texts during the act of reading. Rosenblatt's theory is a reaction to New Criticism theory that assumes that only the texts are central to the meaning making during the act of reading. According to Rosenblatt, New Criticism considers that the texts already have fixed meaning and it is the task of teachers to teach students rigorous methods so that students as readers can grasp the meaning of the texts. No different interpretations are available or necessary. New Criticism theory does not leave room for the reader's role in meaning making. Rosenblatt rejects this view by advocating that in textual reading, readers are active and have significant roles in meaning making of the texts.

Rosenblatt's (1938/1995) personal response theory emphasizes that the meaning of texts does not lie in the text or in the reader but in the transaction between the texts and the readers during the act of reading. She asserts that the texts are just inkspots without meaning when not read. In her later work, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (1978), Rosenblatt emphasizes that every reader makes his or her own "poem." "Poem" here refers to the meaning of the texts as the result of the transaction between readers and texts. This form of transaction suggests that there is a give and take between reader and text. In conceptualizing how readers construct meaning from a text, Rosenblatt describes meaning making as a process that may go on subconsciously in a two-way, reciprocal relationship. This two-way, reciprocal relation between reader and text is the explanation for why meaning is not 'in' the text or 'in' the reader because, "Both reader and text are essential to the transactional process of meaning making" (pp. 26-27).

This theory is influential in that it has informed the teaching of literature. Dressman (2004) confirms that Rosenblatt has extraordinary influence on researchers and

practitioners in the field of English education because her theories changed the focus of the teaching of literature from centered on the text and teachers to a focus on the environments created by teachers for students to construct meaning. I draw on Rosenblatt's theory to understand the relationship between readers and texts. Personal response theory postulates that reading is personal in the sense that each act of reading is unique. The meaning making depends on what the reader brings to the text. Rosenblatt states that what readers bring to the act of reading is unique or, in her words, readers bring to the acts of reading their "personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, particular mood of the moment and particular physical condition" (p. 30). Taking into account the many possibilities readers bring to the act of reading, she asserts that there can be no reading that is the same. Every reading may create a new meaning, even in multiple readings of the same text by the same reader. As I have shown in the opening story, my readings of Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" were different in many ways because what I brought to the text was always different. I did not have firsthand experience about winter when I read the poem in Indonesia but I did when I read it in the United States. The text did not change. The words, sentences, punctuations, or "the inkspots" remained the same. But I changed. This made my transaction with the poem different and therefore my response to the poem was also different.

If the same reader reading the same text has the potential to create new meanings, many readers reading the same text will produce a plethora of possibilities. My family readings are an example. My wife, I, and our two sons read the same books but our responses were different (see the opening story in Chapter Four). Each of us transacted with the text differently because what we brought to the text was different. In other words, each of us had different histories and past and present preoccupations. When my wife and I acted as mediators for our sons it did not mean that we wanted them to come to the same meaning as we did. Even my wife and I read the same text differently and

generated unique meanings. As critical adults for our sons, we tried to create a zone of proximal development in which they could explore in discussions with us, understand and consider ideas and concepts we thought necessary for them to know but that they did not yet see without our mediation. We acted as mediators but we attempted to avoid imposing meaning for them to adopt. In the end, each of us experienced different transactions with the texts we were reading. In these experiences with our sons, we attempted to create imaginary worlds – “as if” worlds – so that they might vicariously experience a world not available to them at the time.

### Figured Worlds

Holland et al. (1998) define figured world as “a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation ...” (p. 52). This socially and culturally constructed world is imaginary. In other words, it is an imaginary world we construct based on our vision of society and culture, the kind of elements Rosenblatt describes we bring to texts as readers. Therefore imaginary worlds we create always have relation to reality because it is rarely possible for us to imagine new and different worlds without reference to the world that we know. It is for this reason that they also call figured worlds “as if” worlds. For purposes of this research, I use the terms “figured world,” “imaginary world,” and “as if” interchangeably.

Reading *The Ugly Vegetables* (Lin, 1999), for example, we enter a world in which people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds are portrayed as living side by side in harmony in the United States. In this picturebook, a Chinese American family wants to share what they cook (the ugly vegetable soup) with their neighbors who have different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. This is the imaginary world we experience in the book but this world has references to the real world. The figured world in the book is a dream or expectation of the author that even though we are different we can live together in harmony. Without understanding how friendship, respect, and appreciation may work in

reality, it would be difficult to understand the world described in the book. At this point I want to emphasize that real world and imaginary world are related to one another.

When we are reading we may enter figured worlds in the text. At the same time, we construct a world based on the world created in the text that we are reading and on reality. We envision possibilities in our minds. Or, when we read literary texts, we may inhabit the minds of characters. In other words, reading literary texts is an activity that can transport us from reality to fictitious or imaginary worlds. If reading transports us to figured worlds, then it also may mean that in the figured worlds we may adopt new identities that may be different from our identities in the real world or in real life. Therefore, I propose that reading allows for certain identities to emerge in figured worlds.

Figured worlds offer rich possibilities for readers. In figured worlds, readers may experience new learning and be enriched by new experiences and new knowledge. When this happens, figured worlds may function to engage readers to read more and promote learning because readers come to know that they learn many new and different things from readings. In my family when my wife or I read with our children the figured worlds created from our dialogues and reading became more complex than if these readings had occurred alone. Each member of my family created and entered a figured world. With the conversations, questions, and answers during and after reading, new figured worlds were created. A positive implication of the experience of a figured world is that people can be motivated to learn more about something they like to do because of the possibilities figured worlds offer.

To summarize, figured worlds is a broad concept and so there is room for interpreting and applying this concept differently as researchers may have different interpretations and applications. If figured worlds are “as if” worlds and imaginary, then these are the places where, according to Caughey (1984), we may adopt or take up different identities. The space created in imagining worlds allowed for readers to try new identities as readers, thinkers, and learners. Sumara (1998) contends that a person’s



identities at the beginning of a story and at the end of a story are not the same. Even though Sumara speaks about personal narratives, his ideas also apply to individuals reading a fictional story. When a person reads a story, his or her identities before and after the reading are not the same. Later in this dissertation, I will discuss the implications of readers adopting new identities in order to enhance their learning.

### Boundary Crossings and Boundary Objects

As I described in Chapter One, I draw on Akkerman and Bakker's (2011) concept of boundary crossings and boundary objects to frame my research. Simply put, boundary crossing means the act of entering into unfamiliar sites. This concept has both literal and metaphorical meanings. People moving from their own country to another country are an example of the literal meaning of boundary crossings. Meanwhile, metaphorically, this concept is rich in meaning because it may refer to unfamiliar societies, cultures, languages, and ideas. Central to this concept are differences. In other words, boundary crossings imply that there are differences between sites. Therefore, when people cross boundaries—out of their own boundary and into new boundaries—what they see as different from what they are familiar with may cause discontinuity or the feeling of uneasiness, unhappiness, fear, or even fragmentation. But Akkerman and Bakker also note that people will find that not everything is completely new across boundaries. There are parts or elements that show sameness. In other words, within the discontinuity there are moments of continuity.

Boundary objects are objects that have the bridging function that enables connections across boundaries. Based on the concept of boundaries, boundary objects can be both physical objects and abstract objects. In this work, I am interested in how books can serve as boundary objects to bridge understandings between sites and sociocultural differences. For example, a U.S. student reading books about Indonesian society and culture may acquire more understanding about Indonesia without having traveled to the country. Reading books about Indonesia, the student is able to make connections and

compare the U.S. and Indonesian societies and cultures. In analogy, stories, too, may function as boundary objects in much the same way that books act as boundary objects.

Akkerman and Baker discuss these ideas in relationship to learning. They assert that during critical moments of discontinuity created by crossing borders, people search for connections in dialogues with and about the new society and culture. It is during these moments that learning occurs intensively. For purposes of my study, I use this theory to understand my family's transnational journeys of crossing borders.

### Parent-Child Book Sharing: From Reading Aloud to Dialogues

In this section I review theory and research related to book sharing between parents and their children, and I specifically relate the discussion of the theory and research to my family book sharing. My wife and I began to read to our first son, Adiwignya, when he was an infant. Since that time, reading books to and with him (and later on also reading to and with his brother, Widagda) have become an important part of our life experiences. Now Adiwignya and Widagda are independent readers; only on certain occasions do we read to them. In reading with them over the years, we created zones where they could develop from non-readers to independent readers. In this section, I discuss the parents' role in parent-child book sharing in the context of how children develop from non-readers to independent readers, the role of children's literature in this process, and how during and after the acts of reading parents and children may use the storybooks to develop dialogues not only about the stories but also about making connections between the stories and real life issues.

#### *From Infants to Early Readers: The Role of Parents*

Recalling the moments my wife and I began to read to our sons, Adiwignya and Widagda, when they were still infants, I thought we were unusual parents in our community. Most parents just talked to their babies but we talked and read to them. We read to them because reading to infants is important (Hasson, 1991). Hasson (1991)

contends that the earlier parents begin reading to children the better. She also suggests that in this stage parents show pictures to the infants from certain distances. Talking about the pictures to the infants is how parents read. Even though the infants are not saying words, according to Hasson, they acquire language, and talking about pictures to the infants is a way to promote their language development. As the infants grow older, reading picturebooks is crucial for promoting their language and literacy skills during the preschool years (Fletcher & Reese, 2005; Holdaway, 1979; Jiménez, Filippini, & Gerber, 2006).

We found that reading aloud to our sons was a joy, especially when they started to respond to our readings by asking questions or pointing to pictures. Many parents reading to their children have the same feeling. Holdaway (1979) reports that—in addition to promoting children’s language development—parents find pleasure and satisfaction in reading to their children and children feel that stories read by their parents are satisfying and enriching. During the acts of reading, children may experience special relationships with their parents. According to Holdaway, this is a feeling that cannot be found in most other activities.

As children grow older, they can respond to the reading by asking more questions about and commenting on what their parents are reading. The more children ask questions and give commentaries, the happier parents are. Parents experience pleasure in dialogues with their children. Holdaway (1979) suggests that parents are not worried if their children do not really understand their explanation. In terms of children’s language development, the language used by parents is sometimes richer than the language used in the books they read to their children. It is at this stage that children begin to enjoy the stories read to them by parents. My wife and I also enjoyed reading to our children at this stage, with our children sitting on our laps, pointing to pictures, asking questions, and even providing commentaries. They also began to form ideas about favorite books and frequently asked us to read the same books over and over.

Picturebook sharing at home is one way to introduce concepts of print to children that is very important for promoting literacy. From this activity, children associate pictures with the print. Fletcher and Reese (2005) note that this phenomenon of sharing picturebooks is positively correlated with a child's language development. They suggest that many researchers have demonstrated that children learn to associate from their parents' comments, answers, and explanation about pictures during the acts of reading. Since Holdaway's classic work (1979), newer scholars have also noted that when children have book experiences beginning in infancy they develop a strong literacy foundation or "... develop a complex range of attitudes, concepts, and skills predisposing them to literacy. They are likely to continue into literacy on entering school with a minimum discontinuity" (p. 49). In other words, children with many prior book experiences are more often ready to learn to read and write as soon as they enter school.

When children begin to understand the stories and enjoy book sharing with their parents, they have favorite books and ask their parents to reread the same books. Recalling reading with our sons, we not only read stories over and over but also introduced them to letters and asked them many times about each letter. In addition, we also explained many words related to the pictures. We wanted our sons to learn new vocabulary. Without our help they could not do it because, according to Mol, Bus, de Jong, and Smeets (2008), "books cannot be a source for acquiring new vocabulary unless children get intensive help and support from adults" (p. 8). This is another example of the power of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and Bakhtin's theory of dialogue. Parents have to mediate this learning. These repeated readings help to develop awareness of the concept of print and reading-like behavior (Holdaway, 1979), an important step in children's language development. At this stage, children begin to independently select their favorite books to "read" them. From what they have learned from repetitive readings with their parents, children retain some language and its intonations. Holdaway contends that this activity is "by far the most surprising and significant aspect of preschool book-

experience” (p. 40). Holdaway’s phenomenon is evident when I recall what my sons did with their favorite books at this stage. I remember one of their favorite books was a children’s picture dictionary; my sons independently “read” the dictionary by pointing out pictures and saying what they were. They did this after my wife or I read the dictionary with them many times. They were enthusiastic when they were familiar with certain objects.

Some children start school learning how to read and write from these literacy experiences; others may learn reading and writing from their teachers. Children who have shared book experiences at home are likely to learn faster than those who do not (Holdaway, 1979). Both in Indonesia and in the United States, my wife and I got involved in helping our sons at this stage of development. We helped them with spelling, pronunciation, and meaning of words; we encouraged them to ask questions while answering their questions. Fletcher and Reese (2005) note a change of strategy between parents reading to children under 18 months and older than 18 months. In the first case, parents tend to move away from texts and use strategies to get attention from their children. When they read to children who are older than 18 months, parents ask questions and have extended conversations about pictures and stories more often to stimulate their children’s responses to the stories.

Instruction in school typically enables children to transition from emergent to early readers as children expand their exposure to literate cultures. But this journey is complex as meaning emerges in unique ways for each reader, literacy development depends on multiple factors and emerges based on individual development and the contexts in which children learn to read, write, speak, and design new learning. Individual children take many paths toward proficiency in reading. It is not the purpose of this dissertation to explore this journey. Instead, my purpose is to describe how books, reading with parents and significant others, may enhance this journey.

### *Independent Readers*

Reading proficiency is a contested term. Researchers and educators may have different criteria for proficient or independent readers and every state in the U.S., for example, may choose to define the term differently. However, for purposes of this research, I define independent readers as readers who manage the demands of reading at their age or grade level and for the most part are able to make meaning of the multiple kinds of texts they are asked to read. To make meaning, independent readers draw on multiple resources they have to make connections between what they read and those resources they draw on as readers. This is a highly complicated process because there is an orchestration of many kinds of knowledge as readers make meaning in the act of reading. Weaver (2009) discusses various strategies readers use to make meaning of texts. First of all, readers have to be able to use cue systems within the language of a text. She explains three major cue systems readers use: syntactic, semantic, and graphophonic cues. Often, the meaning of a word depends on a reader's combined use of these three cue systems. According to Weaver, the meaning of a word depends on its grammatical context within the sentence, its semantic context within the sentence, its situational, pragmatic context, and its schematic context. By schematic context she means

...knowledge in our heads: a mental schema ...an organized "chunk" of knowledge or experience. ... If we did not have mental schemas, we could not make practical use of the other kinds of context mentioned. That is, if we did not have an intuitive sense of grammar, we could not use grammatical context to limit a word's possible meanings to those that are appropriate for the verb function of the word ... or the word's possible meanings to those that are appropriate for the noun function. This process of grammatically delimiting a word's possible meanings is so automatic that we are often not aware of it, but it nevertheless occurs—and is made possible by our grammatical schemas. (p. 17)

Each reader has many schemas and they are different from one reader to another. Readers typically activate relevant schemas they have to comprehend the texts. By doing so readers are able to make transactions with the texts. At this point, Weaver comes to a

conclusion drawn from Rosenblatt's theory of personal response or transaction between the texts and readers by saying,

The crucial point is that meaning is not in the text itself, whether the text be literary or otherwise. Rather, meaning arises during the transaction between reader and text. Thus reading is a process, a transaction between reader and text in a given situational context, an event during which meaning evolves. (p. 27)

In her discussion, Weaver shows us that the process of making meaning of the texts is complex and shares similar views to those offered by Wilhelm (1997) and Tovani (2000) who believe readers need to make connections between the texts and their knowledge to achieve the ultimate goal of reading: to make meaning of the texts.

Reading scholars continue to develop theories related to how independent and dependent readers move forward with making meaning from texts. This is a field with understandings that continue to emerge. Simply said, readers draw on a set of cues that I have described above including semantics, syntax, and graphophonic cues. And as Weaver (2009) and Miller (2002) note, readers must draw on prior knowledge. Readers activate relevant or prior knowledge before, during, and after reading. Readers create visual and other sensory images in reading the texts. Readers draw inferences from the texts they are reading. Drawing inferences is important for forming conclusions, making critical judgments, and creating questions. Readers pose questions of themselves, the authors, and the texts they read. Readers synthesize what they read. The most current reading research suggests that what distinguishes independent and dependent readers is the degree to which they manage the orchestration of these many kinds of knowledge and the kinds of resources they have to call on.

Tovani (2000) describes the importance for readers to make connections during the act of reading. She states that engaged readers will make personal as well as societal connections to the text they are reading. Literacy learning is a social practice. Reading and writing should be enacted in terms of social theory with an understanding that cognition plays a role in developing meaning from text. Tovani also suggests that for

readers to be engaged with texts, personal and social connections are crucial to make meaning of the texts they read.

These researchers' ideas highlight Rosenblatt's concept that meaning is not in the texts but in the transaction between the texts and readers during the act of reading. Readers' experiences and knowledge are central to the meaning making of the texts. As I mentioned earlier, the degree to which readers may orchestrate a constellation of strategies, knowledge, and resources may determine their move toward greater proficiency with reading and literacy. Book sharing may provide opportunities for parents and children to express their opinions and have dialogues related to culture, language, and lived experiences.

#### *The Role of Children's Literature in My Study*

Children's literature has the potential to teach children about cultures and cultural values. This idea is endorsed by researchers (Bradford, 2009; Hunt, 1994; Lee, 2011; Nodelman & Reimer, 2003; Price, 1997) who suggest that adults in societies also share this perspective. Nodelman and Reimer (2003) believe that the role of children's literature is in part to shape children to be productive individuals in society. In doing so, children have to go through the process of learning to "...become the kind of people who can successfully live within it (the society—*addition is mine*) by accepting its selective visions of what kind of people they should be" (p. 97). In this context, children's literature is crucial to further children's education. Through literature—mediated by adults—children may learn how to be members of their society. According to Nodelman and Reimer, this idea is not new, but has been in existence for centuries. They contend that dated back to the 17th century, the Puritans in England "produced books specifically aimed at directing young children to the right path" (p. 83). At the time, the Puritans did not emphasize the pleasure element of children's books but only the pedagogical aspect. In the 1740s, however, John Newberry started to publish different kinds of children's books than those of the Puritans. He combined business with pleasure, in the sense that



the children's books he published generated financial benefit and at the same time contained pedagogical elements. If today's children's books are the result of the evolution of children's books since Newberry's creation, then I suggest that children's books have both pleasure and pedagogical elements. Therefore, it is appropriate to say that children's books can entertain and be used to teach children.

Like Nodelman and Reimer, Hunt (1994) asserts that "it is arguably impossible for a children's book (especially one being read by a child) not to be educational or influential in some way; it cannot help but reflect an ideology and, by extension, didacticism" (p. 3). Hunt emphasizes that children's literature is not written just for entertainment but for educational purposes as well. In other words, adults' ideology or their beliefs and values determine what kinds of books should be written for children. He suggests that "all books must teach something" (p. 3). By this he does not mean to say that children's books can directly teach children about cultures and values but with mediation by an adult, children can learn through children's books where society and families place value. In other words, Hunt contends that children's books are educational or influential because they reflect the ideologies of their authors who may share similar values in their society.

In addition, Bradford (2009) also contends that cultural values and assumptions inform children's books. However, authors are not always aware of these values and assumptions because they are not always in control of or recognize their own values and assumptions. According to Bradford, "...these values and assumptions very often operate at a level below conscious thought and are in any case embedded in narrative patterns, language and modes of thought" (p. 2). She does not explicitly state that children's books are educational but based on her comments, I infer that Bradford understands the educational value of children's literature. If cultural values and assumptions inform children's literature, then books can be used to teach children about those values and assumptions in their society.

Meanwhile, Lee (2011) and Price (1997) discuss traditional stories, such as folk tales, fairy tales, fables, and even religious stories, as sources of cultural values. Lee, who focuses her research on Korean folktales, contends that Korean folktales are important for teaching Korean children about traditions and cultural values. She also affirms that folktales remain important in both developing and advanced countries. As she describes, Korea is now an advanced country but folktales are crucial for transmitting cultural values and traditions to Korean children because “the underlying beliefs and daily practices of its people are grounded in traditional values” (p. 402). Like Lee, Price argues that in most societies, stories, songs, lullabies, and rhymes told and sung to children serve as a fundamental way for children to learn about basic language patterns, values, and culture. Because of the importance of these traditional stories as sources of traditional values, children’s books containing folktales and other traditional forms of literary genres can be significant for children’s education.

Because of the educational values of children’s books, parents introduce books to their children when they are still very young. As I stated, the introduction of books to children is guided by two goals, to promote children’s language development and to transmit values, beliefs, and mores, which are important for children in their preparation to become full members of their societies. This is a primary reason why my wife and I decided to read to our children when they were very young. To use books to transmit values and beliefs, adults must act as mediators during book sharing. I suggest that in reading to children, parents must not only read but they should provide opportunities for children to talk about what they are reading. This way, parents help children express their opinions and ask questions. Sharing books can provide ways for parents to teach children how to say what they think and feel. This brings me to the discussion of parent-child dialogues during and after the acts of reading in the following section.

*Parent-Child Dialogues During and After  
the Acts of Reading*

In a culture with literate traditions that run deep, parents who read to their children is a common practice. However, in a culture with strong oral traditions, parents tell more stories to children than read books to them. Phillips, Norris, and Anderson (2008) discuss reading to children as a cultural iconic activity. Similarly, Kim and Anderson (2008) contend that reading to children is a cultural practice. Therefore book sharing experiences between parents and pre-school children is not only a way for parents to help their children with their literacy, but book sharing experiences are also a form of social interaction. Jiménez et al. (2006) specifically note that the interactive nature of book sharing between parents and children reflects Vygotsky's concept of children's zone of proximal development. Parents, as more competent readers, capitalize on the children's learning process through interactive experiences so that children can internalize what they have learned from book sharing experiences. Holdaway (1979) emphasizes ways parents and children could have stronger bonds during book sharing and like Jiménez et al., Holdaway also views parents as mediators in learning processes. Lever and Sénéchal (2011) suggest that book sharing between parents and children can create a dialogic environment and this helps parents have opportunities for teaching children. It is during these book sharing experiences that parents talk about things beyond the content of the books, such as family and cultural values or issues related to society and culture. As children become independent readers, this social interaction may become more expansive because children take more active participation in the discussion. Children are likely to read better but also know more about the connection between the stories and real world even though parents in this case still act as mediators in their interaction. I suggest that books function as boundary objects; they are artifacts that bridge between real world and the worlds described in the books. Children learn to make meaning of the stories from this connection.

Jiménez et al.'s (2006) study about book sharing within Latino families—using books written in Spanish, not written in English—shows that the dialogues between parents and children during and after the acts of reading become more decontextualized. In other words, the dialogues between parents and children are more about issues beyond the texts that are meaningful to their lives, not merely about the texts themselves. Thus parents and children make connections between the texts and their personal experiences and use these occasions to talk about family values and beliefs. These researchers argue that parents use book sharing experiences as “a means of transmitting meaningful sociocultural practices and beliefs between adult and child” (p. 434). This brings me to the discussion of why we read to our children.

#### *Our Decisions to Read to Our Children*

In reading books to and with our children especially when they were young, my wife and I combined both pleasure and didacticism. As Holdaway (1979) contends, as parents we had pleasure and satisfaction when we were reading to our children and we wanted to strengthen our bonds as a family. More importantly, we wanted our sons to acquire a fascination within stories as much as we wanted them to learn about cultural values, norms, and mores. We did not expect our sons to learn about those directly from the stories, but we did anticipate they would internalize the lessons or values in the stories. When our children were young, our discussions were more didactic and monologic than when our children were older.

For example, in Iowa we read Indonesian folktales with our sons—as I described in Chapter One—to facilitate learning about cultural values, norms, and mores. Similar to Korean folktales, Indonesian folktales are still considered an important source for teaching traditional Indonesian values. As a developing nation, Indonesia welcomes new, global values but, on the other hand, the nation still considers traditional values as central to the beliefs and daily practices of its people. We selected these books because they contain values important in terms of living together as members of society. Through these

books, my wife and I mediated discussions with our sons about social relations, the relationships between parents and children, and the balance between society and individuals.

As the boys grew older and because book sharing is social in nature, we not only mediated discussions with our children through books we read together but also began to listen more and more to their ideas and opinions. We started to read to them when they were infants, but in the end, when they were able to read independently to make meaning of the texts, they became our partners in dialogues. We were still mediators but our mediation was not as intensive as when they were younger. Chapter Four describes our transactions with the text on which we based our dialogues. Our dialogues were lively because of our different perspectives on the text in relation to our real situation. In Chapter Four, I highlight the activities we engaged in by reading to our sons and serving as mediators for their learning. They were ready to transact with the texts, connect the texts to their life experiences, and make meaning of the texts. As readers, they were well positioned to enjoy a literary text in a way similar to my enjoyment with “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.”

### Picturebooks

In this section I review theory and research related to picturebooks because this genre of children’s literature plays an important part in my family book sharing. I begin this section with a definition of picturebooks, followed by the elements of visual arts, and the synergy between the words and pictures.

In children’s literature anthologies (Norton & Norton, 2011; Stewig, 1995; Temple, Martinez, & Yokota; 2011), picturebooks are typically described in categories such as early childhood books, wordless books, beginning reader’s books, and picture storybooks. Included in early childhood books are toy books, Mother Goose and nursery rhymes, concept books, alphabet books, and counting books. Meanwhile, the category of beginning reader’s books comprises predictable books and easy readers. These books are

intended for children. Picture storybooks, on the other hand, are different from the other categories in that they have a plot or a story line. Drawing on the work of the scholars mentioned above, for purposes of this research I define picturebooks as “picture storybooks or books that contain written texts and illustrations that develop a strong story line.” In terms of spelling the word picturebook, I follow Lewis (2001), Nikolajeva and Scott (2001), Sipe (2008), and Sipe and Pantaleo (2008) who choose “picturebook” as a compound word. By choosing this spelling, I consider picturebooks as literary texts that have two equal components, words and pictures, and that the two form a synergy (Sipe, 2008) that creates meaning.

### *Elements of Visual Arts*

Pictures in picturebooks always entice readers. With beautiful pictures and the innovation in printing technology, picturebooks have become more and more eye-catching and sophisticated (Norton & Norton, 2011). However as readers, many of us do not realize why or how illustrators produced certain pictures for certain portions of print text. This short review is important to better understand about pictures or illustrations in picturebooks. Specifically I discuss the elements of visual arts and my discussion draws from Galda, Cullinan, and Sipe’s (2010) work. They assert that in illustrating picturebooks, artists work with basic elements of arts and principles of designs. The basic elements of arts include “line, shape, color and textures,” whereas the principles of designs include “rhythm, balance, variety, emphasis, spatial order, and unity” (p. 62). These scholars also contend that the combination of the two is “to create a unified image that conveys meaning” (p. 62). For readers of picturebooks who do not have backgrounds in art, the work of these scholars is significantly useful. If artists choose certain colors, their choice is not random. Illustrators choose certain colors not only to reflect emotions but also to convey “warmth or coolness, personality traits, indifference or engagement, and other feelings” (p. 64). For example, black is associated with grief or fear, whereas red is associated with excitement, and white with sincerity or purity. In short, every color,

line, texture, and shape artists choose in illustrating picturebooks carries specific purposes and meanings.

Another significant discussion in Galda et al.'s (2010) work is about styles. According to them, styles of art fall into the following categories: representational, consisting of "literal, realistic depictions of characters, objects, and events" (p. 82); surrealistic, "often composed of the kinds of images experienced in dreams or nightmares or in a state of hallucination" (p. 82); impressionistic, emphasizing "light and color" and creating "a fleeting impression of reality" (p. 83); folk art, and naïve art. Illustrators apply these styles to their works depending on the nature of the story. For example, in a realistic story, representational style best suits the story, but to portray events in dreams, a surrealistic style is more suitable. To sum up, the discussion of the elements of visual arts is important in understanding the relationships between the written texts and pictures in picturebooks, which I discuss in the following section.

#### *Synergy between the Words and Pictures*

Picturebooks are different from other kinds of literature. Although other kinds of literature have only words as their medium, picturebooks have two media, words or conventional signs and pictures or iconic signs (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001). According to Nikolajeva and Scott (2001), the function of conventional signs is to narrate and the function of iconic signs is to represent. Together, conventional signs and iconic signs create a unified or total synergy that creates meanings in picturebooks.

Words alone will not be complete without pictures and, on the other hand, pictures without words will not be complete either (Lewis, 2001; Lunn, 2003; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001; Nodelman, 1988; Sipe, 1998, 2008). We may understand the stories in picturebooks by reading the words only but our understanding of the words alone is not enough because we will not be able to produce meaning from reading the words only. Thus, the words and pictures in picturebook are a whole. When the words and pictures are taken together they will produce a synergy or greater effect than the effect produced

by either the text alone or the pictures alone (Nodelman, 1988; Sipe, 1998). This synergistic relationship between the words and pictures also means that there is a mutual relationship between the two: the meaning of the words depends on the pictures and the meaning of the pictures depends on the words.

When we read picturebooks, our eyes move between the words and pictures simultaneously; we enjoy and think about the combination and relationships of the two elements. Without combining these two media, the meaning of picturebooks may be missed. Readers must be active in seeking meaning from the combination of the words and pictures simultaneously:

We can stare at the page for as long as we like but the pictures and words will stay quite still and determinedly leave each other alone. The only relations they share on the page are spatial ones and if any animating gets done it is because an active, meaning-seeking reader is at work. (Lewis, 2001, p. 55)

When an adult and a child read a picturebook together, the adult often mediates the transaction to help the child create meaning. Parents or adults may ask questions of children and, if need be, explain the pictures and the words so that children can make deeper meaning of the book during reading. At other times, children may take the lead by asking specific questions about the story or about an element of an illustration. These acts of reading picturebooks emphasizes that the meaning of picturebooks is created from the synergy between the words and pictures and the reading relationship between the adult reader and the child reader.

### Culture

The notion of culture, as I described in Chapter One, is central in this work because culture shapes the experiences of my family in living in both countries, Indonesia and the United States. Our lived experiences reflect our cultural experiences. In both countries, we learned about culture by living it, reading books about it, and using other resources such as the Internet, traveling, and creating relationships with other people to understand their perspectives. However, discussing culture is a challenge because culture



is a complex term and different scholars or researchers may propose different definitions and not every definition fits to describe our transnational journeys and lived experiences. In this section, I review some definitions and the notion of culture before I decide to choose one definition that best describes my family's cultural experiences.

Finding a definition that was appropriate for my study involved reading widely to understand the multiple definitions. I include a select few in my comments regarding culture. Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2012) borrow their definition of culture from a series of scholars and suggest that culture is “an invisible web of behaviors, patterns, rules, and rituals of a group of people who have contact with one another and share a common language” (p. 3). The phrase “a group of people who have contact with one another and share common language” indicates homogeneity. In this definition, culture appears to exclusively belong to a group of people that are different from cultures belonging to other people. This definition suggests that contacts only happen among people in one group. Fetterman (2010) offers this definition of culture: “the ideas, beliefs, and knowledge that characterize a particular group of people” (p. 16). Like the first definition, this definition of culture may only apply to a particular group of people. I can infer that patterns of behavior, customs, and way of life of a particular group of people are exclusively for people in the same group. This definition does not suggest that people from another group or other groups can also share the ideas, beliefs, and knowledge. Another definition is from Yenika-Akbaw who defines culture as “The practice and beliefs of a particular group of people, which distinguishes them from all other groups through material and symbolic forms” (2008, p. xv). This definition also emphasizes the exclusiveness of culture or, in other words, focuses on the differences between one group of people and other groups of people, in the sense that the same practice and beliefs only happen in one group of people. On the basis of these definitions, I might infer that, for example, culture in Canada is different from Indonesian culture which is different from

American culture, etc. These definitions do not discuss relationships between cultures or between people from different cultures.

Fang (2011) defines culture in a way that I am able to see my family and our cultural experiences. According to Fang, there are two paradigms of culture: static and dynamic. A static paradigm of culture does not recognize the complexity of culture. Instead, in this paradigm, culture is seen as simple. Fang would suggest that the previous definitions are examples of a static paradigm because they propose a more simple view of culture. For instance, U.S. culture is different from Indonesian culture because of the focus on cultural differences between nationalities or countries. As a consequence, the advocates of this static paradigm view cultural differences, cultural clashes, and cultural collisions as a problem. Fadiman (1998) gives an example of how American culture and Hmong culture collide in the case of a Hmong child who suffers from epilepsy. From the perspective of U.S. doctors, Hmong people are ignorant of the modern medicine—the fault is with the Hmong. And from the Hmong perspective, the perception is that U.S. doctors are ignorant of their understanding of health and wellness – the fault is with U.S. doctors. Advocates of a static paradigm of culture view values within a society and national culture as stable and static over time. The definitions of culture above belong to this paradigm and they cannot adequately describe the experiences of my family and other transnational families.

In contrast, a dynamic paradigm of culture sees culture as learned and negotiated; thus culture is dynamic. Learning is dynamic because it is dependent upon the context of time, place, and situation. Culture changes because of these intercultural interactions. Therefore individuals can have multiple cultural identities in heterogeneous and pluralistic societies. Culture does not exclusively belong to one group of people; many different groups of people can share the same culture. The dynamic paradigm of culture is gaining popularity in this “new social environment of globalization with ‘borderless and wireless cultural learning, knowledge transfer, and synchronized information

sharing' ...” (Fang, 2011, p. 5). In this paradigm, cultural differences are not seen as a problem but as an opportunity for learning. One dynamic definition of culture I cite here is conceptualized by Sørderberg and Holden (2002) who define culture as “... shared or partly shared patterns of meaning and interpretation ... made up of relations, rather than as a stable system of form and substance” (p. 112). According to Sørderberg and Holden, people repeatedly produce the shared patterns, then identify with and negotiate them through social interactions. This changes how people identify with and affiliate to variety of different cultures. In this conception, national and ethnic cultures are subject to change. Thus, the boundaries of cultural communities become fluid and contingent because they are conceptualized as symbolic practices that can only come into being in relation with or contrast to other cultures. Consequently, culture is neither stable nor fixed. The construction of people’s cultural identities is also dynamic, dependent upon context.

For purposes of this research I chose this definition of culture because it describes my family journeys as a transnational family. Living in the U.S., my family was situated between two cultures. Drawing on Fang (2011), we attempted to view these differences as an opportunity for learning even though there were moments when these differences created tensions and dilemmas. We learned how to live between these two cultures and maintained our relationships and interactions with people in both countries. We continuously learned to position and reposition ourselves in both the U.S. and Indonesian societies. Our position at the intersection of the two cultural borders encouraged us to continue to explore and critique our lived experiences. As a result of positioning on the border of two cultural experiences, we adopted new identities.

### Identities

Reading—our relation and interaction with texts—may have invited us to develop new identities. I use identities as a plural form because identities are always shifting and in flux (Holland et al., 1998; Lewis & del Valle, 2008; Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007;

McCarthy & Moje, 2002; Moje & Lewis, 2007; Rosenblatt, 1938/1995; Sumara, 1998, 2002). Each of us, no matter what circumstances we are in, reflects multiple identities. In reading and making meaning, we may only draw on a few of our identities but it does not mean that we only have a single stable identity. In imaginary worlds created when reading texts, we may also construct certain new identities.

According to Holland et al. (1998), the discussion of identities cannot be separated from figured worlds. This is because the formation of identities is not only based on reality or the real world but also on the figured or imaginary world. There are reciprocal relationships between reality and imaginary worlds. In this notion, these researchers share similar views with Vygotsky (1978) and Caughey (1984). Vygotsky creates an important theoretical link between reality/real worlds and the imagined world of play. At the heart of this issue, Vygotsky believes that an imaginary situation allows for stimuli that prompt a child to think and act beyond his actual age. Thus, reading, as play, has the potential to develop a reader's identities. Meanwhile, Caughey states that people have imaginary social relationships. When reading, many readers have social relationships with their favorite characters in the books they read. This is an example of imaginary social relationships people have. When people have such relationships, they tend to develop new identities.

An individual has a past and present and under certain circumstances is always in connection with other individuals. This is what keeps an individual's identities shifting and in flux or fluid because of people's relations with one another in particular settings (Lewis et al., 2007). Similarly, Lewis and del Valle (2008) suggest that an individual's identity is determined by his or her relations with the society, culture, history, institution, and politics or, in other words, determined by his or her relations with the worlds around him. And for McCarthy and Moje (2002), "identity is multiple, fragmentary, and contradictory" (p. 230). A good way to understand this notion is perhaps through an example: An individual can be a hero and a criminal at the same time, depending on the

point of views and interests of those who think about that particular individual. In this case, the individual has contradictory identities and these contradictory identities are examples of the multiple identities I describe. However, an individual cannot have fully developed new identities because identities still carry his or her history. It means that the new identities do not replace the old ones.

With such conceptions of identity—that identity is always changing and fluid—I suggest that reading stories (literature) encourages readers to develop new identities because of the opportunities available to readers in imaginary worlds created through reading stories. New insights and new perspectives come into play for readers. According to Sumara (2002), texts play crucial roles in the development of identities of their readers because “Identity emerges from relationships, including relationship people have with books and other communicative technologies based on language” (p. 9). The word “relationship” seems to be the key word. Whenever an individual has a relationship with another individual, with texts he or she is reading, and with the society, then there is the potential for developing new dimensions of one’s identities. If the texts are literary texts, this identity development is likely to happen because literary texts have the power to make us examine the thoughts, beliefs, and actions of other people without asking direct actions of us (Beach & Marshall, 1991). According to Beach and Marshall, this happens because literary texts are “... capable of making us reflect upon, evaluate, and make sense of the lives... In reading we may feel as if we were ‘really there,’ ... (p. 19). This experience of being really there may epitomize what it means for readers to enter imaginary worlds. My readings of “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” is a reflection and evaluation of my life in relations with the poem, how I thought about winter both in Indonesia and in the U.S., and how I had developed different identities between my first and second readings.

In this chapter, I described theory and research critical to my study. In the next chapter, I discuss the methods I used in this study. I describe narrative inquiry as the

methodology and content analysis as the procedure for analyzing data. In addition, I describe in detail the participants, the data collection, and the data analysis.

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to describe how books and stories can serve as mediating tools for parents and children who engage in dialogues about culture, border crossing, and transnational journeys. I describe how books and stories may unearth cultural tensions and dilemmas parents might have in raising children who are transnational. In this study I share data in the form of stories and dialogues that my wife and I had with our sons as a way for us to discuss issues related to culture, transnationalism, and identities that arose while raising them in two different countries, Indonesia and the United States.

I define culture as “shared or partly shared patterns of meaning and interpretation ... culture is seen as being made up of relations, rather than as a stable system of form and substance” (Søderberg & Holden (2002, p. 112). Shared patterns of meaning and interpretation are the result of people’s relations and interactions with one another, so they are fluid and subject to change.

If culture is made up of relations, individuals are likely to share patterns of meaning and interpretation, and at the same time they contribute to the ways that culture shifts and changes. Groups of people have certain characteristics that differentiate them from other groups. It is because of relations and interactions between people from different geographic and political regions that many groups of people now share certain values and norms. I will refer to people who cross boundaries of language, geography, and politics as boundary crossers.

When my family arrived in the U.S., we came to a country that was a different society and culture. There are differences between Indonesia and the U.S. in terms of traditions, norms, and values, including the languages that are spoken in these countries. To adjust to the U. S. society, we chose to acculturate into the culture of the U.S. As I mentioned in Chapter One, I draw the concept of acculturation from Gans (1997) who

states that acculturation “refers mainly to the newcomers' adoption of the culture (i.e., behavior patterns, values, rules, symbols etc.) of the host society ...” (p. 877). If the culture of the host society is fluid and subject to change, newcomers' adoption of the behavior patterns, values, rules, and symbols are also fluid and subject to change. For example, before 2009 same-sex marriage was not legal in Iowa and it became legal in April 2009. The change was the result of relations and interactions—or dialogues—among many parties in Iowa. This was a significant change and it impacted the way people thought about family. This change is an indication that values, norms, and traditions are subject to change over time. In Indonesia, people do not consider the idea of same-sex marriage as legitimate. Following the debates, negotiation, and polemics in this matter, I did not know where I positioned myself. As an Indonesian, I did not have opinions about same-sex marriage. However, from my interactions and relations with some people in Iowa, gradually my perspective changed. The first course I took at the University of Iowa was Feminist Cultural Studies in which we also discussed gay, lesbian, and same-sex marriage. As a newcomer to the society, I gained new understanding about the issue from scholarly dialogues and from following the debates in the media. This is one example of how I acculturated into the culture of the host society.

My example reveals the idea that acculturation is a matter of learning over time. Even for host societies, the change of culture does not happen suddenly. It took time for Iowa to finally legalize same-sex marriage even though for many Iowans this idea conflicts with their beliefs. When I heard the debates for the first time, I was on the boundary of learning and was not comfortable even hearing the term (same-sex marriage) used. The course I took helped me understand the debates and gave me new insights. I thought hard about the idea until finally I came to a different perspective on this matter. Lave and Wenger (1991) might describe me as being on the boundary of learning and moving to fuller participation in the dialogue. As a newcomer, I learned to become part of the community of practice with others who were involved in similar dialogues. This



learning process was not easy because certain values in the local culture conflicted with the values I brought from my culture. But my relations and interactions with other people—not only from day-to-day relations and interactions but especially relations and interactions in terms of ideas—helped shape new understandings and prompted new identities to emerge. My identities are multiple in that I am like a member of the U.S. society and I am also still a person coming from different culture and society. My participation in different communities of practice in U.S. society continues to emerge — and my learning process also continues.

This is true with all members of my family. My wife, Maharesmi, experienced learning to accept new values, customs, traditions, and ideas as a result of her learning process living in the United States. Our sons, Adiwignya and Widagda, experienced difficult adjustments to life in the U.S. (I discuss this in more detail in the Participants section) and were able to acculturate well to U.S. culture. Our stay in Iowa City has been a learning process in positioning and repositioning ourselves between the two cultures. Stories and books served as a significant bridge and mediation tool for all of us. When we left Iowa City, we were different persons. Our identities as transnational people were shaped by crossing cultural, geographic and political borders. As we experienced the values, norms, and patterns of behavior of both cultures, our learning expanded. The intersections of U.S. culture and Indonesian culture are in us.

Therefore, stories of my family are critical in this study. I make use of family stories to frame this study and address the research questions stated in Chapter One: 1. In what ways does story serve as boundary objects? 2. How can story serve as a mediating tool to teach children about culture? 3. How can story serve as a mediating tool to explore cultural tensions and dilemmas?

The methodology for this study is drawn from the qualitative research traditions of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and uses content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004) as an analytical tool. In this qualitative study, I describe how

international parents might use stories as boundary objects to serve as a bridging function to address the ways transnational children might handle cultural tensions and dilemmas. In what follows I describe the methodology and how it works for my study.

### Narrative Inquiry Method

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that “narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience” (p. 20). A narrative inquirer is especially interested in “lived experience—that is, lives and how they are lived” (p. xxii) and narrative inquirers analyze and reconstruct the lived experience in the narrative form. Clandinin and Connelly emphasize that in a narrative inquiry, the collaboration between a researcher and participants happens

... over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer ... concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people’s lives, both individual and social. Simply stated ... narrative inquiry is stories lived and told (p. 20)

Being close with participants is a prerequisite for a narrative researcher to complete research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest a researcher may even need to “fall in love” with his or her participants. This means that the researcher needs to be close to participants in order to present the stories of the participants with clarity and precision even though, in qualitative research, the subjectivity of the researcher is dominant. In most cases—no matter how close the relationships between the researcher and the participants—narrative inquiry is about other people. The inquirer analyzes and reconstructs or rewrites the stories of other people. In this work, I employ this method to do research with my own family—my wife, our two sons, and myself. I use narrative inquiry to explain and analyze our particular experiences of living in two countries—and our attempts to acculturate into the culture of the U.S. society and at the same time how to maintain our identities as Javanese and Indonesian. This was not always easy because along the way we experienced value conflicts, tensions, and dilemmas, especially in

raising our children. The narrative inquiry is useful to reconstruct our lived experiences in this context.

In doing narrative inquiry, I compose and analyze the narratives of my family as social products in the context of specific social, historical and cultural locations. Because I am the researcher and the researched at the same time, what I have done is to capture the stories of my family's lived experience in the social and cultural contexts of Indonesia and the United States. In reconstructing the stories of my family, I use memories, my exchanged emails with my wife, and journals I kept both in Indonesia and the United States (I discuss this in more detail in the Data Sources section). This is in line with what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that narrative inquiry should be undertaken in three dimensional narrative inquiry space: continuity, interaction, and place or "... studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequences of places" (p. 50).

### Content Analysis

Content analysis is a flexible research method for analyzing, describing, and interpreting texts (Krippendorff, 2004; White & Marsh, 2006). The term "text" includes the print texts (articles, books, and manuals), verbal, multimodal, or electronic texts. Krippendorff (2004) also includes recorded speech, visual communications, works of art, and artifacts as texts. In this work, my data include stories of my family, my family discussions, emails, journals, story books (children's literature), and field notes. In a study involving children's literature and responses to the literature, a researcher can use content analysis to draw meaning from the texts or to interpret the texts.

By choosing content analysis as the research method, the interpretation of the content of the text data by the researcher is subjective (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Krippendorff, 2004; Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). As a reader of texts, the researcher does not necessarily share the meaning and interpretation of the texts with

others. On the contrary, the meaning and interpretation of the text should be the researcher's own meaning and interpretation. This is important because subjectivity is always part of qualitative research and can contribute to research (Glesne, 2006). She posits that

Part of being attuned to your subjective lenses is being attuned to your emotions. Your emotions help you identify when your subjectivity is being engaged. Instead of trying to suppress your feelings, you use them to inquire into your perspectives and interpretations and to shape new questions through re-examining your assumptions (p. 120)

Therefore, my subjective interpretation of the content of the text data is important because it presents my identities, perspectives, and how deeply I am engaged in the research. It is my subjectivity that determines how I interpret and explain the data, and how I present the stories of my family. This perspective is important. In this study I composed most of the text data (except emails from my wife and books that we read together) but still I have to interpret them to make meaning of them. However, it does not mean that the interpretations are without guidance because in content analysis this subjective interpretation is obtained “through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). To do this, I carefully documented my procedures in collecting the data and I clarified the way I generated themes for textual analysis. To draw meaning from the texts, as a content analyst I drew abductive inferences from them.

#### *Abductive Inferences*

Krippendorff (2004) states not every inference can be applied to content analysis. Among the three inferences, inductive, deductive, and abductive, it is abductive inferences that a content analyst can use. Inductive inferences, in Krippendorff's terms, are “generalizations to similar kinds” (p. 36). Deductive inferences are the opposite of inductive inferences, they “proceed from particular to general” (p. 36). Meanwhile, abductive inferences “proceed across logically distinct domains, from particulars of one kind to particulars of another” (p. 36). Based on the nature of my data, inductive and

deductive inferences will not work. Therefore, according to Krippendorf (2004), abductive inferences are the centerpiece of content analysis. Using content analysis, a content analyst does not draw inferences deductively or inductively but abductively from texts (data) to answer the research questions. In other words, abductive inferences are “the process of inference to the best explanation” (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/abduction>). Using abductive inferences, I interpreted and explained my data and, more importantly, I analyzed the whole data and answered the research questions to reconstruct the narrative of my family.

### Context for the Study

Living in two countries, Indonesia and the United States, my family has diverse life stories. As the researcher in this study, I share stories of border crossing, discontinuities, acculturation, learning, and cultural tensions as well as dilemmas we faced as international graduate students. My family came to the U.S. bringing our own culture and language and in the U.S. we faced new customs, traditions, people, and a new language. In terms of raising our children, for example, my wife and I wanted them to fit in, but on the other hand we also wanted them to maintain our native language and culture. At some points this created tensions and dilemmas for us, and the stories I tell here address such tensions and dilemmas. Through books and in our home, my wife and I educated our sons in the best ways we could. In addition to learning directly from the society and culture where we lived, our sons learned from books and from us to be transnational children. My wife and I also learned to be transnational parents by knowing the culture of Indonesia and the U.S. It is in this context that our homes, both in Indonesia and in the United States, are important.

Our three homes in Athens, Ohio, Semarang, Indonesia, and Iowa City, Iowa are the sites for this study. It was in our homes that my wife and I read to and with our children, even though once in a while we read in the public library or in the park (in Ohio and Iowa, but not in Semarang). What follows is my description about each of the sites.

*Our Home in Athens, OH*

My wife and I were graduate students at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. Athens is a small college town with a population of around 20,000 people. When the semester is underway, this small college town looks busy and lively, but during the school breaks, both the summer and winter breaks, it is very quiet. However, like many small towns in the U.S., Athens has outstanding public facilities such as the library, parks, and playgrounds.

We lived in an apartment about one mile from campus. The apartment complex was quiet most of the time so it was good for us. As graduate students, my wife and I mostly studied at home. The reason for this was because we had to take turns taking care of Adiwignya who was 1 year old. When my wife was on campus, I was at home and when I was on campus she was at home. It was at home that we began to introduce books to Adiwignya. On the weekends, we usually went to the Athens Public Library to check out children's books such as toy books, alphabet books, counting books, concept books, wordless books, and picture storybooks (Norton & Norton, 2011). In our home, children's books were scattered everywhere because Adiwignya often treated them as toys. Although he played with the books like he played with toys and left them scattered everywhere in the living room and in the bedroom, during reading times he would sit on the lap of whoever was reading to him. My wife and I enjoyed reading to him and read to him often.

When Widagda, our younger son, was born at the end of 2001, my wife and I had tighter schedules but we continued to read to our children. We wondered if the boys understood what we were reading, but soon learned that our readings and discussions were important for the children's early education (Hasson, 1991). According to her, even though infants do not say words, they acquire language when they hear it spoken. Through our acts of reading and discussion, we helped our sons get used to the English language as a mediator in their development (Vygotsky, 1978).

*Our Home in Semarang, Indonesia*

Semarang is the capital of Central Java, Indonesia, and is located on the northern coast of Java island. Its population is about two million. Our home is located in the eastern suburb of the city, about 10 miles from downtown. It is a very crowded residential area, of about 30,000 people that is like a small town. When we moved to the area, Adiwignya was not yet born. Most of the residents in the area were young couples with young children. In terms of social strata, one could tell the lower class, middle class, and upper class people in the area by looking at their houses. The houses on both sides of the main streets are big and those behind them are smaller. The farther a house is from the main streets the smaller it usually is. In terms of professions, the residents have various jobs, ranging from businessmen, physicians, government officials, blue collar workers, food vendors, household helpers, teachers, etc. Our neighborhood was filled with elementary, junior high, senior high school teachers and college teachers.

In my Indonesian neighborhood, parents do not commonly read to their children. One major reason is that, in Indonesia, oral traditions are still stronger than literate traditions. Story telling is more common than reading; therefore many parents tell stories to their children. My family is one of the few exceptions. We read stories more than we told stories to our children. Our educational backgrounds and professions—both of us are college teachers—shaped our decisions about reading to our sons when they were infants and young children. Our experiences studying and living in the U.S. also informed our decisions to read to our sons.

We began reading to our children when we lived in Athens, Ohio, but we continued reading to our children when we returned to Indonesia. There were, however, some differences between reading in Athens and in Semarang. First, in our home in Semarang, we read to our children in both languages, English and Indonesian. We brought children's books written in English back with us from Athens. But, unlike the varied reading we did in Athens, we could not get new books written in English in

Semarang, so we read what we had brought from the United States. We read some of these books many times. Second, as our sons grew, they began to understand more and fully enjoy what we read to them. When my wife or I read books written in English to them, we explained the stories or pictures in both Indonesian and English. This way, the boys learned both languages. Our way of reading to our sons was unusual and reading books written in English to them was even more unusual in our neighborhood, but that was our decision because we thought it was important for us to teach them English and explain to them many aspects of the U.S. through the books we were reading. As a family who once lived in the U.S., we wanted to keep some of the U.S. experiences in our home in Semarang, and reading English books to them was one way to do that.

#### *Our Home in Iowa City, IA*

The acts of reading to and with our sons in our home in Iowa City were also different from our acts of reading in Athens and Semarang. In our home in Semarang, my wife and I mostly read and explained the stories to the boys. But in Iowa City, book sharing became a way for us to have dialogues. The boys were already in school and better understood what we read. They not only listened to us but also actively engaged in the activities. My wife and I were no longer the only readers. Adiwignya and Widagda also took turns reading to us. Sometimes we read books that their teachers assigned to help them with their assignments, but we also still had regular visits to the library to check out books for out-of-school readings. For family reading, my wife or I chose the books and for their personal readings, Adiwignya and Widagda chose their own books. Whatever books we read together, the communication was no longer one-way but two-way. Thus, it was in our home in Iowa City that we had real dialogues about the books we were reading. Usually before the boys went to bed, we read together. In addition to reading a story, we also talked about what we experienced during the day. It was during these times that the boys talked to us about their experiences in school and we talked to them about our days.



Hence, book sharing in our home in Iowa City became our way of sharing ideas and talking with one another. On certain occasions, reading to and with the boys was a way for my wife and me to explain certain issues to the boys. For example, to discuss diversity, we read an Asian American picturebook, *The Ugly Vegetables* by Grace Lin. We explained to the boys that the Chinese American family in the story who invite their neighbors who have different cultural and racial backgrounds is an example of how people of different backgrounds should live side-by-side peacefully and harmoniously. This is important in both American and Indonesian societies. In this way, it was not only the books (the stories) that became the mediator but also the interactions or dialogues with my wife and me.

### Participants

The participants in this study are my family members, my wife (Maharesmi), our sons (Adiwignya and Widagda), and myself. In this section, I describe my wife and our sons and the description about myself is at the end of the chapter in a section titled My Position in This Study.

#### *Maharesmi*

Maharesmi was born and raised in the second biggest city in East Java. Her father was an elementary school teacher and her mother was a housewife. She went to the Catholic elementary school where her father taught. The third child in her family, Maharesmi was different from her siblings. In her childhood, she liked to read stories—especially the Indonesian version of the world’s classic literature such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Don Quixote*, *Ivanhoe*, *Gulliver’s Travels*, *Three Musketeers*, *Robin Hood*, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, *Daniel Defoe*, *Treasure Island*, *Moby Dick*, *Tom Sawyer*, and *Huckleberry Finn*. She also read *The Famous Five* series. These classical works were published in Indonesia in the form of comic books for children. Public libraries were not available yet in her hometown; therefore, she bought some of those books with her allowance money and she also exchanged books with her friends. In

addition, once in a while, her mother took her to watch movies in the only theatre in her city. She enjoyed watching American (Hollywood) and Indian (Bollywood) movies. The books she read and the movies she watched were a tool for her in learning about other cultures.

She also had the opportunity to learn English when she was a child. Different from the public elementary school, her school offered English as one of the courses. In Indonesia, it was unusual at the time. Given these opportunities, Maharesmi began to learn English when she was in the third grade. She liked her English teacher and recalled several special moments during English classes, especially when her teacher taught English songs. Her English teacher was a role model and an inspiration. Launching her dreams of going to faraway places came from the movies she watched, the books she read, and from her English teacher.

The combination of these three—movies, books, and English classes—became an important part of Maharesmi's life. Her passion for languages, especially English, pushed her to enroll in Linguistics as her major when she was in college. She wanted to be an English teacher, just like her English teacher in elementary school. Graduating from college, she began to teach English in a private college in Semarang, Central Java.

Maharesmi wanted our sons to follow in her footsteps. She wanted them to love books and become engaged readers. She taught them to read, read to them, and took them to libraries. She believed that books could create dreams and transport individuals to places they want to see. Above all, she believed that books could enrich lives and open new perspectives so that individuals could appreciate people from different cultural backgrounds.

#### *Adiwignya*

When we came to Iowa, Adiwignya had just finished kindergarten in Semarang. Spending two years in Indonesian kindergarten, he learned to read and write in the Indonesian language. Arriving in Iowa, we sent him to a public elementary school where

the medium of instruction was English. Everything was in English. He experienced discontinuities because of the many sociocultural differences (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011) between Indonesia and the United States. He was anxious because he did not know what to expect in his new school with new friends and teachers. Before school started, he repeatedly told us that he was scared to go to school because he did not speak English. My wife and I attempted to reassure him. His anxieties involved worry over making friends and developing relationships with teachers. He was also concerned with cultural differences related to eating lunch at school and using the restroom. It was crucial that he meet his teachers and see the school so we took him for a school visit. I remembered he was very happy when he read “Selamat datang” upon entering the school building. “Selamat datang” is the Indonesian term for “welcome.”

The orientation Adiwignya had was really helpful for getting him settled. He became familiar with the school building and its environment and, especially, his homeroom teacher and other teachers. The teachers explained what he expected to learn; my wife and I became the mediators between him and his teachers. To our surprise, his first day of school went well. On the first day of school, Maharesmi and I went to Adiwignya’s school to make sure that he knew everything he had to do. Adiwignya rode the bus to school. We met him at the school and we talked to his homeroom teacher and waited for him anxiously at home. As soon as he arrived from school in the afternoon, he said to us that everything was all right and he liked school. School staff assisted with his transition by placing him in the ELL class, together with other international students.

My wife and I got involved directly in his homework and assignments. Every evening Maharesmi or I sat down with him to assist with homework, especially reading and mathematics. In reading, we helped him with pronunciation and spelling. We asked him to read and when he pronounced words incorrectly, we helped him with the correct pronunciation. Later, when Adiwignya—and also Widagda—spoke English and pronounced words correctly, they corrected our pronunciation when we mispronounced a

word. At points along the way, we had to speak in Indonesian or Javanese to help him understand. In mathematics, we assisted with logical reasoning. For example when he had to solve this problem: “I am an odd number. I have a two in the tens place. I am less than 23. What number am I?” We translated this problem into Indonesian so that he could understand it. Being on the boundary of culture and learning at this critical time, Adiwignya learned productively from dialogues he had with his teachers, friends, and us, his parents (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). Slowly and gradually, he was moving from the margins of his learning community to becoming a central participant (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

As time went on, he was increasingly comfortable with his learning process and progressed so that my wife and I provided less assistance. He was going through the transition smoothly and this included using English. I do not quite remember when he stopped speaking in Indonesian and Javanese. My wife and I just realized that he no longer spoke our native languages. We faced a dilemma. On one hand, we wanted him to be a successful student (not to be left behind) but on the other hand we also wanted him to maintain our languages and culture. But in the end we had to accept the fact that he no longer spoke Indonesian or Javanese. We understood that this was the consequence of our decisions. We wanted him to do well in school and we helped him as much as we could. In helping him, we used more English than Indonesian to communicate. In less than two years, he stopped learning English in the ELL class. His ELL teacher convinced us that Adiwignya was ready to fully participate in his homeroom class.

As a reader, Adiwignya had developed strong interests in science and history. Most of the books he chose were science and history books. However, he also read texts of choice that included story books, humorous stories, adventures, and comic books. Once in a while he read story books he chose himself but usually he read funny stories, adventures, and comic books. When he liked certain books, he would read them for

hours. For example, he was crazy for *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series by Jeff Kinney. He also enthusiastically read *The Benedict Society* series by Trenton Lee Stewart.

### *Widagda*

Widagda is 2 years younger than his brother. When we came to Iowa City, he was 4 years of age and he had not attended kindergarten in Indonesia. Upon our arrival, we enrolled him in a Head Start program where he was introduced to English in the context of playing together with all his friends. In about 6 months, he was regularly speaking English. As in the case of Adiwignya, we did not remember exactly when he stopped speaking Indonesian and Javanese. After one year in Head Start, he started kindergarten. In contrast to his brother, he was not placed in an ELL class because he was already speaking English proficiently. Head Start was his transition from Indonesia to the United States, both linguistically and culturally.

Compared to Adiwignya, Widagda experienced more discontinuities during his transition from Indonesia to the United States. From the first day in Head Start, Widagda did not eat and was not happy. We knew that he was nervous, scared, and uncertain about what to expect in the new milieu with new friends, teachers and people outside of home. Unlike his brother, he did not tell us about any of them. Perhaps it was because he was too young to express his feelings. We knew of his struggles from his teachers. At the end of the first day, when Maharesmi and I picked him up, his teachers told us that he cried, did not want to eat, talk, and take part in any activities. He sat down by himself most of the time.

Even though we expected that he would experience discontinuities, we were surprised to see what happened to him. Before going to Head Start, he did not show any signs of being scared and nervous; on the contrary, he told us that he was excited to have new friends and wanted to play with them. The night before the first day of school, he happily prepared his backpack and clothes. Therefore, when we heard about what happened from his teachers, we were really concerned. We convinced him that he would

have good times learning and playing with his new friends and that his going to school was very important; otherwise, he would not learn to speak English like his brother.

My wife and I—depending on our schedules—took turns taking him to his Head Start every day. We did not leave him right away but waited for a while to make sure that everything was okay with him but his teachers did not want us to stay. They convinced us that he needed to go through these processes and any inconvenience was not important. We realized that Head Start was a big change for Widagda. Before going to Head Start, he was comfortable at home, his whole world. He was comfortable with the routines at home. Then suddenly he had to get out of his comfort zone: meeting new people in a new environment. He had to learn almost everything new: how to play, cooperate, and share with other children, how to speak in English, and even how to eat different kinds of foods (my wife wanted him to bring food from home but that was not allowed). We were concerned but we agreed with his teachers that he needed to go through all processes of learning in the community of practice. Therefore, we comforted and convinced him that everything would be all right and that his going to school was important.

Little by little he felt more comfortable in his new environment. When we picked him up in the afternoon, sometimes he was still playing with friends on the playground. We were happy to see him finally enjoying being with other children in the Head Start. Gradually he learned to accommodate and in about two months, he made progress as we expected. Widagda immersed himself in the English language and the U.S. culture (or Iowa City culture precisely) well. When he began Kindergarten, he experienced no issues. From the first day, he was happy. Different from his brother, his formal education was exclusively shaped by the United States education system.

As a reader, he was different from his brother. While Adiwignya could read for hours, Widagda could not do that. Widagda is a more practical and down-to-business type of a child than his brother. We often had to remind Adiwignya about his homework or school projects, but we did not need to do that with Widagda. We told him once and it

was enough to make him complete his homework. If he had to read two chapters of a book, for example, he read those two chapters and stopped. He always prepared his school assignments and projects in a timely manner. For his book club discussion, for instance, he read his portions carefully—usually more than once—and was always prepared with questions or a summary for his presentations. When he really liked a book, he read longer than he usually did but he never finished a piece of children’s realistic fiction in one sitting.

For our book sharing, as I stated previously, Maharesmi or I chose the book and for personal additional readings, he was free to choose books he wanted to read. For picturebooks, Widagda liked unique, unconventional picturebooks similar to those created by Eric Carle like *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, *The Grouchy Ladybug*, *The Very Busy Spider*, and *The Very Clumsy Click Beetle*. Adiwignya, Maharesmi, and I also enjoyed reading these books together with Widagda. Even though these books were not intended for family reading, all of us read and enjoyed them. For stories, he liked stories about soccer, funny stories, and adventures too; and of course, he liked comic books like the *Garfield* series. Unlike his brother, he was not really interested in science and history books.

#### Data Sources

Qualitative researchers use field texts to reconstruct the lived experiences of the research participants in narrative inquiries (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In educational research, a researcher selects research sites beyond the laboratory and makes use of various data sources such as teacher stories, autobiographical writing, journal writings, field notes, letters, conversations, research interviews, family stories, documents, and photographs as valuable sources for analysis. In this work, I used stories of my family, emails, journals, story books, family discussions, and field notes. Taking into account my position as both the researcher and the researched in this work, I did not use interview as

a data source. Instead, I used my journals, family discussions, emails, and memories to reconstruct the narrative of my family.

Narrative inquiry suggests that there are layers of interpretation of data. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) claim that the writing of field texts as data is an act of interpretation that is informed by one's data sources. In this work, my personal stories and stories of my family represent how I interpreted our lived experiences in three locations, at different times, and in the context of the U.S. and Indonesian culture. Thus my data reflect our lived experiences from an eleven-year time span. My primary focus is on reconstructing or rewriting our lived experiences especially when we underwent critical tensions and dilemmas in terms of culture. In the following sections, I describe the data.

### *Stories of My Family*

According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. This study is a way for me to understand the lived experiences of my family during our time as international graduate students studying in Athens, OH, and Iowa City, IA, and moving between the United States and Indonesia. Therefore stories of my family are important. As a researcher, I carefully selected stories of my family to represent stories that reflect our crossing cultural and geographic borders. As an international family living in the U.S., we experienced discontinuities, especially in terms of culture and language. We constantly worked to position and reposition ourselves between the two cultures.

In their earlier work, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) stated that the central task of a narrative inquirer is to grasp “that people are both living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories in words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others” (p. 4). I gathered family stories from journals I kept both in Indonesia and the U.S., from emails my wife and I exchanged, and from remembered family accounts. The stories I present in this work are ordinary stories, not grand stories that can capture the attention of people because they are accounts of our life experiences.



The stories I share are carefully selected accounts of how we experienced learning, discontinuities, cultural tensions, and dilemmas.

### *Emails*

Emails were one important data source for my study. My wife and I exchanged regular and consistent email messages while she was in the U.S. and I was in Indonesia with our sons. My emails to her were focused on our sons: how they grew physically, emotionally, and cognitively. In my search through these emails, I only selected those related to learning languages, questions about living in the U.S., and our concerns about future schools for our sons.

Our emails to each other also have a mediating function (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). Reading my wife's emails about Iowa and school to the boys, for example, allows them to imagine what school might be like in the United States including the buildings, classrooms, learning processes, school buses, the library, and interactions between students and teachers. In this case, emails—like stories—allowed the boys to “create images of things never experienced” (Holdaway, 1979, p. 48). Similarly, through my emails, my wife was able to participate at least somewhat in understanding our sons' development.

### *Journals*

I kept journals about our lives while living in Indonesia and in the U.S. since the boys were babies. Included in journals entries I kept while in the U.S. are stories of and reflections on our lives. These journals cover a wide variety of topics and many are comparisons of life in the U.S. and Indonesia and include discussions of difference in traditions and customs in the two countries.

For example, I wrote journals about Valentine's Day and Christmas. In Indonesia not everyone celebrates Valentine's Day and in the U.S. Valentine's Day is special. Even schools ask students to celebrate the day. Every year my wife and I helped our children make Valentine cards and bought candies and chocolate for them to share with their

friends in school. In observing Christmas, there are also differences between the U.S. and Indonesia. In Indonesia we do not give our children Christmas presents but in the U.S. we give them Christmas presents every year. In Indonesia we attend church and prepare a family Christmas feast. We do not invite people to our home nor do people invite us to their homes. In the U.S., we were always invited to have Christmas dinner with an American family and we often exchanged Christmas gifts. My family also invited Indonesian families and some American friends to our home. These differences in traditions and customs created some cultural tensions.

In addition, my journal entries reflected ideas and practices of democracy. I also reflected on the social, cultural, and educational learning processes we were experiencing, I reflected often how the boys were progressing in school. For example, in my journal entries, I wrote that democracy is not only a matter of freedom of expression and the right to vote but, more importantly, it is also matter of listening to and respecting other people. The U.S. society that I have come to know appears to practice this idea. In school, we have freedom of expression. All students are encouraged and given opportunities to say what they think. But, on the other hand, they also need to listen to other students and respect their opinions. In my opinion, this is true democracy. In comparison, Indonesian society still has to learn to practice this idea of democracy.

My journals also contain information about how we raised our sons. In the U.S., my wife and I taught our sons to love music. We arranged for them to have piano lessons and took them to music concerts. After attending music concerts, I wrote journal entries about what we experienced. My entries included observations I made about how the boys reacted to the concerts, some of their opinions, and whether they enjoyed it or not. The boys also participated in piano recitals while we lived in the U.S. and I described them in journal entries. These entries included information about the boys' performances, but also my feelings about how well they did and how proud I felt.

Some entries in my journals are about seasons; how each season affects peoples' lives. Other journal entries are about our longing for Indonesia—in many aspects. My journal entries cover a wide variety of topics in our daily life. Rereading the journals is like looking at snapshots of our life. I selected the snapshots that are appropriate for the study and also those that allowed me to address my research questions.

Over all, these journals provide ways for me to view and understand the similarities and differences between our lives in Indonesia and the U.S. Rereading these journals now, I located examples of discontinuities – the feelings of tension we were experiencing and how we were going through the process of learning. Above all, these journals reflect how we learned to identify and position ourselves between the two cultures.

### *Story Books*

I also include story books that we read together in three places—Athens, Semarang, and Iowa City—as data sources for my study. In almost an 11-year time span, we read a large number of children's books. Even though all books can have a bridging function, for purposes of this study I only focus on books that encouraged or produced dialogues between my wife, our sons, and me. Books we read in Athens and Semarang do not fall in this category. In the two places, our dialogues during and after the acts of reading did not have the impact of the dialogues that occurred in Iowa City because of the impact of cultural and political challenges we were facing. In those early reading experiences with my sons, my wife and I typically explained the stories or the content of the books to them. These early dialogues reflect communication that was basically one-way. The boys asked us questions once in a while but because they were still too young we were not engaged in dialogic conversations about the books we were reading. In contrast, when we were in Iowa City, all of us read books and engaged in dialogues -- communication that was two-way.

### *Family Discussions*

My family discussions are an important data source for this study. Discussions here refer to our dialogues (Bakhtin et al., 1994) during and after the acts of reading. For purposes of this study, I focus on our dialogues during and after the acts of reading when we addressed cultural tensions and dilemmas. These are moments when the books we read functioned as boundary objects. According to Akkermann and Bakker (2011), books are boundary objects in that they may serve a bridging function as we cross boundaries that are represented by tensions and dilemmas of culture, identities, and language (p. 133). It is in our discussions that we connected the books we were reading with real issues, our lived experiences. Our family discussions, together with the other data sources, are critical in reconstructing the stories of my family. In Chapter Four I describe a critical moment when our family discussions serve as examples where my family experiences represent the concept of boundary crossing.

### *Field Notes*

As I read and reread my journals, emails, and recalled the story books we read together, I added to my field notes comments where I reflected on my thinking and the relationship of these data sources to my research questions. These field notes were important because they provided ideas, memories, and hunches as I continued to think deeply about the themes across the data which represent the cultural tensions and dilemmas and how we handled them in our family discussions during and after the acts of reading. My analysis reflects my reading and rereading of the text data. I cross checked those ideas, memories, and hunches. My field notes document the results of cross-checking all data sources. They are narrative accounts of each data source and analytical memos, and written purposefully as a data source as well.

### Data Organization

I collected and organized individual pieces of my data separately. I printed all emails my wife and I exchanged, journals I kept both in Indonesia and in the United

States, and scanned books that we read in my family readings and saved them in the form of PDF files on my computer. I arrange the printed emails and journals chronologically and created a file for each book. I printed emails and organized them into folders. I did the same thing with the printed journals. I placed the journals I kept in Indonesia and those from the U.S. in separate folders. To make it easy for me to locate each data source, I used folders with different colors and put tags on each to distinguish “Emails to my wife,” “Emails from my wife,” “Journals – Indonesia,” “Journals – U.S.” This way, I minimized the risk of confusing data sources. Once my data were organized and the list of books we read documented, I was ready to move to the next level to begin my analysis.

### Data Analysis

I began to analyze my data by reading and rereading each source. I made multiple passes through data sources to analyze them as a whole. These passes and analyses allowed me to see the connection between each kind of data and see what themes emerged from our lived experiences. Following these multiple passes and analyses, I began to code recursively (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) states that coding is a specific way to label various data sources so that it is easy for a researcher to retrieve specific pieces of data. According to Merriam, “The coding scheme can be quite simple, as in identifying a theme that can be illustrated with numerous incidents, quotes, and so on” (p. 164). Reading and rereading my data, I identified themes across data sources, such as “learning,” “acculturation,” “border crossing,” “culture,” “cultural tensions and dilemmas,” “discontinuities,” and “transnational identities.” Under each theme, I wrote incidents, quotes, and hunches that reflected my thinking. I worked recursively moving from themes to search for evidence in each kind of data and then from evidence back to themes. I grouped and regrouped these themes to look for connections between each kind of data. While I was reading and rereading all my data and developing codes, I maintained my field notes—as I described in the previous section.

### My Position in this Study

I consider myself having multiple positions—the researcher and the researched. I need to take these different positions into account because each of them carries different points of view even though it is impossible to have clear-cut differences. Since I am the author of this work, my primary position here is one of researcher. In the first part of the next section, I discuss relevant points from my childhood, followed by my position as the researcher.

#### *My Position as Researcher*

My love for story is exemplified in this study by my use of narrative. On reflection, I am deeply grateful that my mother told me bedtime stories when I was a boy. Usually she did that after I had completed my homework. I am not completely sure how old I was when she began this practice, but what I do remember is that I became addicted to her storytelling. Every night I looked forward to hearing her stories. She told me stories about great kings, princes, and princesses on some occasions, and on other occasions she told me stories about ordinary people who were just like us. Whatever stories she told me, I enjoyed them. Sometimes, she stretched a story by telling the same story over several nights of storytelling. When she did that, I had more curiosity about how it would end. Often I thought about different scenarios for the ending of the story. When her ending for the story was like what I thought, however, it did not give me as much pleasure as when I was wrong. When I was wrong, I felt surprised and joyful.

My mother never heard about Vygotsky or Bakhtin or about their ideas. She just told stories to her children, and my siblings and I listened to her stories and enjoyed them. But now I do realize that what she did was really important—especially for me. By telling stories, my mother acted as a mediator (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978) between the figured worlds in the stories and me (Holland et al., 1998). I pictured the worlds in the stories in my mind, imagined what happened, pictured the characters, and let the stories live in my mind. Now I also know that I had internal dialogues

(Bakhtin et al., 1994) with those stories. When I listened to my mother, I thought that the stories were real and so were the characters. I did not know the differences. Later on I knew that most stories she told me were a mixture of folk tale and history. But when I listened to her, it did not matter at all. Now, I realize those stories made me think a lot about the relationship between imaginary and real worlds.

Because of both my wife's and my own experiences with stories, we decided that our children needed to listen to and read stories as well. We very rarely told them stories, however, because I, for one, do not believe I am a good story teller. The second reason is that during our time in the U.S., books were abundant. I wonder if my mother would have read stories instead of telling them to me if books had been more accessible to us back then. Therefore, when we were in the U.S., we made the most of it by taking our sons to visit libraries, and we decided that reading together at home was a necessity.

As a researcher who is also the researched, I realize that these positions might prevent me from being objective—in the sense that it was difficult for me to distance myself as a researcher from my family and interpret the events objectively—which is the main task of a researcher in the qualitative paradigm. But now that I am away from my family and writing this dissertation, this research is a way for me to reflect on what we were doing. In looking at what we did from my lens as a researcher, I can see that our book sharing is important in many ways.

As the researcher, I suggest this present study is not only about my family but, in a larger context, may be helpful for other transnational families as well as my own. In this study I show that book sharing between parents and children became a way for us as parents to mediate between our children and two cultures. It is in this vein that this study is important. Families of international students can teach their children about the society and culture of the U.S. and their own culture at the same time. Books offer an alternative as a bridging function to mediate transnational children between the two societies and cultures.

CHAPTER IV  
PREPARING TO LEAVE THE UNITED STATES

Introduction

It was December 2011 when we knew for sure that there would be no way for us to stay longer in the U.S. We had to return to Indonesia by the end of July 2012. The first time we talked about leaving with our sons, they were startled.

“Why?” asked Widagda.

“I am graduating, we can’t stay here. We are leaving for Indonesia,” Maharesmi said.

“We can stay here with Bapak. He’s still in school,” said Adiwignya.

“I am leaving, you are all leaving. Bapak cannot go to school without me being here. That’s the immigration rule,” said Maharesmi again.

“I can stay here. I don’t have to return to Indonesia,” said Widagda.

“You’re right, but that’s not going to happen. Who will take care of you?” Maharesmi said.

The boys were not happy. The days that followed were not easy for my wife and me. Many times the boys expressed their objection. We tried to understand why they were resistant. I brought them to the U.S. when they were very young and they still had little understanding about Indonesia.

Iowa City was their whole world.

We continued talking to them. We explained that every family has a different situation, depending on the immigration documents they have. In



our situation, our entire family had to return to Indonesia as soon as their mother graduated.

“Definitely we have immigration issues to explain to the boys,”

Maharesmi said to me.

I replied, “We will explain everything to them gradually, not at once. They need to know what kind of documents we have and how they work. We also need to explain to them the consequences of violating the immigration rule. I mean, if we decided not to return and stay here, there would be a lot of consequences. We know we can’t and won’t do that.”

“We need to convince the boys that we must return,” Maharesmi said.

“And that is only one thing. We have another big thing to handle,” I said.

She understood what I was suggesting, and then said, “I know what you mean. They are afraid. We need to start preparing them for life in Indonesia. I will be very busy in the months to come. Please help me in this matter.”

“Alright. We will do it together. You talk to the boys. It’s not that I don’t want to talk to them but it’s just that I won’t do it persuasively but more instructively,” I replied.

Living in the United States taught me to be a democratic father. I learned how to listen to my sons’ opinions. However, on some occasions, my Javanese authoritative fatherly attitude was predominant. When I talked to my children, I sometimes adopted a you-must-listen-to-me-and-do-it-as-I-say attitude. But in this matter, I decided that I did not want to talk to them

with this attitude. I needed to listen to their anxieties and aspirations because it was a really big thing for them. This was going to impact their life. They spent more of their life in the United States than Indonesia. Therefore I needed something to help them understand the situation and to help me talk to them persuasively.

“How about stories?” I said to her.

“What do you mean?” she asked me.

“In addition to talking to them, perhaps stories could be helpful,” I replied.

“Can you be more specific?” she still did not know what I meant.

“There are millions of immigrant children in the U.S. There must be a lot of books about them, including books about immigration,” I said.

“But I assume that most of them deal with how and what children do to fit in. In our case, we are going to leave. Our children are going to leave. But if you think you can find books that are helpful, then it’s worth trying,” she said.

Almost every night before the boys went to bed, Maharesmi persuasively talked about the plan, the immigration documents that we had, and why we were in a different situation compared to that of most international students. For me, the book search began. I needed books that would help us create discussions about immigration issues and books that would also help me introduce Indonesian customs and traditions so that they had ideas about how to live everyday life in Indonesia. Books about and related to Indonesia were relatively easy to find—even though there were not many

available. The books that I needed to help us discuss the immigration issues were not easy to find. It took me a relatively long time to finally find a picturebook that I thought would help us have conversations about our situation. My wife was right; most books I found were about immigrant children trying to fit in. But at last I found the book I believed would make our sons have new perspectives on our situation.

It was one afternoon in March, 2012. I took out a book from my backpack and handed it to Widagda. It was a realistic picturebook called *Hannah Is My Name*.

“Read this, guys,” I said to him and his brother.

“What’s this?” asked Widagda, grabbing the book from me. He looked closely at the book cover. Adiwignya stopped playing the piano and looked at the book too.

“When do you want us to read this book, Bapak?” Adiwignya asked, “I have a school project due in two days.”

“Now. I want to have a talk with both of you after you read the book.”

“What is it about? A girl? No way, Bapak. We are boys, we don’t want to read a book about a girl,” Widagda said.

“You guys will need girls someday,” I said and left them. I went to the bedroom. My wife was at her computer.

She asked, “What book did you give them?”

“*Hannah Is My Name* by Belle Yang, a picturebook about a young Taiwanese girl who immigrates to the United States with her parents.”

“Will the book help?” she asked again.

“I hope so. We need to talk to the boys after they read the book,” I suggested.

“Okay. I will read the book after the boys read it. Oh, it’s been one of the hardest things to explain to them about our situation!” Maharesmi said.

“I know,” I replied shortly.

Later that night when the boys were already in bed, my wife and I went to their bedroom. She had read the book too and we had a little discussion of the book. We squeezed into their bed.

“Well, boys, what do you think about the book? Is it a good story?”

Maharesmi started the conversation.

“It’s about a girl who waits for a green card,” Widagda replied reluctantly.

“Okay ...?” I joined in.

“I tried to see your point for asking us to read the book,” said Adiwignya.

“Good,” I replied. “So why do you think I asked you to read the book?”

“Because the book talks about immigration and green cards and stuff,”

Widagda replied.

Adiwignya continued, “And we’ve been discussing this for months.”

“But still ...,” Widagda said.

“I am waiting,” Maharesmi said.

“But still I do not want to return to Indonesia.”

“I understand ...,” she replied.

“No, Ibu, you don’t. If you understood, we wouldn’t leave. See, Hannah can stay in America. She was not even born here. I was born here. Why can’t I? Iowa City is my hometown now,” Widagda said intensely.

He then mentioned some of his Indonesian friends who did not plan to return to Indonesia because they had already become permanent residents or citizens of the United States. What he did not understand and we needed to explain to them was the process of how they became permanent residents and citizens.

“Well, as you said, you can stay here, but will you stay here alone without us?” Maharesmi asked.

“That’s exactly my point. Since you guys are leaving, I can’t stay,” Widagda said.

“Our school, our teachers, and our friends are here. In Indonesia, we will be strangers,” Adiwignya said. He continued, “It’s easy for both of you because you know all the people there and you can speak Indonesian and Javanese. How about us? How will we do in school? That’s why I don’t want to return to Indonesia.”

There it was. Adiwignya named issues that also concerned my wife and me. Those were exactly some of the things that we had thought about as well. Maharesmi and I believed that for the boys, the transition from Indonesian to American school was much easier than the transition from American to Indonesian school. We planned to leave Iowa City for Indonesia at the end of July, 2012 and school in Indonesia would start in

the middle of July. Fortunately, we could arrange our sons' enrollment by phone. But we could not leave earlier because Maharesmi could not defend her dissertation until July. Because of this schedule, the boys would arrive about two weeks late for school in Indonesia. However, our biggest worry for our sons' schooling in Indonesia was that they did not speak Indonesian or Javanese. Because of this, we worried that it would be hard for them in their first year. In Indonesia, student achievement is measured solely from test scores. If students don't obtain a good score, they cannot advance to the next grade; they repeat the same grade in the following academic year. And if they stay in the same grade for the next academic year, they may get labeled as poor students. Unlike the United States, there is no specific program for students who do not speak Indonesian. And if the new students who do not speak Indonesian are Indonesians, everyone wonders why.

Therefore, every time we talked about it, we got stuck because the boys were resistant. Their resistance was strong because they were afraid of what they were going to experience; and we knew that their fears may very likely come true upon our return. But time went by. Maharesmi's graduation date approached and as soon as she graduated, we all had to leave. Our days were numbered.

"I am sorry, boys. I think I already did everything I could so that we could stay here. It just did not go our way," she said.

The boys were silent.

And she asked them again, “But do you see the differences between Hannah, her mom, and her dad from us?”

“I do. But we have many things in common too,” replied Adiwignya.

“Okay, let’s start with the similarities,” I said.

“Her dad works. You also work, Bapak,” Adiwignya said again.

“What else?” she asked.

“They live in an apartment. We live in an apartment too,” Widagda replied.

“Anything else?” she asked.

“Hannah did not speak English when she came here. We didn’t either but we understood when people talked to us,” Adiwignya replied this time.

“How about the differences?” she asked them again.

The boys stared at her, and then at me.

“Hannah was not born here; I was born here. They can stay, we can’t,”

Widagda said, “It’s not fair.”

“And do you know why we can’t stay here?” I asked.

“Because they have green cards and we don’t,” Adiwignya replied.

“Exactly,” Maharesmi said.

“But why? Why don’t you get green cards?” Widagda asked.

”Because we are not eligible for that,” I said.

“That doesn’t make sense,” Adiwignya said.

“What do you mean?” Maharesmi asked.

“Think about this,” he continued, “Hannah’s dad actually cannot work before he receives a green card. But he does. So, he works illegally. If the United States government finds out, he can end up in jail or be deported. Don’t you see how terrified he is when the government officer is around? He has to run away or hide. Bapak can work legally without a green card. So how can I understand this? How can the United States government give a green card to an illegal worker and not to a legal worker? It just doesn’t make any sense. Bapak should get a green card, not Hannah’s father.”

“Well, the immigration rules are so complicated, son,” I said, “As a university student, I was allowed to work given U.S. immigration guidelines.”

“I know it’s complicated. But I just don’t understand,” he said.

“Another difference between us and Hannah’s parents—which you did not mention—is that they are not students but we are. Our purpose of coming here is to study. I go to school, both of you go to school, Bapak goes to school. When I graduate, we need to return to Indonesia. Some people in Indonesia need me. I have to contribute what I have learned. But Hannah’s family comes here to stay. We are different from them,” she said.

“Yeah, you said it many times already; that we are different from this and that; that we have to return ...,” Adiwignya said.

Suddenly, Widagda asked, “Do we have freedom in Indonesia?”

“Yes, we do. Why?” I replied.



He said, "I wish we did not have freedom in Indonesia so we could stay here."

"Why did you say that?" his mother asked.

"Hannah and her family do not have freedom in Taiwan. That's why they come here to stay. If we did not have freedom in Indonesia, then we wouldn't have to return."

Maharesmi and I looked at each other.

"What do you mean by freedom?" she asked.

"Just like what Hannah says. We are free to say what we think and free to be anything we choose."

"You got it. That's Indonesia right now. I am a living example. I am a woman and I can do what I want. As a college teacher, I am free to say what I think."

"Son," I said to him, "Hannah and her family are not the only ones who come here because of freedom issues. There are millions of other people like them. There are millions of refugees in this country. We are not. We are fortunate that we live in a country in which freedom is valued. We have to be grateful for that because freedom is one of the most important things in our life."

"If we stayed here, then it would be because of another reason, not because of freedom issues," Maharesmi jumped in.

“Your mom is right. We’re free people. Besides, we came here to study. It’s time for us to return. When you’re grown up and you want to come and live here, I don’t mind. But now we have no choice but to go home.”

I was not so sure when I said the last sentence. Like the boys—and their mother too—I felt that Iowa City was my home. Even for me, the idea of going home to Indonesia sounded strange. But I did not say that to Adiwignya and Widagda. We still talked about a lot of things that night before they fell asleep. I was sure that there was a lot going on in their minds. But at least they could think about our situation from a new perspective. I knew they were disappointed. They were afraid and uncertain about their future life in Indonesia. When they were asleep, my wife and I looked at them for quite a long time but we said nothing to each other. Each of us had a lot to think about. I had never realized that returning to Indonesia would be so hard for our sons—and for us too.

In this chapter I present a content analysis of *Hannah Is My Name*. This picturebook is important for my family in creating dialogues about immigration. Rosenblatt (1938/1995) would remind us that every reader has his or her own particular reading of a text. So did I in reading this book with my family. I had a purpose in mind and I searched for a book until I found this one. The process of finding and finally choosing this book is where my content analysis begins. As I explained in Chapter Three, content analysis provides an opportunity for the researcher to study a text closely in an effort to describe and interpret the text fully. In the section that follows, I present my analysis of reading the book, Adiwignya’s and Widagda’s discussion of the book,

Maharesmi's and my discussion of the book, and the tensions between the two readings (the readings by Maharesmi and me vs. Adiwignya and Widagda). Using abductive reasoning, content analysis helped me see how the particulars of *Hannah Is My Name* could be compared to the immigration challenges my own family faced.

#### How and Why I Chose the Book

When I told Maharesmi that we needed books to help Adiwignya and Widagda to understand the greater picture of our situation, what I had in mind was a realistic story book about immigration. Through such a book I wanted to show why people can or cannot stay permanently in the United States. My first choice was a realistic story about Indonesian-American children. I hoped I could use the book to address our immigration issues and discuss cultural issues with them. (We were not immigrants in the strict sense of the word because the term "immigrant" refers to people who come to live permanently in a foreign country.) My search was in vain because I could not find such books. I was not sure whether they even existed. Instead, I found many picturebooks about Asian-American children of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese, Asian-Indian, or Cambodian origins. I was intrigued with these books because they could be useful for me in understanding the transnational identities our sons were developing. In these books Asian-American children are portrayed as living in two cultural traditions, Asian and American, and many of them experience cultural dilemmas.

Reading these picturebooks broadened my insights on immigrant children from Asia. From the cultural perspective, the stories helped me to better understand what Asian children experience in the United States whether it is about their schooling, acculturation, how they think and feel about their home countries and their cultural

heritage, and their identities as transnational children. The books I was considering were realistic Asian-American picturebooks. They tell stories about Asian-American children who have dual identities both as Americans and Asians. The stories range from how they struggle to adjust to American life, to how they search for their identities and learn their Asian cultural heritage (usually through relationships with grandparents). Examples of picturebooks in this category are *A Path of Stars* (O'Brien, 2012), *Crouching Tiger* (Compestine, 2011), *Going Home Coming Home* (Tran & Phong, 2003), *Grandfather's Story Cloth* (Gerdner, Langford, & Loughridge, 2008), *Grandfather Counts* (Cheng & Zhang, 2004) and *Halmoni's Day* (Bercaw & Hunt, 2000). In these picturebooks, the main characters are aware that they have dual identities. They are portrayed as children who were born in Asian countries and then move to the United States permanently with their parents. In some cases the Asian children were born in the United States. Some children have both American and Asian names, others only have American names, and the rest have American names but are given Asian names by their grandparents when they come to visit them in the United States. The main characters in these books remind me of my children in that, after living for 6 years in the United States, my sons' identities reflected who they are as Indonesians and Javanese and Americans in the U.S.

As I continued searching for these kinds of books, I found *Hannah Is My Name*. Among the realistic Asian American children's picturebooks, this book stands out. It is the only book that I found that tells a story of a young girl and her parents who await their green cards. The main character, Hannah, like the main characters in other books, also has a typical immigrant story—she struggles to adjust to American life when she arrives in the United States but finally she fits in well. A typical story might go like this:

An Asian child comes to the United States and does not speak English, has problems in school on the first days, does not have friends, and feels lonely. As time goes by, as he or she begins to understand English, the situation gets better because he or she begins to make friends and feels that life is no longer scary or worrisome. However, what distinguishes *Hannah Is My Name* from other books, as I have mentioned, is that it also talks about immigration issues such as acculturation, the process of the green card application, and legal versus illegal workers. As I read and reread this book, I thought it was the book I was looking for that could help our sons understand our situation with new perspectives.

My family, unlike Hannah's, did not have to wait for the green cards. Our immigration documents did not permit us to apply for green cards. I learned that even if we won the green card lottery, because of my wife's status, we would have to leave the United States for two years before we could return. There were contrasts in the stories of my family and Hannah's family. While they were anxious to begin their new life in the United States, we were ready to leave the United States to go back to our old life in Indonesia. Maharesmi and I could use this book to discuss our situation with the boys. We could use the book as a bridge to explain our position.

My choice of this book as a way to create conversations with Adiwignya and Widagda was not random. Finding a book with a purpose in mind is the first step in content analysis because a reader already anticipates the kind of a book he or she wants to read. The next step is reading it with a certain purpose. The reader's reading is purposeful because one's purposes will be met or they won't. The reader may relate the book because of the purpose for reading, its context, or as a way to connect the book to

particular life situations. In my case, even though my expectations were not completely met, the book was still very helpful in creating dialogues. *Hannah Is My Name* served to mediate discussions or act as a bridge among my family members because of the dialogues the book prompted. The book and our discussions also opened opportunities for cultural tensions to emerge.

#### A Note on the Analysis

A rigorous content analysis of a text examines many aspects of the text and may go in many directions. In analyzing a picturebook, it is important to analyze both the print text and the illustrations because the synergy between the two determines the meaning the reader makes of the text. However, my analysis will also take into account the purposes we assigned to this text. We created conversations with our sons about immigration issues in the story and related these issues to our real life situation. In the course of these discussions, cultural tensions emerged and we were able to discuss these tensions and develop deeper understandings because of the discussions.

In discussing immigration I also discuss culture because immigrants to the United States are often situated in at least two cultures, the home country culture and American culture. Living in the United States, an immigrant faces new people, a new language, and new sets of values, customs, and traditions. Immigration is not only a matter of moving from one place to another but, more importantly, reveals how immigrants deal with uncertainty about the new life. In dealing with cultural issues, immigrants are faced with considerations that include whether to adopt the new culture and leave their own culture behind, adopt the new culture but maintain their own culture, or maintain their own culture and do not adopt the new culture. Any choice comes with consequences. While

we are not immigrants, we are a transnational family and experienced some of the challenges that immigrants confront. Common to the experience of transnational families and immigrants are the cultural and linguistic challenges they face. These challenges have implications for the identities one develops and the learning that results.

### My Readings of the Book

Yang opens the story by introducing the main character of Hannah, “Hannah is my name in this new country. It doesn’t sound at all like my Chinese name, Na-Li, which means beautiful” (p. 2). What the main character says, contrasting her American name and Chinese name, is significant in understanding Hannah’s identity. By choosing Hannah as her new name, she is ready for a new life in the United States. The short summary of the book on the dedication page says that Hannah and her parents “try their best to assimilate into their San Francisco neighborhood.” This may be an indication that they are ready for a new life, even though assimilation does not completely describe their situation.

Based on Berry’s (1997) concept of acculturation, assimilation is one strategy available to those “individuals [who] do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures” (p. 9). Hannah’s family does not assimilate because they still maintain their Chinese cultural identity by having close relationships with San Francisco’s Chinatown. When she says that her name sounds strange, I understood this strangeness from her background (and the illustration on page one helps me understand this). Hannah now lives in a completely different environment. In Taiwan, she describes herself as being used to living in a village where she could wander around freely, meet with and talk to everybody wherever she goes without being afraid of getting

lost, and even catch tadpoles in the rice paddy. The environment made her what she was. This is why Willinsky (1998) believes that geography and culture are inseparable. The way we live and what we do are determined in part by the place where we live. And now Hannah is in San Francisco, one of the biggest cities in the United States and it is completely different from her village in Taiwan. She faces new people, a new language, and new ways of life. Her new name is not only a name, but is a cultural symbol that means she is ready for a new life. But it does not mean that she (and her parents) will leave behind their Chinese identity. The concept of continuity, introduced by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) who draw on Dewey's notion of continuity, states that, "experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences" (p. 2). An individual's identities are shaped in the continuation of the past, present, and future. Seen in this way, even though they now live in the United States, they will not forget completely about their life in Taiwan. Hannah may forget her life in Taiwan because she is only seven years old when she leaves her country but aspects of her way of life in Taiwan have played a central role in helping to shape her identity and perspectives on life. The ways in which Hannah and her family live their lives and look forward to their future experiences in the United States is determined by their past experiences in Taiwan. This Deweyan concept helps me understand why most immigrants who might also be called boundary crossers seek to retain their cultural heritage because life experiences are like spirals. For many immigrants, every experience is connected to both experiences in the new country and previous life experiences in their old countries and each is an important part of their identities.



Another contrast on this page of the text is between the old and the new life and is very important to address because it is the issue of freedom. Hannah's parents, like many immigrants to the United States, believe that America is a land of freedom. Freedom is one of the major motivations, in addition to avoiding poverty, for Hannah's family to move to the United States. They believe that they will find what they did not have in Taiwan. The belief that in America a girl "is free to be anything she chooses" is another important motivation for Hannah's family to immigrate to America. The concept of gender equality is a topic Gu (2010) addresses by saying that Taiwan's traditions are tremendously influenced by Chinese culture and Confucianism where women are traditionally considered inferior to men. Gu contends that Taiwanese immigrant women could be well-educated and have a good career but in their family lives they struggle. In her discussion of Taiwanese-American families, Gu states that, "Even among highly acculturated middle-class professionals, the family constrains women's contentment and empowerment" (p. 692). I suggest that what Hannah's mother says to her is an idealized condition. Nonetheless, this belief is a crucial factor to influence their decision to move to the United States. Hannah is ready to welcome the future as she tells stories about her past life in Taiwan on this page. From the next page to the end of the book, she tells stories about her family's lives in the U.S. Her stories are about where they live, her struggles in school, her mother's dismissal from her job because she works illegally, her father's illegal job to provide for the family, and their anxiety in waiting for their green cards.

Every immigrant in the United States has stories. And everyone may have his or her own unique story. So does Hannah. For her family, living in an apartment is a significant change. In Taiwan they lived in a house but in San Francisco they live in an apartment that looks like a "popsicle" (p. 3). For many immigrants, living in an apartment could be a culture shock. Fadiman (1998) describes how some Hmong immigrants still do not feel comfortable living in apartments. *Grandfather's Story Cloth* (Gerdner, Langford,

& Loughridge, 2008) is an example of a grandfather who still behaves as if he lived in a house in his home country. It takes time for many immigrants to get used to the settings of home in the new country. Some immigrants may not be able to adjust to new ways of living.

In adjusting to the new place, society, and culture, the old traditions may no longer be necessary until there is a fit or connection with new traditions. In the United States, every immigrant is faced with new traditions that the host society values. That happens to Hannah and her parents and to other immigrant families. In this respect, immigrants have experiences in common. What may distinguish them are their purposes for coming to the United States and these purposes often determine what immigration documents they have. Millions of people come to the United States as refugees, tourists, students, exchange visitors, workers, permanent residents, etc. Hannah and her parents come to the United States to stay permanently, to become permanent residents and this status may lead to citizenship.

There is a relationship between the book's author and her life and Hannah's story. As a reader, I wondered whether Hannah's experiences were actually a representation of a younger Belle Yang, especially when I read this:

*Hannah Is My Name* is based on our first years in San Francisco. We arrived in the fall of 1967 via Japan. I missed my old friends and teacher, but it was not a miserable yearning. It was a great privilege to come to the United States, and we didn't look back (back cover flap).

In this quote, I sensed that Belle Yang experienced mixed happiness in the United States. So did Hannah. The picture on the back endpapers shows Hannah and her parents' arrival in San Francisco. Different from the picture in the front endpapers, it shows a typical big city in the United States: the roads are well built, houses or buildings on both sides of the roads are constructed in an orderly manner, and sidewalks are intended for the use of pedestrians (in contrast, in many countries in Asia, sidewalks are full of street vendors). Hannah and her parents are in a taxi heading to meet a family who has been waiting for

them. They did not have an apartment yet because in the story Hannah says, “The first thing we have to do is to find a place to live that doesn’t cost much” (p. 3). This must have been an extraordinary experience for them, especially for Hannah. Readers can only imagine the mix of emotions Hannah and her family felt upon arriving in the U.S.

It is interesting how Hannah contrasts the differences between the place she used to live in Taiwan and San Francisco. She describes herself living in a village in Taiwan, where there are bamboo trees, animals wandering around freely, and houses are small and very simple. This appears to be a way for Belle Yang to differentiate between “the old country” and “the new country.” She wants to show readers that the two places are different. The memories of her village represent Taiwan in the 1960s, a country that was traditional and developing in contrast to the representation of San Francisco as the modernized, advanced United States. Whether or not Belle Yang lived in a remote village like the one in the picture is not the point. In short, she wants to tell readers that life is completely different in these places. Therefore we can see from the picture that Hannah and her parents look amazed, anxious, and hopeful at the same time because they are going to start a new chapter in their lives and they appear ready and eager for their future in San Francisco.

Three important themes in the Hannah story stand out: acculturation or how the family adjusts to their new life in the United States; immigration as a process of leaving the old country to arriving in the new country and receiving their green cards; and a success story showing how they cope with the economic, social, and cultural challenges in the United States and how in the end they can realize their dream. These three themes are interwoven in the story and I discuss them in more detail in the section titled, “Tensions in the Family Discussion.”

#### Adiwignya and Widagda Discuss the Book

When I handed the book, *Hannah Is My Name*, to my sons, they knew that I was serious. Widagda said that actually the book was not for them because they were not

young children anymore and he, as I wrote in the opening story, did not want to read a book about a girl. He often said that he did not like girly stuff. Adiwignya agreed with him by saying that at their age children did not read picturebooks anymore but they read graphic novels. I told them the book was important and explained that not all picturebooks were simple. I explained that sometimes I, an adult, was confused about the meaning of a picturebook especially when the book is a story about a child or children from another culture.

The boys did not agree with one another on very many things, but they agreed that the cover of this book intrigued them. I did not interrupt their reading of the front cover together. Widagda started by asking Adiwignya if he knew what city was on the front cover. Adiwignya said that it was probably San Francisco because the bridge looked like the Golden Gate Bridge. In their discussion of pictures and the print texts in picturebooks, Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) assert that pictures are iconic signs and the print texts are representational signs. Sometimes, in making meaning of a story, a reader may rely only on pictures or words but in most cases a reader has to synergize the pictures and the print texts to make meaning. In reading the front cover of *Hannah Is My Name*, Adiwignya seemed to connect directly to the icon realizing the city is San Francisco because he recognized the Golden Gate Bridge. Widagda responded by saying that any bridge would look like that if seen from afar. He asked Adiwignya if he remembered the last time we went to Chicago as we approached Illinois and how the bridge above the Mississippi River also looked like the one on the cover of the book. He said that that was how a bridge looked. Widagda said it so convincingly that Adiwignya did not say anything more about the bridge. Widagda said maybe the city is Chicago because there are many skyscrapers. Adiwignya said that Chicago was not the only city that had skyscrapers in the U.S. He described that many cities had skyscrapers. Then they began discussing the store and Adiwignya said that the girl and her mother were in a Chinese store. Widagda said that definitely it was not Wal-Mart because of the scripts and the gate and the way

the store displays the items sold. Adiwignya agreed by saying that people in Wal-Mart do not hang fish and ducks; American stores would not do that because cold food has to stay cold and hot food has to stay hot.

Listening to their comments as they read the front cover of *Hannah Is My Name*, I would suggest that Adiwignya, the older of the two, acted as a mediator in their reading. At various points he explained the pictures to his brother. Adiwignya seemed to have confidence in saying, for example, that the bridge was the Golden Gate Bridge and that many cities have skyscrapers. I was intrigued by their reading of the front cover when they connected their experiences, their knowledge, and what they were familiar with in the pictures. Based on Rosenblatt's (1938/1995) transactional and reader response theory, they brought their past and present preoccupations to transact with the text and bring meaning to the text. For Adiwignya and Widagda, places like Wal-Mart, the Chinese store, Chicago, the Golden Gate Bridge, and the bridge on the Mississippi River on Iowa's border are important in understanding the cover of the book. After finishing reading the front cover, they read it individually. I discuss how each of them read the story in the "Tensions in the Family Discussion" section.

#### Maharesmi and I Discuss the Book

Before all of us had a conversation that night, Maharesmi and I had a chance to discuss the book. Finding the right book that fit our purposes was a challenge. A book can be read by different readers at different times in different places with different purposes. I emphasized that I chose the book because through the story, I saw a way to talk to our sons about the complex immigration issues so that they could see our situation in new ways.

We also discussed how we would talk about the book to the boys and which part(s) of the story we would address the most. She said that we definitely had to talk about the section on green cards. However, she asked me if the book would help the boys better understand our situation or if it would only confuse them more. I said to her that I

did not know but it was worth trying. She suggested that we start by asking the boys questions so that we could build our conversations based on their responses. That was what we usually did. But sometimes we also encouraged Adiwignya and Widagda to ask us questions as a way for us to know if they understood what they were reading. Many times we told them that asking good questions is a sign that a reader understands what he or she reads. I agreed with her suggestion. I expressed my view that the most important thing to discuss with the boys was the fact that different people come to the United States guided by different purposes. I also hoped that the story about Hannah would open up their minds. She asked me if the book would help them reconsider our return to Indonesia. I said I hoped so but I did not expect that. However, I believed that our discussion would provide us with new perspectives on immigration in general and our situation in particular. We agreed that discussing the differences and similarities between Hannah's family and our family would be the most important issue to discuss. It is a good way to address our situation. In addition, she and I were in agreement that cultural issues should also be addressed, including what they have learned and experienced during 6 years of living in Iowa City and what they were going to experience in Indonesia.

Maharesmi and I disagreed about the green card issues and we knew this would complicate our discussion with the boys. We both came to understand the complexity of immigration. The immigration guidelines that determined our stay in the U.S. were shaped by rules for international students as well as the guidelines from our government in Indonesia. Immigrants who seek political asylum in the U.S. face different challenges. Regardless of the immigration issues, this is an example of a dialogic discussion. Adiwignya and Widagda were aware of peers whose parents were seeking to become permanent residents. Indeed, we had friends from Indonesia who were pursuing opportunities to remain permanently in the U.S. With the discussion we intended to have with the boys, we agreed that we must speak with the same voice if the boys raised questions regarding our immigration status.

### Tensions in the Family Discussion

There were seven different readings and rereadings/discussions of *Hannah is My Name*: my readings of the book, Maharesmi's, Adiwignya's, Widagda's, the discussion of the book by Maharesmi and I, the discussion of the book by Adiwignya and Widagda, and our whole family's discussion. I note and differentiate these seven readings because each reading is different. Personally, each of us read the book as a story and consistent with Rosenblatt (1938/1995), we enjoyed the story as we engaged in the aesthetics of reading the books. In this kind of reading, the ways we each made emotional connections to the story and how we felt about the story were unique and shaped our interpretations. In our personal readings, we each thought about and analyzed the story. When Maharesmi and I discussed the story together, when Adiwignya and Widagda read it together, and when all four of us discussed and read parts of the story together, our readings of the text became more efferent and critical in that we treated the story as a source of information rather than a story. We thought about the immigration issues in the story more than enjoying it as a pleasurable read.

I situate these seven readings into two categories: my readings and Maharesmi's in one and Adiwignya and Widagda's in the other. The reason for this is that our perspectives were different from the boys' perspectives and we wanted to use the story as a bridge through which we showed them a larger picture of immigration and our specific situation. Maharesmi and I, because of our knowledge and life experiences, read the story book in a more complicated way than Adiwignya and Widagda. Too often, adults complicate stories by connecting particular events in a story to social and cultural contexts, for instance. Because of training and life experiences, it can be easy to ignore the imagination (Hunt, 1994). Therefore, we may miss concepts that our children perceive, think about and what they think is important. And children may also read the story in a complicated way. The way Adiwignya and Widagda read *Hannah Is My Name* was not less complex than ours. They connected the story to our real life situations and

considered how they saw things in general from their own perspectives. In Adiwignya's words,

Hannah's dad actually cannot work before he receives a green card. But he does. So, he works illegally. If the United States government finds out, he can end up in jail or be deported. Don't you see how terrified he is when the government officer is around? He has to run away or hide. Bapak can work legally without a green card. So how can I understand this? How can the United States government give a green card to an illegal worker and not to a legal worker? It just doesn't make any sense. Bapak should get a green card, not Hannah's father.

This anecdote reveals Adiwignya's thinking, his conversations and the dialogues he enters: his knowledge, his anxiety as he faces a new and different life, and his sadness of leaving friends, teachers, and everything he treasured in Iowa City.

In this work, I discuss the tensions between the reading by Maharesmi and me on one hand and Adiwignya and Widagda on the other. Even though Maharesmi and I had differences in reading *Hannah Is My Name*, we discussed those differences and agreed that we would have the same voice in our discussion. We would dwell on the specific portions of the book from our perspective as adult readers trying to help our sons understand that we are different from Hannah and her parents. With regard to the boys' reading, they had a joint discussion in the beginning but then they read the whole story individually.

Sipe (2002) contends that there are various ways for children to respond to books during reading. They may try to understand a story from their analysis of the narrative elements (plot, setting, characters, and characterization), through connections they make to other stories or through connections they make to their own lives. Other scholars have suggested that all readers respond in ways to Sipe's framework. So, this response framework may also apply to adult readers. In the case of my family, each of us tried to understand the story in these ways. However, because we had different experiences, purposes, and investments as readers, what we brought to the book was different. As a



result, each of us had a different dialogue with the book and with the author. These differences in reading the book created tensions and opened opportunities for discussions.

We sat down on the boys' bed and laid the book open. While having conversations, we sometimes looked up specific parts of the story. When readers read a picturebook, sometimes what is missing in the print texts can be found in the pictures. Therefore during the discussions, we read both the print texts and the pictures. Scholarly research on picturebooks consistently suggests that the meaning of picturebooks comes from the synergy between the print texts and pictures (Lewis, 2001; Lunn, 2003; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001; Nodelman, 1988; Sipe, 1998, 2008).

Maharesmi began our conversations by asking them, "*Well, boys, what do you think about the book? Is it a good story?*" We expected that they very likely might answer the question by saying "Yes, it is," or "No, it's not," or "It's very interesting," or even "It's boring" followed by their reasoning. Oftentimes, in our discussions during and after reading a book, they had these responses. We started from the story. However, their responses were unexpected. They directly addressed the points we wanted to address about immigration. By saying, "It's about a girl who waits for a green card," Widagda did not answer Maharesmi's question as she expected but directly connected the story to our situation. Adiwignya did not comment on the story; instead, to my surprise, he seemed to have realized that I had a specific purpose to hand them the book when he said, "I tried to see your point for asking us to read the book." According to Sipe (2002), this shows that they were engaged with the story because of the specific purposes they brought to the reading. What Adiwignya said actually was beyond my expectation. He did what Sipe (2002) calls expressive engagement like dramatizing, talking back, critiquing and/or controlling, inserting himself in the story, and taking over.

As our discussion continued, there were several moments when the boys talked back or critiqued the text. Widagda talked back by saying it was not fair that Hannah, who was not born in the U.S., could stay but he could not. He also was confident that if

we could apply for the green card then we could stay. Thus when he said “It’s not fair” he was linking the story to our real situation and placing our family in the story. He thought that as parents of a child born in the U.S., we had the privilege to stay in this country permanently. We explained that that was not the case, and Maharesmi stated that fairness was not the issue. This green card issue also caught Adiwignya’s attention. Different from Widagda, he compared me to Hannah’s father. Adiwignya said that he could not understand why an illegal worker could apply for a green card but not a legal worker.

Adiwignya and Widagda connected the story to their personal lives and to our life as a family, what they had learned in school, their knowledge, and experiences. Bakhtin’s ideas about dialogism (Bakhtin et al., 1994) are relevant in descriptions of how the boys had dialogues with the text—talking back to the text becomes a form of dialogue. Whether they understood it, they entered larger dialogues regarding immigration and who may be in the country legally. They actively resisted the story because it did not meet their expectations. Meanwhile, Maharesmi and I wanted to use the story to help them understand our situation. We wanted to use the story to show them that we could not stay in the U.S. These two different perspectives resulted in tensions in our discussion. Those tensions are specifically related to immigration issues, from green cards to legal or illegal workers and issues of freedom, as Adiwignya and Widagda addressed.

We attempted to use the book to open dialogues with logical explanations for our need to leave the country. We gave them a greater picture of immigration and immigrants as much as we understood them. Hannah and her parents may represent all immigrants who finally become permanent residents. On the other hand, there are immigrants who enter the U.S. without the proper documents. We hoped they would understand that people come to the U.S. for many reasons and each circumstance brings different consequences. We told them that we came legally as students to study with student visas which would not permit us to stay permanently in the U.S. This was an important statement we wanted to share.

The first tension was about green cards. Adiwignya and Widagda said that we should apply for green cards so we could stay in the U.S. In responding to them, I opened p. 6 of the book and asked them to read the part where Hannah goes with her mother to see Mr. Choo in Chinatown to ask for his help with the green card application. During the process of application, her mother has “to fill out papers with lots of questions” (p. 6). Mr. Choo asks her in Chinese and he writes down her answers in English. What is not written in the story is that filling out papers only is not enough. They must have several documents required for the application. It is my sense that the boys may have missed this section of the book. In the book, Hannah is listening carefully to the conversations and finally she asks Mr. Choo if there is a simple way to receive green cards.

“Can’t we make them with scissors and my green crayons?” I ask.  
 “No, little one, it’s not that easy!” Mr. Choo says.  
 It is the first time I hear him laugh. (p. 6)

Hannah sees things from her perspective as a young child. As a child she does not realize how complicated the process of green card application is. She does not know what “green card” means (although later in the story she learns what a green card is). The picture on the page, where Hannah is holding scissors in her right hand and showing a green piece of paper that resembles a card to Mr. Choo in her left hand, made me think that at that time she does not completely realize how important it is and how complicated it is to get a green card.

Adiwignya and Widagda were older than Hannah. They knew what a green card is and they knew that there is a complicated application process to obtain a green card. What they did not realize is that not all people can apply for it. By presenting Hannah as a naïve little girl in addressing the green card issue, Belle Yang wants to assert that actually it is indeed a very complicated process. There are certain requirements that every immigrant has to fulfill. In our situation, we were not eligible to apply because we had come to this country as students. This is something that Widagda did not realize. Viewed from Rosenblatt’s perspective and readers who make meaning from a text, Widagda

made meaning out of the text by placing himself in the story comparing his situation to Hannah's story. His life experiences, his knowledge (and his lack of awareness) of immigration issues prompted him to see the situation as one of equality because Hannah and her parents could stay but we could not. This is a demonstration of his dialogue with the text, his knowledge, and the world around him.

Adiwignya echoed a similar view by pointing out a different portion of the text.

He referred to this portion:

Without the green cards, Mama and Baba are not supposed to have jobs. Mama was fired from the store where she sewed buttons and labels on clothes all day because the owner found out she didn't have a green card.  
(p. 8)

As a 6<sup>th</sup> grader, he had knowledge about obeying or disobeying the law. He took it for granted when Hannah says that her mother was fired from her job because that was the correct decision. But he reacted differently when Hannah says her father, despite having no green card, continued working even though he knew the risk. Adiwignya pointed out how terrified Hannah's father was when there was somebody he believed to be a government officer looking for illegal workers. And then he specifically pointed to the picture of Hannah and her father running from a government officer who was looking for illegal workers (p. 20). He connected this text to our real life situation, especially when he compared Hannah's father and me. He did not understand why in the end Hannah's father received his green card even though he worked illegally, and why I was not eligible to apply when Hannah's father could apply.

Connecting a story to real life is a way for readers to engage with a text (Sipe, 2002, 2008; Tovani, 2000; Wilhelm, 1997). From the Bakhtinian perspective, it was a way to have dialogues with a text. This is what Adiwignya and Widagda did in reading *Hannah Is My Name*. They connected the imaginary world/figured world of the picturebook and found connections to the real world of their family's situation. As readers, they each had their own perspectives in reading the story. According to Applebee

(1978), they actively assimilated the world of the story into their general view of the world. They made sense of the story on their own terms. In our case, Adiwignya and Widagda had their own views of the story based on their world and their expectations. When they thought that the story did not match their expectation, they resisted and became critical of its outcome. According to Applebee, at their age Adiwignya and Widagda should have distinguished between story (fiction) and reality (fact). The boys knew the difference between fact and fiction; however their reading of the text was less an act of aesthetics and more of transacting with the text. In the emotion of the moment, they believed the book contained information that might change their status.

Our discussion shows how the construction of meaning is personal and no reading is the same as other readings (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995). Similar with Adiwignya and Widagda, Maharesmi and I also connected the story to our life. We had dialogues as well with the author, the book, our knowledge about immigration, poverty, and freedom issues in third world countries, etc. Until we had discussions of the book, I did not realize that *Hannah Is My Name* is such a complex story. Nor did I understand the complexity of readings by readers until I completed this analysis of my family's readings. It is complicated because each of the four of us brought our identities and knowledge to make meaning of the text. Readers bring different perspectives to their readings. Maharesmi and I wanted to use the story as a bridge to explain to the boys about our status. Meanwhile the boys viewed the story as a window to our family's current situation.

We understood we had more work to do with our children. Maharesmi told Widagda that fairness was not the issue and I agreed with that. The fact that Hannah's family went to Mr. Choo in Chinatown to seek his help with their green card application shows that they have the required documents. From the very beginning, their intention was to remain permanently in the United States. To help the boys understand, Maharesmi emphasized the differences between Hannah's family and us. This was a crucial explanation for our sons. We came to the United States to study. I explained that with our

immigration document, the United States government gave us as parents, the privilege to work or to go to school or to do both, but we were not eligible to apply for a green card. Further, the Indonesian government allowed us to leave to pursue our education but we would be required to return following the completion of our graduate study. Hannah's family, on the other hand, met requirements for the green card application.

I thought deeply about what Adiwignya pointed out in the story regarding what it means to work legally in the U.S. Jenkins explains that interpretation requires reading and re-reading (Beach et al., 2009). In my own readings of Hannah, I paused at this particular section of the story. As a reader, I wondered why Hannah's father and mother were able to work while waiting for their green cards. Why does Hannah's father continue working even though he knows that the risk is substantial? More importantly, I wondered what Belle Yang wanted to say to readers?

When the two of us discussed the story, Maharesmi made the case that Hannah and her parents had all the documents they needed for the application. I finally agreed with her. Otherwise, Mr. Choo would not help them. From the picture on pp. 5-6, especially p. 5, readers may form an impression of how influential Mr. Choo is among Chinese immigrants in Chinatown and perhaps even the entire city of San Francisco. He is the authority in taking care of the green card application process. When he says that the application is good, Hannah's mother believes it is good. I wondered at this point what Belle Yang was trying to say to readers by describing that Hannah's father played hide-and-seek with the government officers. My wife described that as readers we needed to fill in the missing information. This is what Lewis (2001) and Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) have also suggested when reading picturebooks. Because our purpose was to use the book as a bridge for explaining immigration to our sons, we had to come up with possible explanations to share with them. To be able to do this, I had to think about the story in a larger context of immigration. I thought that it was impossible for Belle Yang

to discuss large topics in a picturebook which has only 24 pages. Our explanation to the boys was the result of filling in the gaps in the story.

### Coming Together Through Family Discussions

To Adiwignya and Widagda we emphasized two things. First, Hannah's family is not behaving illegally. The fact that Mr. Choo helps them in the whole application process is proof that they have the documents to stay permanently in the United States. On another note, the part of the story about Hannah's mother and father working without green cards should be placed in the larger context of immigration. We explained to the boys that with such a story, the author wants to say that every immigrant and everybody in the U.S. must obey the law. The greater picture of immigration is more complex than the one described in the story. We urged them to remember that the story is presented in the first person point of view of a young child. In our discussion, I opened the book to page 5 and I asked the boys to look at the picture. The picture shows Hannah and her mother in Mr. Choo's office. The calendar shows it was the year 1967. I pointed out that from Hannah's perspective, the story should be simple. But reality is rarely simple. Maharesmi suggested that the message of the story is that every immigrant has to obey the law and the author uses Hannah's parents as an example that nobody should do what they do. After pointing this out, Maharesmi showed the boys an important part of the text that connects with this issue when Hannah says:

I love school, but I worry a lot when I am there. Yesterday was my friend Janie's last day. Her whole family was told to go back to Hong Kong. They caught her father working at a Chinese restaurant. He had no green card. (p. 15)

Maharesmi read this aloud to us and we carefully looked at the picture where Hannah and Janie say goodbye to each other, meanwhile Janie's parents look sad because they have to leave the country. Perhaps the boys' perspective had been made larger by our discussion.

“Do you want us to get caught like Janie's parents by not leaving?” I asked them.

“No,” they replied together.

“That’s why we do what our document says. No more, no less. We came here legally and with good intention. We made the most of our staying here by studying. In the end, we have to leave. You know that we know the rules and you know that we will not break them,” Maharesmi said.

“You have to remember that we also have responsibility to the government of Indonesia for letting us come here to study. When your mom graduates, and when I graduate later, we have to contribute to Indonesia,” I said.

The boys did not say anything but I believed they understood what we said.

But the discussion did not end here. After a short pause, Widagda brought up the freedom issues for one more intriguing conversation that eased our tension. Pointing out a portion of the text on p. 2, he asked if we had freedom in Indonesia. Here is the text that he referred to:

When we are Americans, Baba says we will be free to say what we think. An American girl is free to be anything she chooses, says Mama. We want to become Americans more than anything in the world. We want to be free (p. 2).

Widagda must have learned that millions of people come to the United States as refugees because of political reasons or persecution they suffered in their home countries. When they arrive, they hope they can stay in this country permanently. But the fact that he brought up the freedom issues in Indonesia showed that he did not know very much about Indonesia, and yet he knew that freedom is valued in the United States. We explained to them that there were times when it was scary to live in Indonesia. But now, in terms of freedom—his understanding of freedom is like what Hannah says, Indonesia and the United States share many things in common. In Indonesia we are free to say what



we think, criticize the government, and decide our own destiny. Therefore, there is no reason for us to stay in the United States because of freedom issues.

Maharesmi told them she was happy that they both had received a good education in the United States. They were not only taught through core courses but also learned how to live life in the U.S., the definition of democracy, and notions about freedom of expression. Children in U.S. schools are taught and encouraged to appreciate and listen to other people's opinions. They also learn to respect differences. A child's opinion is valued. Teachers and the society at large encourage children to express themselves. The fact that we were having conversations together is an embodiment of what American society values. And for the last two decades, because of globalization, the freedom movement has been contagious, happening in many countries, including Indonesia.

We saw Widagda's question about freedom in Indonesia as an opportunity for us to talk to them about this important issue. Their questions and the story we shared allowed discussions of freedom. We all entered larger dialogues related to what it means to respect individuals who are similar and different. The boys knew American history much better than Indonesian history so I told them a story that was part of the modern history of Indonesia:

“It was May 1998, about two years before you were born,” I said to Adiwignya.

I continued, “Your mother was traveling in the United Kingdom for three weeks to visit universities. Almost every day after work I did not go home directly but I went to the building where the Central Java Governor office (or a kind of State Capitol in the United States) is located to see students' rallies to protest our authoritarian government.”

“Did that happen in Indonesia?” Adiwignya asked.

“Yes, it did. The rallies were happening all across Indonesia and students demanded that the president step down. On May 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>, there were riots in many places in Indonesia and Jakarta, the capital, was on fire.”

“Were there any victims?” Widagda asked.

“Many people died and many building were burned down. The whole world witnessed what was happening,” I replied.

Maharesmi commented, “In the United Kingdom, the media exaggerated what was happening in Indonesia. You know I was so scared I called Bapak many times to see if he was alright.”

We did not go into the details of the May 1998 upheaval that forced the president to step down, but we told the boys that that was the beginning of democracy in Indonesia. I shared with them that democracy and freedom are not free, but costly. The practice of democracy is not easy because it is not only a matter of freedom of speech and expression but, more importantly, it is a matter of respecting other people and differences. True democracy happens when we respect other people and listen to what they say. These discussions are indicative of our shifting identities as we spoke both from the perspective of Indonesians and also from our years of living in the U.S. where we experienced freedom and learned its value. I re-emphasized what Maharesmi had said that we were lucky to be able to live in the United States for long enough time to learn and practice democracy and freedom of expression.

The second major issue we discussed that night was the success stories. *Hannah Is My Name* is one of them. I learned from conversations with immigrants in Iowa City that they experienced similar stories to the one I highlight here about Hannah and her

parents. They came to the United States for many reasons but two of the most common reasons were to live a better life and avoid persecution in their home countries. Hannah and her parents faced struggles to achieve success. Hannah, for example, does not speak English when she arrives. Perhaps her parents do not either. We can see this in the close relationship they have with the Chinese community in Chinatown. Then Hannah goes to school to learn English. Her parents work hard to make ends meet and finally their green card application is approved.

Maharesmi opened the last pages of the book. On page 23 the print text describes how Hannah's family celebrates their success upon receiving their green cards. There is also a picture of three green cards with Hannah's card at the front. On page 24 is the picture describing their happiness because the wait is over. Hannah's father is holding Hannah and her mother is hugging both of them. The boys looked at her and the open pages.

"Do you know why I open these pages?" she asked.

"To show us how happy they are to get their green cards?" Widagda asked.

"No, to show us that we cannot get it," Adiwignya said.

"I love a happy ending," she said.

The boys looked confused.

"That's what I think about us. We have a happy ending in America."

"Why do you think so?" Widagda asked.

"Don't you see? I will earn my degree soon. Both of you did well in school. When you came you did not speak English but now you speak

English better than we do. Bapak goes to school too. For Hannah's family, their green cards are their American dream. For us, these all are our American dream. But remember, everybody worked hard to make the dream come true and you did a good job."

By comparing our situation to Hannah's family success in the new country, Maharesmi was able to highlight the idea that success is not the same for everyone. Every individual may have different purposes in coming to the United States. Hannah and her parents come to stay permanently and we came to study. We used Hannah's story as an example of how hard work pays off. This is an important value in American society (Bender, 1989). Coming to the United States, Hannah did not speak English. She struggled in school in the beginning but in the end she dealt with many obstacles.

Maharesmi and I used the last dialogue with the boys to discuss stories of success and culture differences in a larger context. Our international friends tell us they have better lives because they work hard. Hannah, in her own way, works hard. Her parents work hard. And they all, in their own ways, made their American dream come true. Maharesmi emphasized that studying in the United States was the fulfillment of our American dream.

As we discussed the purposes for coming to the U.S., we referred to a portion of the text on page 14 that describes what and how Hannah does when she just arrives in the U.S.:

At Commodore Stockton School, I am in the first grade. I am learning English. I'm scolded by the teacher for talking in class. But it's better than not being able to talk at all. I'm not lonely anymore, like on the first day when I could only say, "Hannah is my name."

We asked them to remember their first days in school, whether they had similar experiences. While Widagda did not remember his first days in Head Start, he recalled

much of his first day in kindergarten. Adiwignya said that he was like Hannah in that he did not speak English because he could not, even though he understood much of what was said.

Our goal was to remind them of how much they had learned as boundary crossers. As Akkermann and Bakker (2011) would remind us, by being positioned on the boundary of culture, language, and learning, the learning for all of us was heightened. As transnational individuals, we come from a society and culture we knew well and we entered a new society and culture with a new language and new sets of norms, customs, and traditions. Referring to Akkermann and Bakker (2011), there is no learning that does not involve dialogues. In this process of learning in a new society, every immigrant and transnational child are in continuous dialogues with teachers, friends, other people, and books that they read. These dialogues prompt new learning and the creation of new identities.

We talked to them about returning to Indonesia. Similar to the way they learned English and similar to how they learned how to cross boundaries and find a fit with the society and culture of the United States, they would now undergo similar processes in Indonesia. We understand that they felt nervous or uncertain about what they were going to experience. But we persuaded them that everything would be alright. They would learn Indonesian culture by living it and immersing themselves in the language. And these experiences would continue to add new dimensions to identities developed in the U.S. With the learning processes, gradually they would acculturate in Indonesia while their American identities would remain with them. Like Hannah, who has acculturated in the U.S. and she is still Chinese too. A new chapter of life begins. They continue to negotiate across cultures.

#### Closing Remarks

In this chapter I show how a book can be used as a bridge to open dialogues with family members to discuss cultural tensions and dilemmas. Our family discussion showed

how we connected the story to many issues in our life. Our discussions also reveal how complex discussions around picturebooks can be given the unique and individual reading of each reader. Sharing and discussing books may encourage children to explore imaginary worlds so that they may explore possibilities made available to them through books. While making connections between the story and what they know, they draw on their experiences, explore their expectations, and deal with anxiety and fear.

In the final chapter, I discuss an analysis of the family stories I share in this dissertation. I conclude with comments concerning the power of stories to capture the forms of learning that occurred for members of my family as we experienced crossing boundaries of geography, culture, and language.

## CHAPTER V

## CROSSING BORDERS: AN ONGOING QUEST

Taking the Boys to Their New Schools

It was the first Monday of August, 2012, the third day after we arrived in Semarang. We were exhausted from our long flight—about 36 hours including layovers—from Chicago to Surabaya, the capital of East Java. We stayed one night in Surabaya in my brother-in-law’s home before he drove us for about ten hours to our home in Semarang. On that Monday morning we got up at 4:30 to take the boys to their new schools.

Adiwignya would start his seventh grade in a Catholic junior high school and Widagda would start his fifth grade in a Catholic elementary school.

Both schools start at 7:00 a.m. but all students have to be in school 10 minutes before for the Morning Prayer. They close and lock the gate at 6:50. We did not want the boys to be late on their first day of school.

We walked to the bus station, about 300 yards from our home. When we arrived at the station, one bus was about ready to leave. For the first time after 6 years, we were on the public bus in our hometown. I asked Adiwignya and Widagda if they still remembered that we used to take the bus to go to downtown and they said they did not quite remember.

“Are you excited, boys?” Maharesmi asked them.

Both of them nodded but did not say anything. I sensed that they were not happy. In Iowa, they did not have to get up at 4:30 a.m. to go to school. I did not blame them.

“I just wish we could have slept until 6. I am still sleepy,” Widagda said.

“Do we do this every day?” Adiwignya asked.

“Except Sunday,” I said.

“Do we have school on Saturday?” Widagda asked.

“Yes. Good luck,” Maharesmi replied, and then she said to me, “As we planned, you take Adiwignya to his school and I will take Widagda to his school.”

“No, problem,” I replied and then asked her, “Did you bring every document?”

“Yes, I did,” she said, “What do we need to bring except grade reports?”

“The official letters from the principal. I think for now those are enough.”

“I have them with me. Do you think the boys’ grade reports will create a problem?” she asked again.

“What do you mean?” I replied.

“The educational system in the U.S. is different. The grade report is different,” she said.

“We’ll see,” I said.

“I just feel concerned about the boys’ grade report. In Indonesia, students’ grade report contains their scores in numbers. Their new schools would have problems in reading their grade report from the school in Iowa City because it is a qualitative report,” Maharesmi said.

“We can explain to them how students are assessed in Iowa. It’s just a different way of assessing student’s achievement,” I said again to my wife.



“I like the Iowa version better because we can see how a student progresses from the beginning to the end of the academic year,” she said.

“I agree. I don’t see how a student progresses when their scores are expressed in numbers,” I said.

Along the way, the boys didn’t say much and kept watching the very heavy traffic. About 30 minutes later, we got off the bus. Maharesmi and Widagda were heading to Widagda’s school while Adiwignya and I were walking to his school. Just as they experienced in Iowa City, this time they were about to start their new journeys.

#### Adiwignya and His New School

At the front gate, a security guard welcomed us and asked me what purpose I had to come to school. “I need to see the principal. This is my son, Adiwignya, and today is his first day of school,” I said to him in Indonesian.

He looked at us, confused and said, “But school started 2 weeks ago.”

“We just arrived from America,” I explained to him.

Then he said, “Well, the Senior High School is next door, this is the Junior High School.”

This time I was confused. Why did he think Adiwignya was a senior high school student? But then I realized what made him think that way.

Adiwignya was wearing a shirt and jeans. In Indonesia, male junior high school students wear a shirt and shorts. No jeans are ever allowed.

Unfortunately, Adiwignya did not have the kinds of shorts students have to wear because we had to buy them from the school.

“Well, my son does not have uniforms right now. I’ll buy them later.”

He let us in and took us to the principal’s office. I wondered why the school did not have a front office. I looked around but did not find one.

The security guard also acted as a receptionist. Soon we arrived in the guest room, a small room with a table and three chairs. The security guard asked us to take a seat and wait. A few minutes later a Catholic nun, the principal, appeared.

“Hello, good morning,” she greeted us.

“Good morning, Sister,” I replied. Adiwignya did not say a word.

I introduced myself and Adiwignya and told her the purpose of our coming.

“And call me Sister Anastasia. Oh, so you’re the new student from America? Welcome,” she said.

“Thank you.”

“Do you speak Indonesian?”

Adiwignya shook his head.

“We’ve been talking about you. Do you have the documents?” she asked.

I handed her the folder containing Adiwignya’s grade reports from first to sixth grade and the official letter signed by his principal in Iowa City.

“Everything is here, Sister. But my son does not have a diploma. In the

United States, elementary school does not issue diplomas for their students.”

She looked at me in wonder, and then she said, “We are going to study the documents and we can discuss it in the coming week. For now, let me just call your homeroom teacher and she will take care of you.”

Before long, a female teacher joined us.

“This is Mrs. Arumsari, your homeroom teacher. Mrs. Arumsari, this is Adiwignya, the new student from America. You can go with Mrs.

Arumsari, Adiwignya, while your father stays here with me,” she said.

But Adiwignya did not want to go without me so I joined him following Mrs. Arumsari. She took us to the guest room next to the teachers’ office (all teachers share one big room for their office) and left us for a while.

She came back with another teacher.

“This is Ms. Riana, one of the English teachers. You are going to have some tests today. They are required for every new student. She will explain to you what you have to do. I don’t think you will join your classmates today. I’ll just introduce you to them later. So you go with her, Adiwignya, and when you’re done, you come back to me,” she said in Indonesian and Ms. Riana explained it to Adiwignya.

“What tests?” I asked.

“Psychology, basic mathematics, and English,” she said.

“Now, Bapak?” Adiwignya asked me. The way he spoke and looked at me showed that he was baffled.

“Yes, now. So, come with me,” Ms. Riana said and both of them left.

“You will be fine, son,” I said to him, even though I was not sure. He would do well in English and hopefully in math, but not in psychology because that exam would be administered in the Indonesian language. I did not have an opportunity to discuss Adiwignya’s situation with his homeroom teacher because she had to go back to her class. She sent me back to the principal. I was disappointed, but I tried to understand because she was teaching. Another issue I had was the fact that Mrs. Arumsari did not speak English. I did not expect every teacher in the school to speak English, but knowing that Adiwignya’s homeroom teacher did not speak English made me worried. How would she communicate with my son? How would they understand one another? Homeroom teachers are academic advisors who communicate intensively with students. They are responsible for the success of a student’s transition into Indonesian school. “This is a new situation for me, and for the school,” the principal said when I was back in her office, and then she continued, “We have never admitted a student who moved from abroad and does not speak Indonesian and Javanese.”

“So what will you do to help my son during the transition?”

She did not answer my question right away. I expected Adiwignya to have huge problems in understanding all his teachers without mediation. My wife and I could help our sons at home, but not in school.

“I am sorry, we do not have resources to give him special help all the time. I expect that you will help him at home.”

Currently, very few Indonesian schools have a special class for Indonesian language learning like ELL classrooms in U.S. schools. It was going to be tough for Adiwignya without assistance. How would he understand what his teachers said? I remembered what he experienced in Iowa City before school started. He said he did not want to go to school because he did not speak English. With the assistance of his teachers, he coped with that problem. Now he had to be on his own and he did not complain. I hoped sooner or later he would do well. I just did not know how long it might take him to get over these school differences.

“We have three English teachers for more than 500 students. Some other teachers know English but they do not speak the language. So I do not know what is best for Adiwignya right now. I think he needs to learn the Indonesian language fast so that he is not left too far behind.”

“Sister, of course, he learns all the time. But is there anything you could do to help him, especially during these critical times?”

“I will ask Mrs. Arumsari to make an arrangement so that Adiwignya sits next to a student who speaks English.”

I did not have any idea if that would help. I knew it would be difficult for the student sitting next to him to listen to the teachers and talk and explain to Adiwignya at the same time. I was disappointed but there was nothing I could do. It was like I asked him to swim by jumping into a deep

swimming pool even though he could not swim. Well, it did not matter, he had to go to school.

After taking the tests, Adiwignya came back to Mrs. Arumsari who then took him to his classroom and introduced him to his classmates.

“What did they say to you or about you?” I asked Adiwignya on our way to Widagda’s school which is only about 500 yards from his school.

“I did not quite hear what they said. It was very crowded when I entered the classroom,” Adiwignya replied.

“Why?”

“They were just excited, I guess.”

“To have you in the class?”

“Yes. One of them said I was cool though.”

“Cool?”

“Yeah, because I speak English better than the English teachers.”

“That’s not a surprise. It would be a big surprise if you spoke Indonesian better than anybody else.”

Both of us laughed.

“Do you already know who sits next to you?” I asked him.

“Yes. I sit next to a guy named Bisma. He speaks English.”

On the second day, I took him to school again. This time Adiwignya looked like a “regular” student: he wore uniforms, his backpack was full of text books—all written in Indonesian except the textbook for the English class, and he mingled with his classmates. I was surprised that he

seemed to have made friends instantly. As soon as Adiwignya arrived, some of them just swarmed him and they talked and laughed together. I had no idea what they were talking about or how they understood each other but Adiwignya seemed to enjoy that moment. Did he really enjoy that moment?

I never thought of writing stories of my family as the touchstone of my research. The reason was that I thought they are just ordinary stories and, like many people, I was often more interested in stories about other people. But then during the process of writing my research, my dissertation committee convinced me that my stories are worthwhile. Stories of my family are meaningful because of our experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and it was in my reflective moments that I came to the realization that stories of my family matter. Taken together, they are stories of crossing borders and ongoing quest and dialogues in multiple places at different times; the grand narrative of our life. They are stories of becoming. I, therefore, decided to take the opportunity suggested by my dissertation committee to present my stories in this dissertation, framed in the narrative inquiry methodology.

Throughout this work, I presented 12 stories. But narrative inquiry is more than just the telling of stories. Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) assert that "... telling stories is not enough. We need to move to the retelling and reliving of stories, that is, to inquiry into stories" (p. 33). In other words, as the researcher I need to analyze my own stories. My personal stories, stories about Maharesmi, Adiwignya, and Widagda as participants in this research are complex, as I will show in my analysis in the context of the three dimensional narrative inquiry space: interaction, continuity, situation (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000). In these three dimensions, stories of my family are interconnected to one another across different sites and times; they exist in our interactions and relationships (dialogues) with other people moment by moment or, in Bell's words (2002), "shaped by lifelong personal and community narratives" (p. 208). Every story I presented in this dissertation has these three dimensions.

First, in terms of interaction, each story I wrote has personal and social dimensions. The personal dimension is how each of us feels about our experiences, how we make meaning of our experiences. Meanwhile, the social dimension is how we see our experiences in relation to other people and what audiences can learn from these narratives. Another social dimension of stories in narrative inquiry is the relationship between the inquirer and the participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) in the sense that the inquirer is always in relationship with the participants, not only at the time of research in the field but also in the process of writing the research text. In this sense, as the researcher, I have a strong social relationship with my participants in this research for the participants are my family members. This means that I must work hard to represent all of our voices, and not only my own voice. The balanced voices between the researcher and the participants are crucial in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). One way to represent my family's voices was by creating dialogues in stories I composed and offering their perspectives within my stories. During the process of writing, I was also in constant relationship with them. I member checked as a way to make sure that the data and my analysis were accurate (Creswell, 2003). I sent my stories to my participants to read and check if their voices were adequately represented. Maharesmi was especially critical of the way I composed the stories. We had discussions about the details of



dialogues so that they represented our experiences as closely as possible and she constantly reminded me to represent Adiwignya and Widagda in the dialogues. By member checking, I made sure the stories I have written represent their perspectives. However, an essential critique of my own research is that my voice is still too dominant while my wife and sons' are more silent. Consciously or unconsciously my subjectivity as the researcher is the main cause of this. I believe, therefore, that these stories of my family may have been different if my wife had told these stories from her point of view. The stories are written from my perspective.

Second, in terms of continuity, the stories date back to our past, reflect our present circumstances, and have implications for our future. They are a series of interconnected events which suggest causes and show relationships. The introductory story in Chapter One, about my childhood in Java, for example, connects well with our transnational journeys and border crossings; the introductory story functions as the starting point. This is to say that what I experience now is determined by my history and the events from my past. It is in this context that I see the importance of including a story about where I was born and raised. This is the beginning of my family journeys. In the introductory story I also mentioned the history of Adiwignya and Widagda. I did not write about my wife's childhood in any of the stories but presented it in Chapter Three, in the section describing my "Participants." This is important because this narrative is not only about me but about my family.

Third, in relation to places, I set the stories in Indonesia, Athens, Ohio, and Iowa City, Iowa, in the United States, because these places have been so important in our lives. Our thinking, perspectives, ideas, and identities are shaped by our ongoing dialogues with

people and communities in both countries where my family resided. When I say places I do not merely mean the physical places but the people, culture, and languages in multiple places in both countries.

### The Stories

For purposes of analysis, I numbered and titled all stories in sequence from Chapter One to Chapter Five (this chapter) so it would be easy to reference stories in this section. The stories in Chapter One are (1) “Beginnings,” an introductory story, (2) “Asking for a Drink,” (3) “Addressing Adults,” (4) “Taking Our Son to Head Start,” and (5) “Back in Indonesia.” Chapter Two only has one story, (6) “Robert Frost,” an introductory story. In Chapter Four, there is one story, (7) “Reading *Hannah Is My Name* and Our Dialogue,” and three story-like excerpts from the family discussion, (8) “Reasons to Leave the U.S.,” (9) “On the Modern History of Indonesia,” and (10) “Happy Ending.” The last two stories are in this chapter, (11) “Taking the Boys to Their New Schools,” and (12) “Adiwignya and His New School” (see Table 1 for the setting of time and place for all stories).

### The Themes

My analysis of the stories revealed themes such as crossing borders, discontinuity, cultural tensions, acculturation, learning on the boundaries, and identity. I will also explain an interplay I found between temporal dimensions (continuity), personal and social dimensions (interaction), and places (situation). In these stories, there are times when I look backward to our past—dating back to my childhood—to address our present circumstances and in terms of place, I set the stories in multiple places. I will begin by discussing the themes of the stories.

Table 1. The Stories

Story Number	Story Title	Year	Place
1	“Beginnings,” an introductory story	1970s 2001 2002  2006	Remote village, Central Java Athens, OH Semarang, Central Java Iowa City, IA
2	“Asking for a Drink”	2010/2011	Iowa City
3	“Addressing Adults”	2010/2011	Iowa City
4	“Taking Our Son to Head Start”	2006	Iowa City
5	“Back in Indonesia”	2012	Semarang
6	“Robert Frost”	1990s 2011/2012	Semarang Iowa City
7	“Reading <i>Hannah Is My Name</i> and Our Dialogue”	2012	Iowa City
8	“Reasons to Leave the U.S.”	2012	Iowa City
9	“On the Modern History of Indonesia”	2012	Iowa City
10	“Happy Ending”	2012	Iowa City
11	“Taking the Boys to Their New Schools”	2012	Semarang
12	“Adiwignya and His New School”	2012	Semarang

Story (1) is a complex story beginning with how I began to read and write in my childhood, and moving to our first journey to the U.S. and then our return to Indonesia and back to the U.S. again. I also describe how my wife and I started to read to our sons, and a bit about our identities as Indonesians, international graduate students, and the children of international graduate students. This story is set in four different locations: a remote village in Java, Semarang (the capital of Central Java), Athens, and Iowa City. From the temporal dimension, it covers a long time span, beginning with my childhood to the present day. In this story, I tell about my childhood which is important in this research, not only to provide my background as the researcher but also as a person with an ongoing quest in life. Through this story I reveal myself as a child who begins to learn

how to read and write in Indonesian and then in English with very limited resources, and who finally enters graduate school in the U.S. with my immediate family. The interplay between these places at different times shows the complexity of our identities as the result of our interactions and relations with other people and cultures. Every time we moved, we crossed borders: socially, culturally, linguistically, and sometimes religiously and ideologically. We adjusted to the new place, experienced discontinuities, uncertainties, unhappiness, fears, and fragmentations. In every place and time we learned from our dialogues with other people, not only in terms of verbal dialogues but also in terms of dialogues about ideas. I will frequently come back to this first story in my discussion of the themes across the stories in this narrative of my family. In the following sections I include a discussion about my analysis of the stories based on the themes that emerged in my data. I need to clarify that all themes are interrelated and each story may have multiple themes.

### Crossing Borders

As I described in Chapter Two, according to Akkerman and Bakker (2011) borders or boundaries mean more than just geographical or physical boundaries; often they refer to sociocultural differences. In this concept, any contact between people from different ethnic and cultural groups may contribute to border or boundary crossings in which people may experience discontinuities or the feelings of unhappiness, fragmentation, or confusion and at the same time learn productively from each situation. Therefore, some of the stories, even though set in Indonesia, can also be understood as stories of crossing borders since our time away from Indonesia while living in the U.S. created temporal factors related to continuity.

I came to the U.S. for the first time when I moved to Athens, Ohio, to join my wife in 2001. That was also the first time for me as an Indonesian to cross social and cultural borders. Prior to the trip, I read a large amount of information about U.S. society and culture (including many literary works), but still it was difficult to be in the U.S. I

was excited and curious about the society and culture but at the same time I was also scared and uncertain about what was going to happen when I moved there. I learned how to interact with people from both the host society and other Indonesian students already living in Athens. But what surprised me most was that being in the U.S. made me able to look at Indonesia from a different perspective—and this is an important aspect of crossing borders, in the sense that we can have new understandings and be critical of our own society and culture. It is not an outsider looking in perspective but an insider who is outside looking in. On another note, it was while living in the U.S. that I found I could appreciate more about many aspects of my home country. For Maharesmi, even though Athens was not the first place for her to cross borders, it was still a huge change for her. Before her arrival in Athens, Ohio, in 1998 she travelled to the United Kingdom for 3 weeks to visit 20 universities in different cities across the country. Her experience traveling to U.K., in a way, helped her settle in relatively quickly in Athens.

In terms of identity—as I will describe in more detail later in the section titled Identity, we all developed new dimensions of identity. If identity is also what people perceive of us, then even before we left Indonesia, we developed new identities because some people told us that going to the U.S. would make us Americans. From the point of view of some of our acquaintances in Indonesia, we already had new identities by simply making plans to study in the U.S. This identity making continued when we arrived in Iowa City in 2006. This time our sons already had an understanding about life in the U.S., even though they did not fully realize that it would be different from the last time and they would again cross social, cultural, and linguistic borders.

Story (4) shows how Widagda experienced a huge change from home to his formal education in a local Head Start program. In fact, this was the first time he was away from home by himself. He crossed social, cultural, and linguistic borders even though at home in Iowa City—and also when we were still in Indonesia—we had introduced him to U.S. society and culture through books and TV programs. But having

firsthand experience of going out to cross borders was not the same as being read to or watching TV. I will discuss more about his experiences crossing borders in the Discontinuity section. In a sense, story (5), (11), and (12) are also about crossing borders, especially for Adiwignya and Widagda. Returning to Indonesia was not a completely new experience for them but what made it different for the boys was not remembering Indonesia well. For Adiwignya and Widagda, it was like coming home from home because our home in the U.S. was more present in their minds and in their lives. They knew we are Indonesian, but Iowa City was home during their formative years.

As I analyzed my stories, I realized I described Adiwignya and Widagda like the main character in *Going home, coming home* (Tran & Phong, 2003). In this story, a Vietnamese-American girl lives with her parents in the U.S., but one day her parents decide to take her to Vietnam. Ami Chi, the girl, identifying herself as an American, finds everything in Vietnam different but, as she interacts or has dialogues with many people, a sense of being a Vietnamese girl grows inside her. This is similar to what happened to my sons. Returning to Indonesia was a social, cultural, linguistic, and educational boundary crossing. The difference was that Ami Chi went to Vietnam for a visit, but our sons left the U.S. to return to Indonesia more permanently. Ami Chi never attended school in Vietnam but our sons now attend school in Indonesia. But, like Ami Chi, they also learned many new things.

In story (6), which is a story about me, I described a time when I also crossed borders. Frost's poem acts as a boundary object between the tropical country in which I was born and the unfamiliar world of a winter wonderland. Referring to my own first readings of the poem, I suggest that Frost's idea of a "winter wonderland" is an imaginative border crossing. This is how stories serve as boundary objects or mediating tools that inform readers about culture. Reading the poem, I do not only imagine the beauty or the fierceness of winter but also how people live in such a condition. The way people live in the place where they live is culture (Willinsky, 1998). People who live in

tropical countries and those who live in countries having four seasons have different ways to deal with their environment. To know an aspect of culture of a people, one can read stories about it. At this point, my readings of “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” are a kind of border crossing because through the poem, in my imagination I learned at least an aspect of the culture which is different from my culture. At the same time, the poem gave me feelings of discontinuity. In my imagination, I saw winter wonderland: snow is falling down, the evening is dark, the lake is frozen, the temperature is very cold and these all create stillness. I felt the sensation of being very peaceful as I entered the figured world of the poem. It was in contrast to what I typically experienced living in Java—the most populous island in the whole world—for one can hardly find such tranquility there. Thus, through the poem, I traveled from my everyday world in Java to the serenity of the winter wonderland—not necessarily in the U.S. but in a place I saw as very peaceful. This gave me the feeling of longing to experience the winter wonderland *in person, to travel to a place where I might experience this tranquility*. In a sense though, the poem also gave me the feeling of discontinuity. It was not fear or unhappiness but more of an obsession to be in a place like the one I envisioned in Frost’s poem.

#### Discontinuity

Discontinuity is the feeling of uncertainty, fear, fragmentation, or difference people feel when crossing borders. While discontinuity is not always a negative feeling, it is a feeling that occurs when the society, culture, and even nature are different from what the border crosser knows. But, according to Akkerman and Bakker (2011), within discontinuity there are also feelings of sameness or continuity, meaning that border crossers work to find something with which they are familiar. This sameness and continuity enables people to make relationships with other people in the new setting. Thus, dialogues and the learning process begin. Discontinuity occurs in most of my stories, but here I will focus on stories (1), (4), (5), (11), and (12).

In Story (1) I discuss discontinuities I experienced when I came to the U.S. for the first time. Obviously I had these feelings when I came to Athens in 2001: fragmented, confused, unhappy, and not aware what to expect. Even though Ohio University sent me many guide books, brochures, and maps, these did not really help in my first days in the U.S. The fact that Maharesmi had come to Athens 1 year before was most helpful. As time went by and I knew more and more people and learned more about life in Athens, I became more and more comfortable.

Story (4) in particular describes how Widagda experienced discontinuity in Iowa City in 2006. We all shared this experience but Widagda had the most severe discontinuities. Actually for the boys, even before our trip, they felt scared (but also excited at the same time) because they could not speak English. Their concerns about speaking English were mentioned most often, but once they started school, their feelings of fragmentation and unhappiness heightened in other ways as well. However, in Adiwignya's case—as I described in Chapter Three—neither my wife nor I knew much about how Adiwignya experienced discontinuities except from his silence. In the beginning of our stay in Iowa City, there were times when he stopped doing something and looked like he was lost in his own world. But at the time we did not consider that it may be a sign of discontinuity. I realize now that silence was very likely a sign of Adiwignya's discontinuity at the beginning of our stay in Iowa City, for silence was a very different way of being for my oldest son.

What our sons experienced in the beginning of their schooling in the U.S. is a common experience for children who cross borders. In her research, Igoa (1995) found that many immigrant children in the U.S. experienced severe discontinuities because they were uprooted from their society and culture and not prepared for the new life in the new place. Igoa also discovered that some children did not even know that their parents were planning to move to the U.S. until several days before their trips. Therefore, in the beginning of their lives in the U.S. they experienced culture shock because they felt the



new culture was meaningless (Adler, 1975). In the beginning of their schooling in the U.S. they were lonely, had no friends, and did not talk to anyone as the result of social, cultural, and linguistic discontinuities. These same kinds of experiences are also captured by contemporary realistic Asian-American picturebooks such as the Yoon series by Recorvits and Swiatkowska (*My Name Is Yoon*, 2003; *Yoon and the Christmas Mitten*, 2006; and *Yoon and the Jade Bracelet*, 2008), *Lissy's Friends* (Lin, 2007), and *Sumi's First Day of School Ever* (Pak & Kim, 2003). With these examples I want to emphasize that moving to another country is not easy, because of unfamiliar people, places, cultures and languages.

Stories (5), (11), and (12) are examples of times when my family experienced discontinuities back home in Indonesia. Widagda was scared and screamed out in English when he saw what he thought was chaotic traffic. Adiwignya was scared too but did not say anything. I see Widagda's screaming and Adiwignya's silence as a reaction toward a cultural phenomenon which was very different between the two places where they had lived. In Indonesia, car traffic is a relatively new and developing way of living and interacting, while in Iowa City, car traffic has a longer history of rules and laws.

However, the traffic pattern was not the only example of discontinuities we experienced upon our return to Indonesia. Maharesmi was concerned about safety in general. Living in Iowa City for 6 years, we always felt safe—the places we went to and the environment we were in, like school, campus, and other public spaces, were safe. Returning to our hometown in Indonesia, Semarang, which is a big city, made her worried. Even on a public bus, people have to be really cautious; there might be pickpockets among the passengers. Our sons needed to realize safety was an issue as well, and so it took time for us to be settled again.

For Adiwignya and Widagda, especially, it was strange to be among people who do not speak English as their first language. Indonesians also looked at them in wonder when they heard two children who looked very much like any Indonesian boys speaking

English. Widagda's scream on the bus attracted people's attention. For a brief moment, there was a tension. No one on the bus expected to see two Javanese children speaking English and then Widagda screamed out in English for all to hear. My wife and I felt the tension when many people on the bus turned to look at us curiously. Our sons seemed to realize that many people were looking at them and they lowered the volume of their voices but continued speaking to one another in English. We felt uneasy in the situation but what could we do? Adiwignya and Widagda could only speak English at the time. One way to ease ourselves was replying to them in Javanese or Indonesian every time they asked us questions. But it turned out that it did not make us more comfortable. From the gazes of the people on the bus, I could feel that they were also uncomfortable. We were part of them but different from them at the same time. That is discontinuity.

Stories (11) and (12) offer examples of changes in the boys' education. There are many differences between schools in Iowa City and schools in Semarang. From the stories my wife and I frequently told them, the boys knew that they would have to get up very early every day; the school gate would be closed and locked so that students would not be able to get in if they were late; the school day would begin with the Morning Prayer six days a week; they would have homework every day; and their test scores would determine their success in school. All of these examples created discontinuities for them and we all wondered how they would do in their new school settings. Therefore Adiwignya was very quiet when I took him to his school. He felt very tense and was silent in formal settings like meeting with the principal and the teachers, but among his classmates he was more relaxed. The feeling of being accepted by his classmates was crucial for his successful border crossing from Iowa City school to Indonesian school.

#### Learning on the Boundaries

Akkerman and Bakker (2011) assert that "all learning involves boundaries" (p. 132). People crossing boundaries experience discontinuities and in these critical moments, people search for ways to make connections to the unfamiliar (people, culture,

landscapes, etc.). Making connections is a way out of discontinuity, a way to begin unveiling the unknown. Therefore people may learn productively and powerfully in critical moments that involve boundary crossing. People typically feel comfortable within their own “borders”, but crossing borders creates new challenges and learning is the way to overcome those challenges. Many of my stories reflect this. In story (1), I learned how to be a new student at both Ohio University and the University of Iowa; I learned to be a member of the society in the new place. Interaction and dialogues with people helped me settle into the new setting. Meeting with my academic supervisor and attending academic orientation as soon as I came to the university is one example of how I learned.

Story (4) shows how Widagda learned on the boundaries. When my wife and I decided to send him to the Head Start program in Iowa City in 2006, he began to experience cultural dialogues with other children. Going to Head Start program meant that he began to have interactions and relationships with children and adults from the host society. Like children portrayed in the picturebooks I mentioned previously, Widagda was sad and lonely at school, did not speak because of language limitations, and did not want to interact with other children. However, as Igoa (1995) discovered in her research about immigrant children, in his silence Widagda was learning. He was having intensive internal dialogues and absorbing much from the world around him as a way to overcome his discontinuities. The same was true for his brother, Adiwignya, and perhaps for all transnational children, regardless of the level of their discontinuity. Going to school was an important beginning point to their new life. For them, immersion into the language, culture, and society in the new place began with having very intensive interactions (dialogues) with members of the host society—children and teachers.

In story (7), our dialogues after each of us read *Hannah Is My Name* were also representative of learning on the boundaries. Widagda compared three places, the U.S., Taiwan, and Indonesia in terms of freedom. The concept of freedom is not easily captured in one definition but Widagda pointed out his own meaning of freedom as he

understood it from the book we read: *We are free to say what we think and free to be anything we choose*. Widagda's definition, however, may mean different things in each of these three countries. Maharesmi explained to the boys that we have freedom in Indonesia. I also explained to them by telling them a story—story (9)—about how Indonesian people earn freedom. This is an example of how stories can function as boundary objects that bridge differences between cultures, countries, or even ideas. I used the story to further meaning about the issue of freedom in the U.S. and Indonesia.

Stories (11) and (12) also reflect learning on the boundaries. Coming to Indonesia, the boys did not have any idea what school was like in Indonesia. When we took them to their schools, despite discontinuities they experienced, they learned about the new environment from their interactions with the principals, teachers, and other students. They spoke Indonesian very little but that did not obstruct their desire to get along with other students. From the very beginning Adiwignya and Widagda worked to build relationships with other people. On their very first day, they already made friends and I see this as a sign that learning on the boundaries is in progress.

#### Acculturation

Gans (1977), as cited in Chapter One, describes acculturation as the adoption of the culture of the host society by newcomers, while maintaining some characteristics of the native culture. According to Gans, culture includes behavior patterns, values, rules, symbols, etc. Based on this concept, stories of crossing borders are stories of acculturation. My family's arrival in the U.S. meant that we crossed cultural borders and in order to survive in the new place, we adopted crucial aspects of the culture of the host society. We chose to acculturate, not to assimilate, because we did not want to experience the loss of our own culture. However, Adiwignya's and Widagda's lived experiences show that they tended to move more toward assimilation. Story (1) identifies this tendency with my discussion of our struggles to teach the boys the Indonesian language. Before coming to Iowa City they spoke both Indonesian and Javanese but after about

three years of living in Iowa City they stopped speaking both languages. We continued speaking Indonesian and Javanese at home so they would not completely forget the languages, but our experiences show that to stop speaking the native language is the most obvious tendency toward assimilation for a border crosser, and we did not speak our native language as much as we needed to in order for them to continue to use it facily.

In terms of culture as Gans (1977) defines it, we can still help the boys learn about Indonesian culture. The incidents in story (2) and (3) made my wife and me aware of the importance of introducing Indonesian culture to the boys more intensively. In a way, this is interesting. We are from Indonesia but we taught our children about Indonesian culture using English as the medium of dialogues. This illustrates how complex issues related to culture and acculturation are because they are dynamic concepts. Values, patterns of behavior, norms, and traditions are subject to change (Fang, 2011) so acculturation is also subject to change, depending on what values, patterns of behavior, norms, and traditions that people hold at the time.

Following Gans' (1977) ideas about acculturation as the adoption of the culture by newcomers, I wonder what best describes the phenomenon experienced by our sons when we returned to Indonesia. In the U.S. it is obvious that we acculturated into the U.S. culture, but now I am thinking hard about our move back to Indonesia. Definitely, my wife and I will not acculturate into Indonesian culture since it is our native country. But what about our children? I suggest this is a phenomenon that is difficult to address. Ethnically, our children are Indonesian, but culturally they are more inclined to U.S. culture than Indonesian culture. In this instance, story (4) is a story of acculturation. When Widagda began Head Start, and also when Adiwignya began first grade in Iowa City, both boys started the process of acculturation into the U.S. culture. Now my sons return to schooling in Indonesia. I wonder if this will be an example of my sons reliving their own culture, or if this is a type of acculturation that occurs when parents raise their children in a country or culture that is not the land of their birth. I leave these questions

for further reflection. This phenomenon indicates that the interplay between identities, place, and culture is complicated.

### Identity and Cultural Tension

Any discussion of identity in this research, to some extent, is also a discussion of cultural tension. Our identities as border crossers are shaped by the tensions of two cultures. The differences between the two cultures cause these tensions, either when we interact with people from the host society or even in our interactions at home and among Indonesian people living in Iowa City. As I described in Chapter Two, identity is complex and always changing, multiple, and dependent upon sociocultural context and ongoing processes. Therefore, there were many times when we wondered how to identify ourselves because of our complex situation as international graduate students. In story (2), set in Iowa City in 2010 or 2011, I identify myself as a Javanese and Indonesian father and I realize that actually this is only one dimension of my identity. I identify myself in this way because I was born and raised in Java in which I have historical, place, and temporal relationships with the Javanese and Indonesian societies. Definitely in this story I look backward to the past, not only to the time before we lived in the U.S. as a family but also to historical practices in Javanese society when a father demanded absolute respect from his children. I no longer live with old Javanese traditions and we do not live in Java but in Iowa City where people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds live as one community. In responding to Adiwignya's request for a drink of water, I was torn by how to respond. Now I wonder why I did not identify myself as an American father because as a border crosser, it is not an exaggeration to say that U.S. society and culture have had a large influence on me. I have developed from being a Javanese and Indonesian to an Ohioan and an Iowan, but I am unique in that I am an Ohioan and Iowan who is also Javanese and Indonesian. I am multidimensional. Values, norms, and traditions are not static over time. But it turns out that it is not as easy as what we think. By this I want also to emphasize that even if at the time I identified myself as

an American father, I continued to want my children to pay respect to me in ways that were consistent with Javanese traditions. But, nonetheless, I was more lenient in responding to Adiwignya's request. The cultural tension I felt was not as intense as my willingness to respond to his request for a drink of water. I was caught between the two cultures and both my Javanese and U.S. American identities were calling me. I wanted my son to realize it was not something a traditional Javanese child would ask of his father, but I also was willing to respond to his request. That incident makes me reposition myself and wonder about my identity as a father. I am not only a Javanese father or only a U.S. father; I am unique. This is the kind of cultural tension I continue to face as a result of the complex dialogues I have with people from the host society but also with other transnational students and immigrants. I wonder if I will ever be able to settle this matter. Perhaps our identities are as complex as the contradictions between different cultures.

Identity issues and cultural tensions are not less problematic in story (3), also set in Iowa City in 2010 or 2011. This story is Maharesmi's and in the story she identifies herself as an Indonesian mother and, on the other hand, Widagda identifies himself as an American child. Again, sociocultural context is at play in this story. That particular gathering of Indonesian families caused Maharesmi to identify herself as an Indonesian mother. When a group of people from the same society and culture gather, the sense of belonging to the heritage culture is intense. Living far away from our homeland, these gatherings identified our careful consideration for culture and traditions. And actually it is not only Maharesmi who wanted our children to behave in an Indonesian way but I did as well. The context of the gathering made her unhappy with Widagda's attitude. In a different setting, for instance in a gathering involving people from the host society and/or other international families from various cultural and ethnic groups, Widagda's way of addressing adults would not have been as much of an issue. In such a setting, Maharesmi tended to follow the common practice in the U.S. society: we address friends and

acquaintances by only their first name as long as there is no personal objection. In our experiences as international graduate students, even some of our professors want us to address them by their first names but our Indonesian worldview and perspective will not allow us to do that. We simply cannot. Our identities include cultural ideas and philosophies like this that are too powerful for us to abandon.

Identity and cultural tension are themes that can also be found in stories (4), (5), (6), (11), and (12). But the tensions and identities in these stories are not as obvious as in stories (2) and (3). In story (4), starting his Head Start program, Widagda developed a new dimension of his identity, from a child at an Indonesian home in Iowa City to a child who learned to be a member of the Iowa community. Meanwhile, in story (5), after 6 years of living in the U.S., we found ourselves in Indonesia again, but actually wondering about our identities. For the boys, especially Widagda who often identifies himself as an American, being in Indonesia is like being in a different society and culture. Our hometown, Semarang, is not a completely new place for them but they do not quite remember anything about Semarang. In the beginning it was not easy for Adiwignya and Widagda, but also not easy for the people with whom they communicated. Language was the barrier. People saw our sons as Indonesian just like them but they wondered why the boys spoke English to one another. Both our sons and the people they communicated with had those kinds of tensions. The schools also found it difficult in dealing with Adiwignya and Widagda. They had no experiences admitting Indonesian children who do not speak Indonesian. Surprisingly, Adiwignya and Widagda made friends easily. That helped them a lot. Both of them in their own school were surrounded by many children for a couple of weeks. Many of them said they wanted to learn to speak English but Adiwignya and Widagda said they wanted to learn to speak Indonesian. They must have wondered about their identities. If identities carry the whole history of a person (Holland et al., 1998) then it is true that we are Indonesian but at the same time we carry our U.S. history, which is



tremendously important for us. At this point, it is safe to say that under any circumstances, a person always has multiple identities.

Stories (11) and (12) are similar to story (4) but in this story we take the boys to Indonesian school which means they are going to develop their identities as students, as new friends for other children, and as new members of the school communities in Indonesia. At the same time, they expect cultural tensions to occur because of how they perceive of school, teachers, friends, learning and everything about school from the U.S. perspective.

### Living Two Cultures: A Reflection

The 12 stories cannot tell everything that we have gone through during our journeys because life is too rich to be expressed in words, but these stories capture important moments in our journeys—our interactions and relationships (dialogues) with other people in other cultures. Framed in the narrative of crossing borders, the 12 stories reveal themes as I described previously. This is to say that to cross borders or boundaries means to face discontinuity, to learn, to experience cultural tension, and develop new dimensions of identities and these all occur simultaneously. I refer to stories (2) and (3) as I continue this discussion.

The incidents in these stories, Adiwignya asking me for a drink of water and Widagda addressing an adult by only her first name, happened in Iowa City in 2010 or 2011. They might appear as ordinary incidents in our daily life but for my wife and me, these incidents are complicated. To look at the complication of these incidents, I look back again to story (1), “Beginning,” to unveil the complication of this issue. Both my wife and I were raised in the Javanese tradition in which parents demand complete respect from their children. I cannot speak exactly to how my wife was raised but I assume that in this instance, our upbringings were not really different in the context of Javanese traditions. For me, complete respect towards my parents meant I had to do whatever they said. When speaking to my father, I had to use the highest speech level of

the Javanese language. However, I did not have to use the highest speech level to my mother, except for certain words. This cultural practice identifies the Javanese tradition that demands higher respect and privilege for Javanese fathers than for Javanese mothers in a Javanese family. I mention this to provide background for how I perceived the relationship between father and son in traditional Java and to open discussion about my own changing perspective on my role as a father. I do not demand that my wife and sons use the highest level of Javanese language when speaking with me. (At the time of writing this dissertation, I do not even know if my sons are now speaking Javanese because every time we communicate, we still use English; and my wife struggles all the time while speaking the highest level of Javanese language and she is not fond of using it). Javanese language has three speech levels and basically each speech level has different vocabularies. When speaking between friends, we use the lowest speech level or what I call the democratic version of Javanese language—the speakers are in an equal position. Traditionally, a wife speaks to her husband using the polite language, at least the medium level. But my wife did not want to do that; she said she'd rather speak English to me than speaking in medium or high Javanese. She also said that husband and wife are equal partners so she did not need to use the medium or high Javanese when speaking to me. This was a decision we came to together, a decision I perceive as important to the relationship between a husband and a wife, something that my father and mother did not find important. This is a big change in Java but my education allowed me to have new perspectives on this matter. The world has changed; values, norms, and traditions have also changed because they are not stable over time.

My wife and I have changed considerably, like many Javanese people, even those who may not have shared our experiences living abroad; we no longer have strong ties to the old Javanese traditions. Our education, our readings, and our dialogues with other people have contributed to these changes; simply our move to the United States to pursue graduate studies justifies that we are no longer traditional. Living in the U.S., we adopted

many of the values, norms, and traditions of the host culture. We sent our children to public school to be educated like children of the host culture and my wife and I went to graduate school to be educated in an American way, not in an Indonesian or Javanese way. In the U.S. we learned that there is room for students, not only for teachers or professors, to express their ideas, to speak their thoughts, to critique and to be critiqued. These all change us; these all give us a new horizon in our relationships to other people and make us different persons. As a consequence of choosing to acculturate, we learned to act, think, and behave like the members of the host society. But our home is like a sanctuary where we identify ourselves as Javanese or Indonesian; a place where we maintain an Indonesian atmosphere in an American milieu. But at the same time this also deepens our complicated situation. Responding to Adiwignya's request, my identity as a Javanese and Indonesian father was dominant. I would have reacted differently if the request had come from a child from the host culture. I was upset because Adiwignya is my son, and his respect for me is important. My childhood upbringing appeared very strongly in response to my son's request. The same is true for Maharesmi in Widagda's incident. In Java, when a child's behavior is not attuned to the social norms, people often believe the parents have failed to educate the child. Responding to Widagda's behavior, Maharesmi was upset too. She identified herself as an Indonesian mother. It happened in the U.S. but the setting—the gathering of Indonesian families—demanded that we acted and behaved as Indonesian.

These two short stories captured basic issues of boundary crossings, in the sense how sociocultural differences can create tensions and dilemmas. The period of experiencing discontinuity is the critical moment for learning. In the case of our family, once our children learned to cope with their discontinuity and feel comfortable with the new milieus, they gradually began to move away from the culture of our native country to adopt the host culture. In their research about Asian-American children and youth, Mo and Shen (2007) found that Asian-American youth had conflicts with their parents

because “their American values and beliefs don’t always go with the traditions of their ancestry” (p. 174). At this point it is important to get back to the debate over the dynamic versus static paradigm of culture. Drawing on Fang (2011), in Chapter Two I described that I see culture as dynamic, not static. Fang argues that in this Internet and technology era and intensive global interactions and relationships, we can no longer perceive that values, norms, and traditions are fixed and stable over time. Instead, they are subject to change. Mo and Shen, however, discovered that when parents see culture as dynamic there will be no cultural conflict between them and their children. My wife and I have not come to a stage in which we experienced severe cultural conflicts with our sons like what Mo and Shen described about Asian-American youth and their parents. I see what we experienced as tensions. In my understanding, conflicts imply that at least there are two opposing parties who openly disagree over something but our experience was more related to our internal conflict or in other words, our conflicts within ourselves. This most likely happened because of how we positioned ourselves between the different cultures. We took two separate journeys to study in the U.S., because we believed it was important for our professional lives. Today I also realize that learning involves boundaries and boundaries can be understood as sociocultural differences (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). We can accept differences because, as I believe, that is how we learn and live. What my wife and I learned from our parents and from Indonesian society will remain with us. Our history will always shadow us wherever we are. But, we are also flexible in our adoption of new values, norms, and traditions because without flexibility, we will never learn to broaden our perspectives and never learn to appreciate diversity.

Crossing borders also means learning—in its broadest sense. It is in this context that my wife and I were happy and proud to help our sons have a formal education in the U.S. Even though I only wrote one story about our sons’ going to school, story (4) about Widagda, it reflects the decision we made for our children’s education. We were aware of the consequences of our decision. They would be immersed in U.S. culture and the

English language. What we did not expect was that they would stop speaking our languages. But, in the whole context of our journeys, I do not regret this. They still have the opportunity to learn our native tongues. There were times when we were concerned about this and we struggled to help them keep speaking the languages, but their immersion into the U.S. culture and language was too strong. Above all, their experiences going to school in the U.S.—like my wife’s and my experiences—will tremendously important for their future. At this point I need to look backward again to my childhood when I went to school in my village. All students and teachers were from the same society and culture, and spoke the same language. But years later I have the opportunity to live in the U.S. with my immediate family and send my children to U.S. schools. We are exposed to a multicultural community. This is something I would never have imagined in my childhood. Comparing myself as a boy to the lives my children have led reveals how far I have traveled in this life. At the same time, this reveals the many changes that have occurred in my lifetime. In my childhood, it was enough for people to have interactions with their immediate neighbors. We did not think about building social webs as we understand them today. During my childhood, when one knew his or her neighbors, it was enough. But the world has changed. We need to learn across cultures and from one another in this global context. It is in this context that our children’s education in the U.S. is important; their interactions and relationships with people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in Iowa City will hopefully prepare them for life in a diverse society and culture.

Boundary crossings is also a cultural dialogue—how people from different ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds learn to live side by side, understand and appreciate one another. Upon coming to the U.S., my family had firsthand experiences interacting with people and culture in the U.S., other international students and immigrants. These experiences were much more than we expected. We can read books, find information on the Internet, and rely on the media to learn about other people and culture but none of

those provide the same experience as the direct contacts we had with other people and cultures. Our stay in the U.S. helped us understand daily life. I never imagined that in Iowa I would meet “regular” people who became our friends. I would never know about them by watching Hollywood movies or reading media sources. As newcomers, we can also provide firsthand information about our society and culture to those in the host society who want to know about Indonesia. My experiences teaching the Indonesian language to students from various countries, including from the U.S., were a good chance to provide information about the Indonesian people and culture. Experiences like this provide an important give and take between the two cultures. In the context of the relationships between newcomers and the host society, individual families, like my family, may not have an impact on the host society and culture but millions of immigrants bringing their own cultures, traditions, and languages to the U.S. will of course impact the changes in the host culture. Therefore crossing borders is a cultural dialogue in this sense. It is not only the newcomers who change, but the host society changes as well. Thus, as Fang (2011) describes, one of the reasons culture is dynamic is because of boundary crossings.

Reflecting on our stays in the U.S., both in Athens, Ohio, and Iowa City, Iowa, many times I think that they were more than just cultural journeys. Perhaps in a sense, I might call them cultural pilgrimages in which each of us had our own unique, personal, cultural experience. Our sons, in particular, truly lived the culture when we lived in Iowa City, whereas my wife and I lived in two cultures. My own longing for living in the winter wonderland was fulfilled. I experienced the beauty and the fierceness of winter. That is to say that some of our curiosity about different people, cultures, and landscapes was fulfilled. Our desire to live with and learn from people with different cultures became reality. Is that all? The answer is no. There is more to learn. But at one point, pilgrims have to return home. For my family, that journey has begun. That does not mean going home is free of problems and tensions. Stories (11) and (12) highlight our

problematic cultural situation. It turns out that going home becomes another journey. Taking our sons to their new schools in Indonesia is like taking them to their schools in Iowa City; however, they are both older now and becoming more capable of expressing their opinions. Normally people are settled when they return from journeys, but in our case, that did not happen immediately, especially for Adiwignya and Widagda. This is one of the consequences of our decisions to cross borders.

Like we prepared them for our journey to the U.S., this time we also prepared them for the trip home (aren't both Iowa City and Semarang our home?). Stories (7), (8), (9), and (10) are excerpts from our dialogues to prepare the boys for their new life in Indonesia. Story (10) is our short conversation in the context of freedom and democracy in Indonesia during our dialogues, an issue which Widagda raised. I told them the story so that our sons could have a little preliminary understanding about the issue in Indonesia. From their education in Iowa, they are familiar with U.S. history and they know that the U.S. values freedom of expression. My wife and I explained to them that like the U.S., Indonesia also values freedom. The story I told them was a bridge to connect their understanding of freedom in the U.S. and what they expect to experience in Indonesia. Perhaps they are still too young to understand all of this complication, but at least they already started to question. Widagda, especially, connected the book we read, his lived experiences in the U.S., and what he expected to face in Indonesia. Moreover, who can completely understand the complication of the interactions and relationships between people from various countries, cultures, and traditions? There are more questions than answers to this question and I did not realize this in the beginning of our journeys. But now I do realize that indeed we have more questions than answers. Living in two cultures has complicated our identities.

#### Stories for Learning

Most of the stories I presented in this work involve our children. My wife and I educated them in the context of crossing boundaries. School is the formal primary

institution responsible for their education, but as parents we also have a crucial role in promoting our children's learning especially in relationship to our identity as a transnational family. Reading and telling stories about culture to our children are not only an occasion where we share stories to enjoy but also a way for us to educate our children. I suggest that it is in these activities that some theories or concepts such as mediation and ZPD by Vygotsky (1978), dialogism by (Bakhtin et al., 1994), personal response by Rosenblatt (1938/1995), figured worlds by Holland et al. (1998), and boundary crossings and boundary objects by Akkerman and Bakker (2011), became significant for educating our transnational children. Story (7) also reflects the significance of these theories and concepts.

In this story, the roles my wife and I played as mediators for the boys in understanding the issues we experienced as transnational people were crucial. International students have to return to their home countries when they graduate but often their children do not feel comfortable returning because they have social, cultural, and linguistic ties to the host country more than in the home country. Our sons are in this category. We used the picturebook, *Hannah Is My Name*, to mediate immigration issues and create dialogues about culture in a broad sense. We explained our situation to our children and compared our situation with the story, and made consequences of not returning as clear as possible. In the end, this mediation gave them new perspectives. They could understand and accept the fact that we had to return. I do not suggest that such mediation had an immediate impact on changing our children's perspectives or that it will work the same way in another context. It takes time for children to internalize what parents explain to them. The point is that it is imperative for parents to mediate for their children to help them develop as learners and thinkers.

Bakhtin's dialogism is at work in our reading of *Hannah Is My Name*. Throughout the story I wrote, each of us expressed our thoughts and ideas about the book we read and we listened to each other. As parents, my wife and I did not try to dominate the



conversations because we believe that in book sharing it is important for us to know how much our children understand the book we read or what perspectives they have on certain issues. Dialogues are important in critical times and when parents find the “right” book to address a certain issue, reading books with children can help to shed light on new understandings. At the same time, our reading of the book illuminated Rosenblatt’s ideas about personal response or transaction between readers and texts in meaning making. Each of us read the book individually and then we discussed the book in a dialogic conversation. The story I wrote shows that each of us had a different transaction with the text. What we brought to the text (our past and present knowledge, the purpose of reading, and our identities) determined the transaction and the dialogue that ensued. Each member of our family learned from one another and just as Bakhtin (Bakhtin et al., 1994) points out, learning is most productive when individuals are in dialogue with one another.

In Chapter Two I described how figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998) offer rich possibilities for learning. Reading books with children, telling them stories, and having dialogues with them really epitomizes the importance of figured worlds. Stories and dialogues enable us to create imaginary worlds in which we can create new identities, gain new knowledge and understanding, and promote learning in a broad sense. In this research I describe how my wife and I capitalize on stories as a way for our children to create figured worlds about cultures and awareness of home country and what they can learn from them.

### Final Notes

What do our stories—our experiences—tell? What is it about? This question haunts me. My wife and I could have decided to stay in our hometown, work hard, raise our children and be comfortable within our own native boundaries where everything is familiar. We did not have to transition to a new and more global context in our interactions and relationships with other people. But we took chances and crossed borders, leaving our familiar worlds to live in other places with different cultures, where

uncertainties awaited us. We decided to go on journeys to face the unknown, the uncertain, and challenges. It was an audacious decision for we did not know what to expect. We thought that life would be monotonous and dull if we already knew what we expected to do day by day. In life, sometimes we have to take chances (and opportunities at the same time) and expect surprises. We made a big decision to come to the U.S. The 12 stories I presented in this dissertation reflect moments in our adventures or, as Sumara (1998) contends, "... the narrating of self, whether it is done by oneself or by others, is always a kind of traveling" (p. 204). As in traveling, there are times when we wonder why we do this, when we are surprised, when people ask who we are, and these all make us pause and ask ourselves about our identities. As in traveling, not everything is fun; there are moments of discomforts, unhappiness, tension, and even fragmentation.

It may appear on the surface that I told stories that have a happy ending. I would say in response that there were definitely times when we felt pain; there were moments of discomfort and a lot of unhappiness as we began our life in the U.S. and then returned to our native Indonesia. Crossing borders is a difficult journey. In story (10), Maharesmi said that returning to Indonesia is a happy ending. But, reflecting on our journeys, it was only true at the moment she said it. After years of going to school, she graduated and she believed the boys had a good education in the U.S. For me, what she said is more her way of convincing the boys that it is time to continue our journey by returning to Indonesia to face new challenges and the unknown.

By saying these stories have a happy ending, she does not discuss the difficulties, unhappiness, ups and downs, and pains we experienced while living in the U.S., away from our homeland and relatives. The border crossers I know are not without pain. Every international student and immigrant who tells me about their stories expresses their difficulties in living in the U.S. Immigrants have to work hard to make ends meet, survive, and try to reach their goals and dreams, whether they come true or not. International students often grapple with various problems related to academic life,

acculturation, longing for the beloved in home countries and other issues. When Maharesmi says that we have a happy ending, I understand it as a moment when she deserves to enjoy the results of her hard work.

Returning to Indonesia is not the end of our journeys. Maharesmi gets back to work and the boys go to school. That's all we know. Other than that, we have no idea about what comes next. Whether we will stay in our hometown or move again to another place, experience another culture, and develop new dimensions of our identities, that is something we can only wait and see. One thing is certain, though, what is to come is another journey. We will always cross borders—if borders or boundaries refer to differences or the interplay between identities, place, and culture. Life is dynamic, we continuously and simultaneously interact or have dialogues with different people with different ideas and that is what is exciting in our journeys.

Answering the question at the beginning of this section, I am not sure about the answer because there is no definitive answer. Is it about fulfilling curiosities and dreams? Is it about getting a degree? Even though it is true, these journeys mean much more than just fulfilling curiosities and getting a degree. In the end these journeys become a kind of search or quest for something essential in our life: to know where to position ourselves in this complex world and what roles we have to make this complex world a better place. The answer lies in our ongoing interactions and relationships (dialogues) with the worlds around us. This is the essence of Bakhtin's dialogism (DeSantis, 2001). That is how I see my family's journeys—as a never-ending quest filled with dialogues.

## APPENDIX

## LIST OF BOOKS READ IN THE U.S.

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