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Abstract

Engaging in conversation with immigrant children about selfinitiated home art experiences can reveal valuable insights into the complex world of immigrant children, and what constitute their 'funds of knowledge' (Moll 2000). Lee Wong, a five-year-old Chinese–Australian boy, is one of four young children involved in a visual ethnographic research project investigating children's art experiences in their homes, preschool and school. Lee is equipped with a digital camera and through regularly sharing and discussing his photographs Lee reveals how he explores complex ideas and experiences through his drawings. This article will share, in narrative form, one of Lee's graphic stories, 'Farmer Bob: Bob's Farm' to demonstrate how he explores concepts of difference, identity and friendship. Employing a Vygotskian perspective I will discuss how this personal, semi-fictional story provides insights into Lee's creative processes (Moran and John-Steiner 2002), and how drawing and storytelling function as cultural tools and mediating devices (Vygotsky 1962/1934, 1978) for multilingual and immigrant children to make sense of their social and linguistic worlds.

Keywords

Narrative inquiry, children's drawing, Vygotsky, early childhood, immigrant children, ethnography, children's photography, funds of knowledge

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Current Narratives 2: 2010

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Rosemary D. Richards
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Abstract: *Engaging in conversation with immigrant children about self-initiated home art experiences can reveal valuable insights into the complex world of immigrant children, and what constitute their 'funds of knowledge' (Moll 2000). Lee Wong, a five-year-old Chinese–Australian boy, is one of four young children involved in a visual ethnographic research project investigating children's art experiences in their homes, preschool and school. Lee is equipped with a digital camera and through regularly sharing and discussing his photographs Lee reveals how he explores complex ideas and experiences through his drawings. This article will share, in narrative form, one of Lee's graphic stories, 'Farmer Bob: Bob's Farm' to demonstrate how he explores concepts of difference, identity and friendship. Employing a Vygotskian perspective I will discuss how this personal, semi-fictional story provides insights into Lee's creative processes (Moran and John-Steiner 2002), and how drawing and storytelling function as cultural tools and mediating devices (Vygotsky 1962/1934, 1978) for multilingual and immigrant children to make sense of their social and linguistic worlds.*

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Introduction

Lee Wong is a first-generation Australian-born Chinese boy who lives with his father (Xiaoming), mother (Jingjing), and seven-year-old sister (Penny) in a rented unit in the small Australian city of Ashtown.[1] Lee and his family speak Mandarin and English. Xiaoming, who has a PhD in computer science, lectures at the local university. When in China, Jingjing qualified as a teacher, but her university degree and English skills do not allow her to teach and she is not in paid employment. She tells me that she aspires to be able to teach again but while the children are young her main responsibilities are to manage the household and look after the needs of their children.

The Wong family moved to a large Australian city about six years ago, and then to Ashtown for Xiaoming's job. In their previous city they had contact with some extended family and members of the Chinese community. However, although Chinese

[1] All participant and place names are pseudonyms. All images are published with the participants' written consents.

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immigrants are the largest group of immigrants to arrive in Australia in the last 15 years (Tannenbaum and Howie 2002), there is not a large Chinese community in Ashtown. Lee attends preschool and is starting school the following year.

I know Lee and his family through my doctoral research that investigates four young children's experiences of art in their homes, and as they transition between preschool and school. The children are equipped with digital cameras, as we engage in collaborative visual ethnographic processes (Pink 2001). The children share their experiences in verbal and visual form as they tell me about their photographs, and these research conversations consider a phenomenological perspective of their experiences (van Manen 1990) within a narrative inquiry framework (Clandinin 2007; Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

While Lee's drawings, his creative use of language, and his photography are worthy of interrogation, in the interests of both brevity and thoroughness such issues are left for future articles. Furthermore, while traditional approaches to analysing children's art privilege the artwork over the art-maker, contemporary sociocultural perspectives seek to link children's art to 'real people, in real contexts, leading real lives' (Richards 2007: 28).

Therefore, in employing ethnographic approaches and sociocultural perspectives I am conscious of my responsibility to represent Lee as a unique, visible and vocal research participant, without overlaying his experiences with reductionistic and formalistic lenses, where all experience is seen in terms of merely playing out the 'hegemonies of politics, culture, gender, and framework' (Clandinin and Connelly 2000: 40). However, even as the research highlights Lee's art experiences, it prompts me to consider his lived experiences as a young bilingual child from a Chinese immigrant family, and how his art helps him to make sense of his life. Therefore, this article shares in narrative the experience in which Lee presents one of his drawn stories, 'Farmer Bob: Bob's Farm', and considers how Lee explores concepts of difference, identity and friendship through his drawings and narratives.

Further discussion considers this research event and Lee's drawings in terms of Vygotskian perspectives on creative processes and in terms of insights into Lee's 'funds of knowledge' — that is the bodies of knowledge, including information, skills and strategies, which underlie household functioning, development and well-being (Moll, Amanti, Neff and González 1992). Using Vygotskian (1978) perspectives I will position Lee's creative art experiences as socially, culturally and historically situated and involving a series of transformations. With specific reference to Lee's experience of creating and presenting 'Farmer Bob: Bob's Farm' I will explore the assertion that through the transformation of 'social interaction and use of cultural tools and signs, a person can free himself or herself from the constraints of the present environment and take control of his or her own future' (Moran and John-Steiner 2002: 4). Furthermore, I argue that researchers and educators should tap into the rich source of insights that dialoguing with children around their self-initiated home-based art can provide, and seek to honour and connect immigrant children's home and preschool/school experiences.

Narratives within narratives: Lee and 'Bob's Farm: Farmer Bob'

The narrative begins

With laptop case in one hand, and my camera slung over my shoulder, I knock at the front door of Lee's house. I have been visiting Lee's home at least once a fortnight for the last fifteen weeks and plan to do so for another six months. I am feeling comfortable with these routines, and I am pleased that my enthusiasm to work with Lee outweighed my initial qualms about communicating with a bilingual Chinese–Australian family. Jingjing opens the door with a cheery greeting and five-year-old Lee, wearing his yellow 'Bob the Builder' tee-shirt and 'Toy Story' pants, pops out from behind his mother. He welcomes me with a shriek of delight, as though we haven't seen each other for weeks — when in fact we saw each other at preschool a few days ago. Lee joyfully lunges towards me, and with a mischievous grin takes my free hand and leads me inside. This lively, articulate and boisterous child literally lifts my spirits and not for the first time I consider how 'Lee the Son' is a different persona to 'Lee the Preschool Boy'.

Lee the preschool boy is a quiet, serious and largely solitary child (Figure 1). He speaks when spoken to, in a rapid, soft voice and he can be difficult to understand. Although he seldom calls attention to himself, if assisted by an adult he has definite ideas about how he wants things done. One teacher comments on the transformation that occurs when Lee draws, as he initiates clear conversations about his drawings and when doing so often adds more details and ideas. He joins in most activities and does not appear unhappy or ostracised. Nevertheless, Lee is often on the edge of play activities, rather than in the midst of the social network. Poor language skills can limit play interaction for second language children (Konishi 2007) and young children are more likely to play with ethnically similar children (Lui and Blila 1995). By contrast to Lee's preschool demeanour, Lee at home, Lee the son and brother, is energetic, animated, rowdy, deliberately comical and centre-stage. This is the Lee that greets me today.

Figure 1. Lee in the sandpit at preschool. As a preschool boy, Lee is a quiet, serious and solitary child. This contrasts with how Lee experiences life as a son and brother.

I sense that Lee has something special to share with me and I have noticed how the research processes have encouraged a heightened sense of audience for all four of the children I visit. While the children bring their own unique experiences to my research project, they all respond positively to my genuine and enthusiastic interest in what they do and say. As I consider how Lee changes between various settings, and how unique each child's experiences are, I am reminded why I opted for this collaborative research into children's art experiences, and why I visit them across multiple contexts of home, preschool and school.

So here I am on this afternoon, in late November, visiting Lee. A lot has happened this month for Lee. He has visited his new school in an orientation morning. I too attended his school that day, sitting with Jingjing in the school hall, as parents were told how to pack lunch boxes and prepare their child for school. Although I was not a parent, I felt offended all the same by the underlying assumptions that, despite five years of raising a child, 'we' would need to be told how to pack our child's lunch box. It was as though all experience leading up to the point of being a schoolchild was negligible; that the years of getting children off to preschool with packed lunches, appropriate clothes and positive attitudes were not the real thing. Now school attendance — that was a serious business! The principal even mentioned the school's discipline procedures, although she did note that the expulsion of a kindergarten child was almost unheard of. I do not know how the bona fide parents felt, but my apprehension for Lee was greater after this meeting than before. Lee, along with the other children, was involved in unspecified activities in the classrooms. When I asked him later what he had done he just shrugged his shoulders. He appeared indifferent to the experience — or perhaps just as bewildered as I was.

Lee is not indifferent today though as he leads me towards the dining room table. This solid wood table appears to be the hub of family interactions, schoolwork and creative activities. One end is cleared to make room for the family of four — perhaps to eat, read, write, sit and talk. This is where Lee and I usually set up my laptop and digital recorder so he can insert his digital camera card and generate a slide show and commentary. The other end is a tidy jumble of books, paper, pens, scissors and art gear — a sculptural montage of family activity and history.

I look around and notice the photocopy of a soldier, which Lee has coloured and drawn on, taped to the lounge wall next to the Chinese calendar. Lee is beginning to talk excitedly. At times Lee's utterances are dysfluent and unintelligible, even to his mother — but he persists, sometimes conversing in both Mandarin and English, until he is understood. I tune into his voice as I orientate myself to the English pronunciation of a Chinese–Australian child.

This tuning-in process is not a one-way process. As a recent immigrant to Australia, my New Zealand accent and phrases can differ from Australian ones, and at times I need to repeat or rephrase sentences. Outside of this home, I have experienced occasions when people have teased me about my New Zealand accent. On several preschool visits, when I have asked a child or teacher if Lee is present, I have been greeted with: 'Who's she? We don't have a Leigh here'. These names sound the same to me, and as there is no preschool girl named Leigh the experience of being misunderstood is both frustrating

and embarrassing.[2] To my own surprise, I come to dread having to ask after Lee, and wonder if Lee's quiet demeanour at preschool is one way he deals with challenges to his dialectic difference.

Today I can see that Lee is eager to share something almost immediately. Usually I would set up my laptop and digital recorder before the session, but today I hardly have time to turn on my recorder as I abandon my laptop to the floor. Lee ushers me to a chair at the side of the table. He climbs onto the chair at the head of the table and stands obliquely facing me. This reconfirms what my role is to be, as on previous occasions, in similar poses, Lee has sung songs or recited poems and stories. I am to be the audience and Lee is to become the main character in a dramatic rendition. Oh, if his teachers could see him now I am sure they would marvel at the enigmatic transformation that occurs for Lee in this place. Lee's home and preschool are not just different places to him; they are different lived spaces with accompanying lived experience of body and human relations (van Manen 1990). On this chair, Lee has created a lived space, a centre-stage in which he bodily takes on a mantle of confidence and leadership. He pulls himself up to full height and draws in a breath.

On the table in front of Lee is a book in which he has drawn. Over the last few months, Lee has made many drawings at home with well-articulated narratives. To begin with, these narratives appeared on a single page in the form of a map or game, depicting various characters, actions and sequences of events over time. More recently, Lee stapled together pages of drawings in which each page expressed a different moment in the story, and just last week Lee made a book for each family member. Lee's parents have provided Lee with an exercise book and I sense by the grandeur of this unfolding event, and the way the book is positioned, that, in many ways, his story is a gift to me.

Figure 2. Bob's Farm: Farmer Bob, title page.

Lee looks at the upside-down words on the cover of his book (Figure 2) and lets out a sigh. He gives Jingjing a quick glance — I can see, as is the case with all the families I visit, that child and parent are collaborators, with Lee taking the lead role and Jingjing offering technical and emotional support. 'Farmer,' prompts Jingjing in a gentle voice. Again, Lee draws breath and his story begins. In a clear voice, he announces: 'Bob's Farm: Farmer Bob'. He reaches down and flips to the next page (Figure 3).

[2] The incidents described did occur but, as research participant's names are changed, the 'Lee or Leigh' confusion stands in for the actual names.

Figure 3. Bob's Farm: Farmer Bob, pages 1-2.

'Once upon a time, there's got a house. This is not just a house, it's a farm house. There lived a Farmer Bob.'

'Farmer Bob's got three sheep. One is different because it is green — and these two orange sheep wouldn't play with him.' Lee's voice trails off as he says this last part, intoning a sense of sadness. I say: 'Oh, that's a bit sad'.

Figure 4. Bob's Farm: Farmer Bob, pages 3-4.

Turning the page Lee's voice now expresses suspense. 'And once at night, in the gate, something secret got away' (Figure 4). He turns the page quickly. Lee turns his head on a slight angle, raises his eyebrows and, in a storybook tone, says to me: 'Can you see it?'

Looking at the book, I suggest: 'One of the sheep got away?' Engrossed by the narrated story, I have almost forgotten that Jingjing is here until she says to Lee: 'You tell me the reason why'.

Lee continues: 'Farmer Bob very happy to see the sheep. Can you see the green sheep?'

'Oh, it's off the picture,' I exclaim, pointing to the bottom half of a sheep at the top of the page (Figure 4). How clever, I muse. This is the first time I am aware that Lee is using graphic conventions, such as partially obscured objects to tell the story. Three previous pages have drawn letters, but he now employs the image as the storyteller. He is aware of the power of the image, making sure that I too understand the significance of this part of the drawing.

Figure 5. Bob's Farm: Farmer Bob, pages 5-6.

Lee flips the page. 'And the Farmer Bob have only two sheep.' Lee's blackened sky and stars tell me that time is passing in his story (Figure 5).

'Oo-oh! Something gets wrong!' says Lee in a dramatic tone. I note the outstretched arms of the alarmed farmer. Then, still in character as the narrator, but in a more conversational manner, Lee says: 'He met a new friend called Josh'.

'Josh the new sheep?' I ask so I can be sure we are now talking about the green sheep and not Farmer Bob.

'No, Josh the Wass!' shouts Lee in an exasperated tone, as though I should know better.

'Josh the Wass?' asks Jingjing. This appears to be news to her also.

'Yes,' says Lee more calmly.

Jingjing says quietly: 'Yes, his name, this sheep's name …'

'… is Josh the Wass,' I finish.

I see that the green sheep is not drawn on this page (Figure 6), but somehow in the retelling of the story Lee feels the need to account for the lost sheep, and to make sure he is not lonely. Lee mutters by way of explanation: 'He see him up a tree … um …' His voice trails off, and then switching back with the confidence of the narrator, commands: 'Next page!'

Figure 6. Bob's Farm: Farmer Bob, pages 7-8.

'Farmer Bob was to look.' Again, the sky turns to night, and now Farmer Bob appears to be moving towards the right, as though on a journey (Figure 6).

Lee continues: 'He was to say: "Oh my God, that might be where he be …"'

Figure 7. Bob's Farm: Farmer Bob, pages 9-10.

Lee flips to the next page but says nothing (Figure 7). 'What's this bit?' I ask.

'Is it a hill?' inquires Jingjing. We are both still caught up in the story, and Lee nods solemnly and looks to the next page.

'But he's wondering. That sheep is a Garfield. "Do you see my sheep?"

'"No, no, no, but you can come in and look, but I've got some work to do."'

I smile as Lee modulates his voice in the space of a few sentences to be the narrator, Farmer Bob and Garfield. Lee breathes life into the Garfield character, who for a moment Farmer Bob mistakes for his lost sheep. Lee gives Farmer Bob and Garfield speech bubbles denoting the two-way conversation. Lee has a Garfield soft toy and this character has appeared previously in Lee's photographs and drawings. The Garfield in

this story is a busy fellow as he tells Farmer Bob he can look around but he himself has work to do. This is most unlike his slothful namesake of the comics.

Turning to the next page (Figure 8) Lee takes on the voice of Farmer Bob: '"I need something to … I know, I need a map."'

Ah, I think, Lee is back to an old favourite — maps. I wouldn't be surprised if sharks and soldiers appear next. I notice that Lee tucks the next page face down on the table. He carefully opens out the page, exposing just a tail shape. In a drawn out high-pitched voice he says: 'Guess what is this is?' Maintaining the drama and humour of the moment I respond: 'Oh, it's the edge of something scary. It's not a shark fin, is it?'

'Of course it is!' laughs Lee, uncovering the drawing.

'Oh no! The shark is going to eat Farmer Bob!' I exclaim in mock horror.

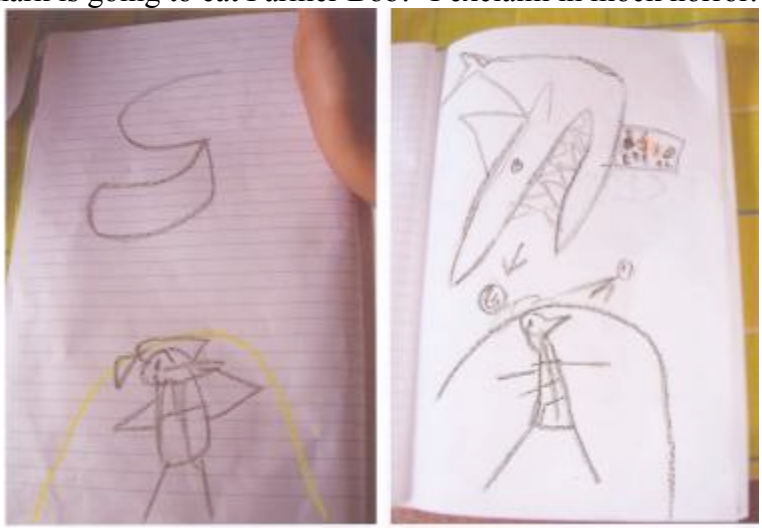

Figure 8. Bob's Farm: Farmer Bob, pages 11-12.

Lee switches back to narrator and says: '"Have you seen my sheep?"

'"No, no, no", says the shark.

'"I saw you eat it!"

'"No, I be baddy. Your hat is going to be flooded."

'"Yes, I want to buy a hat."'

Figure 9. Bob's Farm: Farmer Bob, pages 13-14.

'Farmer Bob he wish he have a new hat. So, Farmer Bob walked to the shop, but the shop is ready to close' (Figure 9).

'So he go to call the police station man. He said: "Have you seen my sheep?"

'"No," said the man.

'"Have you seen MY sheep?"' (Figure 10).

'"No, so we will going to go find."'

'So they got in the police car?' I ask.

'Yeah,' agrees Lee.

Figure 10. Bob's Farm: Farmer Bob, pages 14-15.

'They search, with the badge, but no.' I notice that a gun now appears in the story as the policeman and Farmer Bob search for the green sheep. Below the men is a body of water, which usually signifies danger — especially in the form of lurking sharks.

'He said: "Can I search for it?"

'"No."'

I look to the next page (Figure 11) and see that the policeman fires his gun into a building and Farmer Bob moves towards a flock of sheep. I expect a dramatic conclusion to this story, and I am surprised when Lee in a calm and resigned voice says: 'And he come back, and they lived happily ever after'.

Figure 11. Bob's Farm: Farmer Bob, pages 16-17.

Lee completes this story and immediately launches into retelling his next drawn story, about a prince and princess employing a knight to get the castle they want off a 'bad princess'. Then Lee decides he is going to make another story called 'Find the boat in the street'. He begins to draw at a furious tempo, intent on his task. I gain an insight into the single-mindedness in which Lee creates his narratives and I marvel as his pencil sketches page after page at a frenetic pace. He appears to be in a state of creative flow (Csikszentmihalyi 1996) as his internal narrative manifests in graphic marks.

I can see that Jingjing is keen to revisit the Farmer Bob story. She says: 'He told me that they wouldn't like to play. The green one said: "I am so sad, I am so lonely". He told me in Chinese, maybe because it is very difficult for him to say in English. The green one got away. "So sad," he said, "I want to change my colour."' Looking towards Lee she asks: 'Did you tell Rosemary the green sheep says "I want to change my colour into orange" so these two can play with him?' Lee looks up with an almost dazed expression, and then resumes drawing. Jingjing continues. 'So, at the last page the green sheep eats a magic biscuit and changes colour; changes orange at the last page — an orange one so they can play together. You can see in the first page the sheep is green, and in the last page it is turning orange.'

This insight certainly changes the impression I have of the outcome of the story. It is clear in Lee's story that each sheep's colour is its main identifier, and colour difference is the reason for the green sheep's ostracism. The green sheep feels unhappy when the other sheep refuse to play with him. However, someone does care about the green sheep — Farmer Bob. Metaphorically speaking, if the sheep represent children, then Farmer Bob represents the carer, parent or teacher who cares for all of his or her family or charges. Farmer Bob goes to great lengths to find the green sheep. As I travel the

parallel narratives of Lee's preschool experiences as a Chinese child on the fringes of social interactions, and the green sheep's social isolation, I feel pleased that Lee, as the storyteller, has storied the green sheep as returning by his own volition and accepted as he is. However, Jingjing's elaboration of the narrative, accompanied by the graphic evidence of the green sheep now outlined in orange, reveals a different version. Only by becoming externally like the others, while retaining the internal 'greenness', is the green sheep accepted, befriended and happy. Furthermore, the task of transformation could not be accomplished without the aid of magic.

Discussion

Just as Lee used transformation to alleviate the green sheep's isolation, so too has transformation been an ongoing theme in Lee's drawings and play. His favourite toys are Transformers, and some of his earliest research photographs are of these toys in various poses. Furthermore, he has created many narratives and drawings based on their exploits (Figure 12) and constructs Lego models that he transforms from robots to vehicles.

Figure 12. One of Lee's action drawings that include 'Transformers'.

Transformation: a theme and a process

Lee explores the theme of transformation in his play, stories and drawings. He engages in transformative processes as he modifies his manner and speech between home and preschool. Assigning this Farmer Bob story the power of metaphorical narrative, I can see how this personal semi-fictional story gives me greater insights into the knowledge and understandings that constitutes Lee's 'funds of knowledge' (Moll 2000) and provides insights into Lee's creative processes (Moran and John-Steiner 2002). The sharing and re-sharing of Lee's stories intertwine with that of the research processes (Clandinin and Connelly 2000), and my interpretation of Lee's art experiences is influenced by Vygotskian perspectives on the cultural-historical theory of creativity and development. This is perhaps best summed up if I personalise a quote from Moran and John-Steiner (2002: 4-5) with Lee's name.

> Lee comes to know about the world not through absorbing — but through transforming — the information received from others' speech and actions; he must reconstruct knowledge based on these experiences. Through the transformation of this social interaction and use of cultural tools and signs, Lee can free himself from the constraints of the present environment and take control of his own future. Past experience influences but does not determine what Lee

> does; he can reorganize the way he thinks in anticipation of future needs and goals. The emphasis is not on autonomy from others, but in the development of self mastery and a more flexible interaction with others.

Lee comes to know his world through social interactions with his family, teachers, community, preschool peers, and me. These social interactions lead to transformation of his thinking and actions and the reconstruction of knowledge. Within the supportive environment of family interactions, Lee is a son, brother, cousin, and nephew, who shares routines, cultural practices, languages and competencies that constitute his family's funds of knowledge, and he learns through the lived experience of human relations (van Manen 1990). Likewise, as a preschool boy, friend and community member, Lee experiences social interactions but often without the easy flow of shared language and similar family values and traditions. When reconciling these ways of being, Lee is constantly learning and developing through a series of transformations. Activities and operations that initially represent themselves as external social interactions are reconstructed and begin to occur internally (Vygotsky 1978). This internalisation is evident as Lee draws and constructs his stories, with the intention of sharing these with others.

'Bob's Farm: Farmer Bob' is a story that evolves from Lee's experiences. Previous literacy and graphic experiences include drawing his toy sheep, Woollie, and drawings of action games and stories, coupled with Lee's understanding of picture book formats from library visits, preschool, bedtime stories, movies and television. A popular book at Lee's preschool is 'Where is the green sheep?' (Fox and Horacek 2004), where sheep of various colours happily play together, performing amazing feats such as playing in a band or surfing, while the green sheep is nowhere to be found because he is asleep behind a bush.

Lee may have built on his story, play and drawing experiences when developing his drawings, but perhaps the most pertinent experience is that of being Lee. Lee's experiences influence his actions but they do not determine what he will do or how he will share his story. Instead he has transformed the narrative 'in anticipation of future needs and goals' (Moran and John-Steiner 2002: 5). As the artist and author, Lee uses the cultural tool of art and narrative to free the green sheep, who is different to the other sheep, from his friendlessness and create a new future — or symbolically Lee frees himself from the constraints of the present environment to take control of his own future (Moran and John-Steiner 2002: 4). As a family member, Lee is vibrant, sociable and articulate, but as a preschool boy Lee's current needs include being verbally understood, accepted as a playmate and belonging within a social group. Lee's future needs include starting a new school, with the associated challenge of forming new peer relationships. He can anticipate that, despite the reassuring knowledge that his parents, family and teachers will care for him, like the green sheep, he must solve his own relationship issues. In a triple parallel of Lee's story, Lee's lived experiences and the theories of Vygotsky, Lee's 'emphasis is not on autonomy from others, but in the development of self mastery and a more flexible interaction with others' (Moran and John-Steiner 2002: 5).

Visual narratives: insights into Lee's funds of knowledge

Through the cultural tools and symbols of art and narrative, it is as though Lee says: 'Look, listen! I have something to tell you that is so much a part of my lived experience

that only through drawing and story can I share this'. Quite powerfully, Lee's drawings and photographs not only facilitate conversations around the narrative of his art and storytelling but they also transform my understanding and consciousness of Lee's lived experiences. Lee makes use of photography, drawing and storytelling as cultural tools and mediating devices (Vygotsky 1962/1934, 1978) to explore and make sense of his social and linguistic worlds. In doing so this aligns with Vygotsky's view that people are active in the development of their consciousness and use tools and sign systems 'in order to transform themselves and to reshape cultural forms of society' (Wink and Putney 2002: xxi), not just at a domain-altering level, but at an everyday level. For Lee, Jingjing and me, the negotiation of meaning and understanding of Lee's story, dialoguing in English, and Mandarin between mother and son, generates shared cultural understanding. These understandings, which begin with the child's perspective, need extension into the school and preschool world of immigrant children. Engaging in child-initiated dialogue around children's art honours their perspectives and provides valuable insights into the complex world of immigrant children, and what constitutes their funds of knowledge.

Lee shares with his family the everyday routines, competencies and knowledge that constitute their funds of knowledge (González and Moll 2002; González, Moll and Amanti 2005; Hedges 2007; Moll 2000). His home life is rich in bilingual conversations, texts and images — he has books, movies and computer programmes in both English and Mandarin. Learning experiences, such as drawing, writing, mathematics or playing a musical instrument, are valued as part of the Wong family's home routines, and provision is made for what they term 'learning time'. Jingjing and Xiaoming are aware of their children's growing interests and skills, and provide material resources, time and interpersonal relationships to support these.

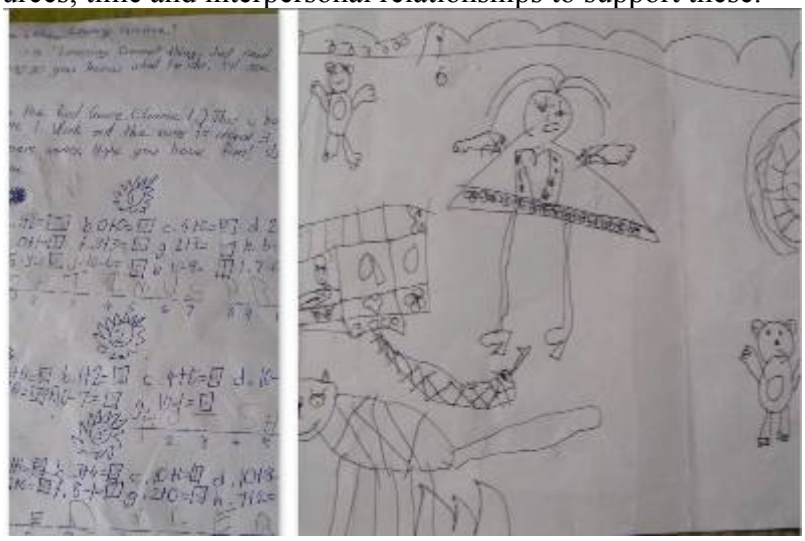

Figure 13. Transformer learning activity sheet made for Lee by Penny (left) and the Princess activity sheet made for Penny by Lee (right).

Although Lee is a preschool child, he is expected to be involved in home-based learning activities. He often models drawings on homework activities that Penny brings home from school, or responds to an activity sheet that his mother or sister make for him. For example, seven-year-old Penny made a number-to-letter code game, based on Lee's favourite theme of Transformers (Figure 13, left). In a reciprocal manner, Lee made an activity sheet for his sister, which he named 'Got to help the princess to decorate' (Figure 13, right). I notice how both children base the activities around the other's

interests. Jingjing is keen for the children to learn to read and write in Chinese and she instructs Penny in Chinese script writing. As Lee wants to be part of this activity, he independently makes his own drawing for his mother to write Chinese script on (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Lee's drawing on which Jingjing has written Chinese script.

For Lee and the Wong family, 'learning time' is not a chore to be endured, but an interactive and interesting part of their home life. These positive attitudes towards learning and education, maintaining a Chinese identity through the language, and the cohesive nature of the family, reflect traditional Chinese family values (Tannenbaum and Howie 2002). Lee also demonstrates well-developed drawing, storytelling and photography skills (Lee took all photographs in this article, except for those featuring him). His stories reveal a good understanding of 'emotion situation knowledge' despite research that suggests that Chinese children tend to have a poorer grasp of such issues, as compared with their American peers (Wang 2003: 740). While these skills, interests, values and practices constitute aspects of Lee's funds of knowledge, these are obscured when he is in the preschool environment.

Immigrant children and children's art and narratives

Graphic images, drawings and illustrations can be used to facilitate intrapersonal and interpersonal communication modes. Research projects have assisted young children to 'express culturally-diverse backgrounds and perspectives through multimedia story writing' (Peng, Fitzgerald and Park 2006: 262) and picture books have been used to assist children with English as a second language (ESL) to become 'aware of the generic structure of a story by comparing how each stage is realized both visually and verbally' (Astorga 1999: 220). Culturally relevant picture books have also been used to help children cope with the dilemmas they face as immigrant children (Baghban 2007).

Child-initiated, home-based art can also facilitate intrapersonal and interpersonal communication. When Lee shares his visual and verbal narrative with others, he is doing so at an interpersonal level. However, the processes involved in generating the story, and the complex relationships between the story and the illustrations, require a dialogic engagement with his drawing (Brooks 2005) as he expresses increasingly complex ideas in a multi-layered narrative. His dialogic engagement with the drawings is also necessary as he retells his story in English, matching illustrations with corresponding aspects of the narrative.

Narrative and illustration matching is a complex task, especially for an ESL child. Peng, Fitzgerald and Park (2006) undertook a research project with ESL immigrant children in a USA primary school, where the children used computer programmes to produce multimedia stories. They found that the children needed a great deal of help 'breaking their narratives into pages and matching illustrations to specific pages' (2006: 267). Lee is younger than the children in the multimedia project, but he appears to be very accomplished at this cognitive skill. While his manner at preschool indicates some difficulties with Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) (Ellis 1994), he shows strong evidence of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) when talking about his drawings. Qian and Pan (2006), who researched a five-year-old immigrant Chinese girl's literacy acquisition over a four-year period, noted that CALP usually lags behind BICS. Yet, understanding Lee's home art experiences revealed greater insights into his communication skills than observation of him in a preschool setting alone would have provided.

When I consider Lee's proficiency with verbal–visual correlations, and his understanding and application of literary conventions, alongside the findings of Qian and Pan (2006) and Peng et al (2006), I note several features of Lee's experience of visual narrative. Firstly, Lee draws and composes his story concurrently, as an internal cognitive and external visual dialogue. His detailed graphic record does not demand a written form, and as Kraus points out, 'self-stories are rarely written down' allowing them to be 'volatile, and subject to change depending on the audience and circumstances' (Kraus 2006: 107). Lee makes small changes to 'Bob's Farm: Farmer Bob' as he tells his story to his mother, and then to me — making changes depending on his audience. This brings me to a second feature. Lee can predict that not only will his family be an interested and immediate audience, but he will also share this story with me. Thirdly, Lee creates his drawings and stories at home. In the home environment, drawing can be more spontaneous, relating to a child's specific interest at that time, rather than a current classroom theme or curriculum focus. Furthermore, not only does Chinese tradition value didactic narrative to convey such things as moral and social standards (Miller, Wiley, Fung and Liang 1997), but Lee's propensity to draw and share visual narratives is encouraged through the ethnographic nature of the research processes. While Lee's parents are not financially wealthy, like the academic Chinese immigrant families in Li's (2007) research on the link between family capital and second language acquisition, they make educated choices and invest in a 'variety of material resources' that are 'beneficial to their children's learning' (2007: 295). A three-year longitudinal study of young children drawing across home, preschool and school also noted the 'importance of the mother's role in organizing the home space, the child's time and his or her access to materials' (Ring 2006: 63). Lee's family also provides Lee with positive verbal persuasion, emotional support and veracious experience which are important in sustaining Lee's positive art self-efficacy (Richards 2009).

In contrast to Lee's home-based experience, the ESL children producing multimedia narratives 'wrote and illustrated their stories with their classroom teacher' prior to working with research partners (Peng et al 2006: 266). In this model, the children's written stories were likely to precede their drawn images — a process that may contribute towards difficulty in image-text matching and sequencing. Furthermore, audience response was not immediate, with a time lapse between story production and

working with the researchers. Lastly, as these children were working from a school base, they would not have had the ready access to their mother tongue, and to their family's support. Tannenbaum and Howie (2002) suggest that parents usually prefer to communicate with their child in their mother tongue, and as such 'this language would be expected to symbolise a most meaningful and emotionally loaded communication between them (Wong-Fillmore 1991)' (2002: 411). In Lee's case, being able to communicate in Mandarin with Jingjing was necessary when explaining the green sheep's emotional state. Therefore, I argue that researchers and educators should consider the positive features associated with discussing with young children their self-initiated home-based art, and find ways to access young immigrant children's ideas, knowledge and concerns through such discussion. In research processes, developing positive research relationships with young children and their families is vital, and a visual ethnographic approach, and the use of digital cameras by children, is one approach to forming collaborative research processes that explores and expands young children's narratives of experience.

Summary and recommendations

For Lee, transformation is a theme of his drawings, and a daily reality for him as he navigates the social paths of preschool and home life. As a family member, Lee shares everyday routines, competencies and knowledge that are rich in bilingual conversations, texts and images. The Wong family values learning in the home environment and make provision of time, space, and materials for educational activities, and emotional and cognitive support exists between all family members. Lee is a competent and contributing member of this family-based learning community — to the extent that he produces worksheets for his older sister to complete. For Lee, drawing is an empowering process that allows him to share with others, make sense of experience, learn to write in two languages and explore complex concepts.

Lee's participation in this visual ethnographic research process not only facilitated self-initiated conversations around his art and stories but also around important issues such as difference, identity, and friendship. While drawings and illustrations have been used in other research projects to help ESL and immigrant children to develop language skills (Astorga 1999), express cultural perspectives (Peng et al 2006) and cope with dilemmas (Baghban 2007), one of the most potent forms of graphic imagery for young children is often overlooked — child-initiated art produced at home. As this article has demonstrated, access to children's art and graphic narratives, retold from their point of view, can provide powerful insights into children's lives. Immigrant children's visual images and verbal accounts not only provide valuable insights into the concepts they explore through their art, but potentially provide a connection to the rich funds of knowledge of home life. For immigrant children, and ESL children, this connecting bridge is vital, especially when, as in Lee's situation, there is a disjunction between home and preschool/school experience. Hedges (2007) suggests that understanding and building on children's funds of knowledge has the potential to transform early childhood teaching-and-learning environments. Therefore, researchers and educators need to find ways to dialogue with children about their self-initiated home-based art, and attempt to acknowledge the perils and promises that young immigrant children face when reconciling home and early childhood experiences.

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