

## East Is West

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It's pretty amazing, when you become a mom. You automatically become connected to other women who are moms, and you become more deeply connected to your own. It's like a huge global club of members who are experiencing their kids' (and their own) milestones, regardless of their time zone, culture, or language. Some ultimately graduate to become part of the grandmother club, and even fewer are lucky enough to become part of the great-grandmother club. When you are a mom and a doctoral student, to boot, you become part of a coterie of women who never surrender learning and growing. Balancing a personal life, making an adequate income, and maintaining a focus on studies has been a great challenge for me.

As I complete the first draft of my dissertation, and as I was asked to reflect on motherhood, one thought kept coming back to me again and again: Writing a dissertation is all about *momentum*; having a kid is all about *interruptions*. Then the Kipling quote came to mind, "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet." Not to sound so doomsday about the whole thing, but it does occur to me frequently that motherhood and selfhood (ahem, I mean, being a doctoral student) are virtually at polar ends of the spectrum of female achievement. Motherhood is about "the others," while working on your own research is all about self-consumption. By "the others," I see two sides: First, there is the element of immense support and love from my parents. It has helped that our child is the first and only grandchild in the family, but they have become completely involved in his upbringing. Everything that they could not do for me in my childhood, they have come back in abundant surplus to make up for with our son. It has been an incredible experience for everyone involved, and especially our little one. Without my parents, my husband and I could not possibly have done any of this without falling into serious debt or losing our minds—or both. We feel incredibly lucky and blessed that our son's grandparents are so involved in his upbringing.

The other side of "the others" includes the important details that are a part of the whole motherhood experience: the doctors' appointments, the breastfeeding (which by the way, no one warned me would become the absolute center of the world!), the household chores, finding the right school district to live in, the NYC-specific pressure of enrolling the kid into preschool or daycare when they are literally *in utero*, making play dates and planning birthday parties, and the list goes on and on. Being an advanced doctoral student is pretty simple: it's you at the computer screen and it's you at the library (virtual or actual) — all under the tremendous guidance of an erudite and supportive dissertation advisor, of course. There is a positive correlation between hours spent in front of the computer screen and pages tapped away. However, the trick here is the level of focus one can achieve when one is sleep-deprived while also being affected by differing increments of guilt on any given day. Being a mom seems so simple from a distance because women have done it for eons, but modern pressures of female achievement definitely put a different, more complicated spin on it. However, at the end of the day, what is clear to me is that being a good/involved/present mother has been the greatest achievement of my life, bar none.

Jee Wha Dakin is currently writing her dissertation on the simultaneous development of language and content knowledge in low-proficiency adult learners. Her areas of interest include curriculum development, test development and validation, needs analysis, and program evaluation.