An Exploration Of Organizational Anticipatory Socialization Via Virtual Communities
Of Teachers Of English As A Foreign Language In Thailand

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ABSTRACT

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Traditionally, organizational scholars examining the socialization process new organizational members experience have done so from a post-hire viewpoint. Generally, these studies examined traditional, post-hire corporate contexts with full-time employees who have already gone through some level of organizational socialization. While technology in relation to socialization is also discussed, it is often done as part of post-hire, organizationally-driven socialization tactics and many studies investigating the impact of technology rarely venture outside of this boundary.

This study examined the pre-hire socialization process and the impact of the virtual world, specifically virtual communities, on the process. Qualitative interviews grounded in two research questions explored the use of virtual communities by teachers of English as a Foreign Language classes in Thailand. The resulting themes include developing a process, how to live abroad, how to work abroad, the (mis)match, left to their own devices, and individual-within-community. Taken together, these themes provided the foundation to build a better understanding of organizational anticipatory socialization processes of English as a Foreign Language teachers in Thailand and the ways in which virtual community interaction and participation relate to the socialization and training efforts by educational institutions in Thailand.
The teachers’ descriptions of their organizational anticipatory socialization processes gave rise to three different implications regarding the use of virtual communities in the organizational anticipatory socialization process. First, is the need to re-conceptualize virtual communities as realistic job previews. Second, traditional definitions of socialization as a linear process are challenged by this study. Finally, the themes raised career development and vocational organizational socialization issues as a result of the teachers’ interactions with the virtual communities.

Approved: ________________________________

Daniel P. Modaff

Associate Professor of Communication Studies
DEDICATION

To my wife, Nichakorn, who sacrificed much in pursuit of this degree and worked at least twice as hard as I did for it.

To my daughter, Natalie, who kept me focused on what is truly important and never let me forget why I started this process in the first place.

To my extended family, Krit, Areewan, Ariya, and Kanokrak Manusuk, thank you for all of your help and support leading up to and during this entire process.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Organizational socialization practices and an individual’s response to those practices have been an area of study by communication scholars for many years. However, with the continuing advancement of technology, scholars are beginning to explore the effects that emerging technologies such as the development of virtual communities on the internet, the improved methods for video and audio production and dissemination, and ever more sophisticated computer-mediated communication applications are having on the processes of socializing new members into an organization (e.g., Flanagin, 2000; Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004; Waldeck, Seibold, & Flanagin, 2004). While examinations of the socialization processes in general are complex, examining such issues in virtual and international contexts (e.g., Chao, 1997; Chow Hau Siu, 2002; Feldman, 1997) provides additional layers of complexity.

The notion of examining virtual technologies and their effects on the socialization process came about through my experiences during the five years I spent living in Thailand and teaching Management and Marketing courses at Yonok College and Bangkok University. I had a number of colleagues who taught English as a Foreign Language courses (EFL) in the country. Generally, the EFL faculty members in Thailand teach courses in reading, writing, and/or conversation. In each of these different courses, they must help students with varying levels of English proficiency. The colleagues with whom I worked were part of language institutes that focused solely on English language courses for both Bangkok University and Yonok College.
While I was not an English teacher, I did have the opportunity to teach conversation courses to undergraduate students (traditional and non-traditional age) as part of extra-time or bonus pay work. These courses were some of the more challenging ones I taught in my career as I did not realize the breadth and depth of the English language until I had to help someone learn it. The conversation courses were centered on the students’ abilities to speak the language, and thus, I created classes that had numerous group and individual opportunities to speak in front of the class. I stressed that we all could learn from each others’ successes and mistakes and no one person was fluent enough to be able to criticize another, myself included. These classes were enjoyable to teach and fascinating in a pedagogical sense as I had never thought how to instruct someone in English prior to this experience. Eventually, my time teaching English came to a close as additional EFL teachers were hired and the need for extra work diminished.

Through these experiences, however, I was able to gain a strong sense of what EFL teachers went through in the classroom on a daily basis. Thus, when I had conversations with friends or heard their teaching stories, I had some basis of understanding of their world and why so many of them moved around, within, and among different jobs or countries. EFL teaching seems to be a lifestyle rather than a career choice. The teachers I encountered seemed to enjoy their work, but they also enjoyed the freedom and flexibility their work provided them. The EFL teachers I observed were *in-between* figures in that they were not treated as traditional full-time Thai faculty members, nor were they treated in the same manner as the other non-Thai teachers. They occupied a liminal space in which they could be viewed as either mere interchangeable
parts of the academic system or as individual members/teachers participating in campus life.

While working in Thailand, I began to formulate my plans for graduate school and I created a series of topics that I would be interested in pursuing as part of my dissertation work. One of these topics revolved around EFL teachers and the way they interact with the organizations for which they work. This topic is a direct result of a conversation I had with Dr. John Schermerhorn of Ohio University in 2000. I had just finished examining one of his Management texts in preparation for my introductory Management course, when he strolled into my office. I was a student of his as an undergraduate in the College of Business at Ohio University and knew that he had a long-standing relationship with several people at Bangkok University. However, his appearance in my office was a shock. During his short stay in Bangkok, he and I discussed a variety of topics, one in particular being the re-socialization of Thai faculty who study abroad and return to their colleges and universities. I was curious as to how these faculty members made sense of their intercultural experiences and balanced the knowledge learned overseas with the expectations and requirements of their positions within a Thai context.

Many of the foreign faculty members with whom I worked, both those who taught English and non-English courses, had a set of websites that they frequented prior to arriving in the country. Many of these teachers continued to visit the websites even after they became settled in their particular job. These websites can be called virtual communities because they attract individuals from the EFL world, provide ideas, and
information, and some even allow interactive exchanges between the members. The virtual communities for EFL teachers in Thailand can form around EFL teaching as a career (e.g., www.Daveseslcafe.com), can be websites managed by individuals and focus on their personal experiences, can provide information about Thailand or teaching EFL courses along with some level of interactivity among members of the community (e.g., www.Stickmanbangkok.com), or can be specifically focused on EFL teaching in Thailand and have forum areas (e.g., www.Ajarn.com). By visiting these communities, EFL teachers have the opportunity to develop an understanding of Thai cultural traditions, organizational practices, and perhaps even first-hand knowledge of working in the country.

The use of EFL faculty members in this study is important to the development of a broader understanding of how potential new organizational members seek information during the organizational anticipatory socialization process (OAS). The ways individuals react to socialization efforts from a new organization are important, especially for members of the contingency workforce, such as part-time or flex-time workers, which includes many EFL teachers. EFL teachers in Thailand must navigate overlapping and sometimes contradictory cultures: national culture, local culture, organizational culture, native/home culture, and virtual community culture. While contingency workers have been studied in the past, EFL teachers --who can have full-time and/or part-time positions-- and the profession of overseas EFL teaching are rarely explored in the organizational literature despite being a career opportunity operating in an intriguing contextual situation that lies at the intersection of OAS processes, national cultures,
organizational cultures, and virtual community cultures. The teachers’ experiences can contribute much to organizational scholarship, especially as they take place in an international context.

During my own hastily organized pre-departure preparations for living in Thailand, I did not use websites as a socialization mechanism. I did use general job search engines to find job openings, eventually finding an opening for a Management and Marketing teacher at Yonok College through the Chronicle of Higher Education. After accepting the position, I simply went to Thailand and began teaching with minimal pre-hire information-seeking activities and encountered no virtual community and only minimal organizationally-driven socialization processes upon arriving in the country. In hindsight, this might not have been the best way to prepare, but at the time I thought, since I was going to work at a small college in a small town in the north of the country, the cross-cultural realities of the experience would manifest themselves immediately and clearly to me. Interacting with my colleagues within that community would be a much better teacher of Thai culture than travel guides or generalizations of Thai cultural characteristics. It turned out that I was right and I was quite fortunate to be socialized into the Thai culture, Thai academic culture, and the Academy in general in such conducive and welcoming circumstances. The experiences I had in the north prepared me well for what was to come in the metropolis of Bangkok where I moved a year later.

While I did not have a great deal of cultural information at my disposal prior to departing for Thailand, it is difficult to say with certainty that those who did were in an advantageous position. As I reflected upon my experiences in preparation for
undertaking this study, I wondered if going to the country with an open mind towards learning about the cultures of the country and the organization I would be working at prepared me better than if I had pre-conceived ideas about how things should work? Would having knowledge from an OAS process make a difference in the experiences of other teachers as compared to me? Arriving in the country for the first time, and subsequently moving to Bangkok a year later, I grew closer to my EFL colleagues as I better understood life in the country. I learned much from and about them through their stories especially as to how they came to be at that moment in their lives.

The conversations I had with colleagues, especially the EFL teachers, routinely involved the use of the internet in their daily lives. I was given the web addresses for a number of different websites by these teachers and told I should visit the sites to learn more about Thailand. For example, if I wanted classroom activities for the conversation classes, then I could go to www.Ajarn.com (Ajarn.com). If I wanted to learn about the real Thailand, I should visit www.Stickmanbangkok.com (Stickmanbangkok.com). I noticed that different faculty members recommended different websites based upon their way of life in the country. The more academically focused among them passed along websites that were driven by EFL information, while those who were in Thailand more for entertainment than career-related reasons suggested other places to visit. The suggested websites, in part, reflected aspects of an individual’s personality, some of which were evident in our daily interactions although I would not say that the websites they suggested completely defined who these individuals are or were. As a generalized group, many of the faculty members with whom I worked were either teachers planning
to live and retire in Thailand (generally older men, fifty years of age and older) or
teachers who moved throughout Asia or among universities in Thailand without seeking a
permanent place to live and work (generally younger, single men). The latter group
usually included individuals who worked in several countries in Southeast and East Asia
as EFL teachers, some of whom were on second or third rotations in Thailand. Many of
them were full-time employees although several were part-time and had taught at several
universities. However, it is important to remember that the people with whom I worked
do not represent the only types of EFL jobs available in Thailand. Positions are available
in primary, secondary, and high schools (privately-owned, international or Thai public
high schools) as well as language schools and other private sources of English training. I
was most frequently around EFL teachers at the university level given the nature of my
job.

In addition to the various career paths my colleagues took, I found a gender
imbalance when it came to the EFL teachers as there were few non-Thai female EFL
teachers at the institutions where I worked. Of the five female teachers with whom I
worked, three were at Yonok College and two were at Bangkok University. Compare
this with at least thirty male colleagues that I recall working with at both institutions.

Despite having an understanding of the general EFL career path, I struggled with
a classification for the type of career the EFL teachers had developed. I needed to
somehow represent the full-time and part-time nature of their work at the same time I
took their overall individual career pathways into account. Some of them were full-time
employees while others were part-time or had alternated between the two at the same
time by virtue of being hired in multiple places simultaneously. Each situation had its
own set of enablers and constraints.

EFL teachers have the opportunity to lead a nomadic life (and could be
categorized as such), moving from position to position, country to country (e.g.,
Pittinsky & Shih, 2004). However, international/regional geographic relocators
(I/RGR) is a term that I believe best describes these individuals by allowing their
different work and life experiences to be organized without necessarily having to
categorize every facet of their lives, yet it does not make widespread generalizations
about two different types of work (full- and part-time). International/regional
geographical relocators is derived from the term domestic geographical relocators used
by Feldman and Tompson (1993) in their study on job changers (e.g., expatriate,
repatriates, and domestic geographical relocators) to describe individuals who change
jobs within a country. For me, I/RGR captured the essence of the different types of
individuals teaching EFL courses overseas and retains the flexibility required to account
for the variety of experiences of the individuals who move across the region in search of
EFL teaching opportunities. As I said earlier, my colleagues appeared to follow a
lifestyle rather than a career path in the traditional sense. These individuals experience a
transitory employment process that can be motivated by a variety of factors.

I do not believe the EFL teacher is an expatriate as he or she is, almost
exclusively, in a particular country of their own volition. While an expatriate might
volunteer for an overseas assignment, they are sent to a location by an organization or
corporation for a pre-determined purpose with all of the preparation and care such a move
entails. In general, the EFL teachers make the decision to leave their home country and move overseas without much of a support net. Further, varying levels of career preparation make a pre-determined career purpose difficult to articulate when compared to the potential number of non-career reasons or motivations moving to another country entails. Thus, naming the individual EFL teachers as I/RGRs allows for the teachers to be grouped together despite potentially wide-ranging reasons as to why they are in Thailand as well as including teachers who move frequently with those who do not.

When situating the teachers within the broader workforce, the I/RGR EFL faculty members began to blur the lines of distinction between the numerous categories that comprise the contingency workforce developed in the literature (Booth, Francesconi, & Frank, 2002; Connelly & Gallagher, 2004; Foote, 2004; Foote & Folta, 2002; Leighton & Painter, 2001; Polvika & Nardone, 1989; Segal & Sullivan, 1997). The career of English language instruction can be also classified in several ways. English as a Second Language (ESL) describes teaching English in countries where English is used “both inside and outside the classroom” (Frequently Asked Questions, 2007, ¶ 3), for example in the United States. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is the term used to describe teaching in places where the language spoken outside the classroom is the native language, for example Thai in Thailand (Frequently Asked Questions, 2007, ¶ 3). TESL and TEFL stand for Teachers of English as either a Second or Foreign Language respectively with TESOL used as a way of describing “the field as a whole, the international organization of ESL teaching professionals, or teacher preparation programs for State licensure” (Frequently Asked Questions, 2007, ¶ 2). While these terms are often
used interchangeably, this study will use the terms *English as a Foreign Language* and *EFL* in order to most accurately represent the work done by individuals in the study (Foley, 2005).

Since EFL teaching has the potential to allow individuals the ability to move around more often, both geographically and from institution to institution, than most other career opportunities, categorizing them into discrete employment categories becomes difficult. While these teachers might be part-time or full-time, their ability (and willingness) to move around the region gives them a unique place in the contingency workforce. Privileging their lifestyles in Thailand ahead of career aspirations in the traditional sense seemed to be a significant way of learning about, understanding, and categorizing their experiences since the reasons for living and working in Thailand will vary among the individuals. This final aspect is one of the more interesting and compelling reasons why I developed the dissertation topic I did. The personal reasons for seeking EFL employment in Thailand would, as I conceived it, have an effect on the nature of their information-seeking activities prior to taking a first position in Thailand as well as post-hire activities during subsequent job searches or continued information-seeking about life and work in Thailand while maintaining a teaching position in the country. This led me to examine the pre-hire area of the socialization process as I believed the virtual communities provided the opportunity to explore pre-hire behaviors of individuals, in this case their I/RGR tendencies and career perspectives, in ways that were traditionally more difficult to study or even gain access to in the past.
Combining the virtual community descriptions given to me by my colleagues and the fluid nature of an EFL career, I became intrigued with the idea of virtual communities as a part of the pre-hire socialization process. The result was an interest in the ways in which technology and socialization are woven together to help new members learn about, prepare for, and become socialized into an organization’s culture.

As the pre-hire socialization of EFL teachers crystallized into a stronger, more cohesive idea, the nature and understanding of what organizational socialization is became critical (e.g., Allen, 2006; Chatman, 1991; Jablin, 1987; Jablin, 2000; Laker & Steffy, 1995; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Van Maanen, 1978). In this study, the term socialization will be used exclusively as it captures a sense of interactivity, agency, and dynamism between the individual, the organizational members, and the structure of the organization itself. Assimilation is a term also used to describe this process (e.g., Jablin & Krone, 1987; Jablin & Krone, 1994), but scholars have criticized the use of the term because it does not connote an active individual in the process (e.g., information-seeking) (Morrison, 1993a; Morrison, 1993b; Morrison, 1995). As this study was conceived and developed, I believed using the term socialization would retain the sense of individual agency I witnessed in my Thai colleagues and that was apparent in the comments made by the EFL teachers during their interviews for this study. This effort worked to keep organizational hierarchy or organizational socialization efforts from becoming privileged over an individual’s experiences.
As Neihuas Bauer, Wolfe Morrison, and Roberts Callister (1998) noted, understanding the socialization process of organizational newcomers is important because:

Unsuccessful socialization can be extremely costly for organizations as turnover is often the result of unsuccessful socialization…it has a strong and potentially lasting impact on the behaviors and attitudes of employees who remain with the organization…it is one of the primary ways in which organizational culture is transmitted and maintained…and it is a mechanism by which newly entering employees learn about organizational politics and power dynamics. (pp. 150-151)

The process of socialization occurs whenever a boundary crossing takes place such as within an organization (e.g., job promotion) (Kramer & Noland, 1999) or with movement between organizations (e.g., a person taking a new job). Van Maanen and Schein (1979) believed that “what people learn about their work roles in organizations is often a direct result of how they learn it” (p. 209). They saw organizational socialization practices as “the process by which an individual acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 211). The process of entering a new organization can be made more difficult by the introduction of national culture elements into the process, for example, when an individual from one country takes a position in an organization located in a second country as in the case of non-Thai EFL teachers in Thailand. However, even in these situations, the socialization of an employee into a new organization can be thought of as a way of helping a new member
understand and identify with aspects of organizational life including the norms, the policies, or the culture of their new environment.

Traditionally, organizational scholars have developed and used stage models to understand the ways in which individuals are socialized into new environments (Feldman, 1976; Jablin, 1987). It is common for the stages to begin with the choice of career paths (vocational anticipatory socialization or VOCS) (Jablin, 1985) and the OAS stage, which occurs prior to a hiring decision and in part involves job- or position-related information-seeking behaviors by individuals. The second stage begins when an individual enters a new organization and learns more about his or her duties and the organization in general. The third stage is typically characterized as a transitional stage as an individual better defines their position in the organization by seeking additional information or participating in development programs such as training initiatives. A final stage occurs when an individual exits the organization or takes a new position within the organization. In both cases, the overall socialization processes begin again.

The EFL teachers in Thailand presented me with a particularly interesting community to study as they have unique career aspirations and socialization processes as compared to other teaching or organizational situations. Some of the EFL teachers I knew expected to stay at one location or within the same country permanently or at least for an extended period of time. Others were more mobile and only stayed in a particular place for a short time and then moved on to another teaching position or country. Regardless of the time spent in the country, the motivations for being in Thailand discussed by the teachers in the study varied by person, but can be broadly categorized as
personal relationships with Thais, dissatisfaction with existing native cultures or cultural aspects, and/or a level of affection for Thailand. As I better defined the EFL/organizational situation before me, I understood the need to reflect upon and subsequently re-evaluate the literature that existed about the socialization process. As I did so, two particular aspects of the socialization process seemed to stand out as important.

First, less socialization research focused upon the OAS stages as compared with subsequent stages of the process despite it being constantly referred to as an important part of the overall socialization process (Jablin, 1987; 2000). OAS research has gone so far as to examine the sources of job information used by individuals during this pre-hire phase and the interpersonal interactions available to an individual (e.g., an interviewer) (Jablin, 2000). Despite these efforts, studies have not fully explored OAS processes, especially those not directly connected to an organization, perhaps due to the difficulty of obtaining information from such a vast number of disparate individuals seeking information on a vast number of organizations. The pre-hire OAS process is an important aspect of examining post-hire behaviors because it allows us to examine the ways in which perceptions are created, information is sought after, found, utilized, and made sense of. Disconnects and matches between perception and actual events have the potential to occur in the pre-hire process.

In my own career, the socialization experiences into the Yonok College and Bangkok University communities were limited in both time and scope, based upon my lack of pre-hire information-seeking as well as the socialization and training efforts
offered by the two institutions where I was employed. The EFL teachers I knew experienced a far less structured socialization process than I did. In addition, they operated under many more organizational constraints than I was placed under including salary earned, teaching expectations, and status within the Thai academic community. These factors combined, in some cases, to hinder their opportunities on campus because they were merely an EFL teacher, while in other cases, individuals thrived in the university setting and became popular teachers among the students. Many, though, were somewhere in between these two extremes. Virtual communities provided aspects of organizational socialization to the teachers and, for some, became a method of defining themselves and managing their EFL career in Thailand (and beyond) (see Haworth, 1998 for an examination of ESL teachers in the Academy).

Second, as I explored the literature on the processes of socialization, I saw technology discussed in various ways, but usually in the post-hire phases (e.g., Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004; Waldeck, Seibold, & Flanagin, 2004). My investigations showed that the virtual communities my colleagues used were more than just places for information; they were places of important social interaction. Virtual communities are networks of individuals built around a common interest; for example, being an independent musician or participant in a particular online video game. Central to these communities are the tensions or relationships between individuals and the individual’s presence within the communities. These communities are comprised of individuals who shared a variety of experiences and, through the disclosure and discussion of these experiences, negotiated the tension between being part of a community, in this case, in a pre-hire context versus a
post-hire organizational situation, yet remaining an individual with their own perspective on EFL teaching, Thailand, or any number of issues. A number of interesting questions began to enter my mind. I wondered what their experiences were, especially in terms of virtual community usage and interaction. How then can an individual completely make sense of and trust the stated experiences and information presented to them at the virtual communities? Could they also decide what is *True* (a commonly accepted fact by the community members) and what is *true* (an individual viewpoint that seems true, but is still contested among the community members) among the various viewpoints presented at a virtual community (differentiating between the website management and the members’ viewpoints as well)? What did technology do for their career search process or personal goals?

Based upon past methods of disseminating and gathering job-related information through mediated forms including television media and newspaper advertisements (Jablin, 1987), it should come as no surprise to organizational scholars that job-seeking individuals would turn to the internet with its vast array of available information and use it as a source of OAS information. The emergence of virtual communities and computer-mediated communication (CMC) has added a new dimension to the information available on the web; information available with critique, comment, and first-person accounts that are accessible, potentially interactive, and not always under the control of the organization affiliated with the career or where an individual works (e.g., a Thai university).
CMC technology has progressively grown in importance to many areas of organizational communication study. Manovich (2001) believed “we are in the middle of a new media revolution—the shift of all culture to computer-mediated forms of production, distribution, and communication” (p. 19). Issues of access, content, voice, and ownership are affecting how individuals use the internet and CMC technologies because this new media revolution is still in its infancy. As Herring (2004) noted:

> After barely more than 30 years of existence, CMC has become more of a practical necessity than an object of fascination and fetish. (Over)use, disenchantment, fatigue, ubiquity, indispensability, and the passage of time all contribute inexorably toward this end. (p. 8)

As CMC technology evolved, so too has the nature of work within organizations. Burnett (1999) described this shift when he stated that our current technological state “has been characterized by increasingly complex levels of diversity that have altered the way our culture uses media and redefined our understanding of the meaning of a knowledge-based society” (p. 205). While his comment is unclear regarding which *our culture* he speaks of, his point is well taken. The trend, linguistic and actual, towards a *knowledge society* is a key aspect of this study: the examination of communities of people on the internet known as *virtual communities* and the ways in which the communities and community members act to socialize and train new and potential EFL teachers in Thailand. As the name states, these are not physical communities in the sense of a town or city, yet they do have structure (e.g. computer networks), street addresses (e.g., website www.xxx.yyy),
and inhabitants (e.g., users, community members). Feenberg and Bakardjieva (2004) challenged a terrestrially-defined nature of community when they stated:

> If face-to-face contact is required by definition, then obviously no community can form online. We prefer to approach the question from the standpoint of Benedict Anderson’s notion of imagined community: ‘All communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined’ (1983: 18). Thus, some sort of virtuality is a normal aspect of community life, regardless of the nature of the medium on which it relies. (p. 37)

In other words, the *imagined community* perspective is one that exists within the minds of individual community members at the same time it exists as part of or in contradiction to the actual state or level of *community* formed between individuals within cyberspace-based communities. However, while a singular definition of a virtual community can be contested, the communities tend to have common characteristics including computer-mediated components, social networks, and contestations of power, equality, and diversity. Mason (1999) provided a definition of virtual communities that is part of the foundation of this study. He stated virtual communities are “groups of people interacting primarily, or solely through computer-mediated communication (CMC). … [F]eelings of community are emerging from virtual groups, indeed it would be surprising if such feelings did not exist (Mason, 1999, p. 62).

In this case, Mason might believe that the natural action of interpersonal dialogue, whether online or offline, would lead to feelings of community. Less attention has been given to CMC technology’s role as an OAS source for new employees than has been
given to aspects of the post-hire OAS processes such as information-seeking (e.g., Allen, 2006; Breaugh & Mann, 1984; Carr, Pearson, Vest, & Boyar, 2006; Comer, 1991; Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004). I was curious about this as I believed the internet provided a unique space for job seekers to interact and for scholars to study pre-hire activities of individuals. Given the variety of potential organizations and countries in which to work, I believed that many EFL teachers seeking to live and/or work in a foreign country would conduct a significant information search about a country prior to accepting any organizational position, which might or might not include a similarly intensive search for information about a particular organization. In addition, these sites could be used in a number of ways after obtaining a teaching position and arriving in Thailand.

My dissertation topic emerged as the information, experiences, and knowledge of the EFL teachers, my own experiences in Thailand, and the socialization literature intersected and converged. Thinking about my experiences and those of my colleagues, it seems that the decision to uproot your life and move to a foreign country is a significant and complex one however simple it might be to the individual in the moment. In my case, I did not actively seek information about my move to Thailand or becoming a university faculty member because I had been a graduate assistant during my MBA days and had previously managed a company. In my mind, I felt that I understood the nature of the Academy and what I would need to do in order to effectively teach Management and Marketing courses in Thailand. The cultural aspects of the country, much of which I had no control over, would take of themselves as I experienced the country and its people for myself.
However, if a person is at the beginning of their career as an EFL teacher, especially if they had little or no previous EFL teaching experience or expertise, they would have to conduct some information searches or examine aspects of this career prior to going to Thailand, at the very least because they must be certified by an accredited institution in order to teach at reputable educational institutions in the country. Upon reflection, perhaps I should have made better, more detailed preparations for moving to Thailand. As this is no longer a possibility, I wanted to understand how, why, and to what extent others sought information prior to their own departures and what that would mean/meant for their experience in the country? At this point, I began to ask myself whether these virtual communities of the internet could be acting as a socialization process for new faculty members at universities in Thailand, specifically EFL teachers. Did these communities provide information and experiences for individuals and allow them to become an individual-within-group when visiting the websites; concurrently maintaining a focus on their own issues and needs as they gradually became an individual-within-group. Further questions emerged such as what effect this had on their perceptions of Thailand, EFL teaching, and themselves? As I faced new question after new question, I realized that I truly did not know what the answers could be.

**Purpose**

The aforementioned personal elements and scholarly inquiries came together to provide a foundation to learn more about the socialization aspects inherent in third party virtual communities. Specifically, I wanted to learn the extent to which these communities acted as a socialization mechanism during the OAS process for EFL
teachers in Thailand. For the EFL teachers, the socialization opportunities in this process can act as a companion activity to existing, traditional organizational socialization and training efforts or as an alternative to them. This study, then, examined the relationship between the virtual world and the process of socialization as it pertained to the non-Thai faculty members who teach English as a Foreign Language in Thailand. In addition, it investigated issues of information-seeking behavior and OAS within the context of EFL teachers and related, EFL-themed virtual communities. The two research questions that guided the study are discussed below.

Research Question 1: How do EFL faculty members utilize third party virtual community websites as an organizational anticipatory socialization medium?

This question sought to understand how the EFL teachers use third party virtual community websites. While it is believed that these EFL teachers were utilizing the websites as a socialization tool, consciously or unconsciously, further investigation was required to demonstrate what the EFL teachers needed and wanted from the websites, to learn how they accomplished this, and to better understand the outcomes of such usage.

Research Question 2: After entering an organization, how did the EFL teachers reconcile the organization’s socialization efforts with the information gathered from the virtual communities?

This question explored the quality and extent of the match between what an individual learns from the websites and the socialization processes used by the organization for which they will be working in Thailand. Given the variety of
organizations where an EFL teacher might work, it became important to learn more about the types of information the organization provided to a new hire and how that information related to information gathered during the pre-hire OAS process.

A key contribution of this study is that it continues the necessary examination into organizational socialization processes, but does so in a non-traditional manner. In other words, this study examined socialization in a different context and from a different perspective than has traditionally been the case: online, pre-hire, and non-corporate organizational members. First, it examined pre-hire socialization, an area covered in the literature, but one that has achieved less attention over the years. Second, it examined the impact of the virtual world, specifically virtual communities, on pre-hire information-seeking and OAS behaviors; technology and technological contexts not generally studied in socialization literature. Third, the EFL teachers interviewed in this study are a set of (actual and potential) organizational members that raised interesting issues in terms of workforce composition, career decisions, and use of technology as a part of individual socialization processes in the pre-hire stage. Finally, the study itself is an argument for a methodology that can be used to examine such a unique context, a methodology that utilizes a few of the very methods that the teachers use when they participate in the virtual communities related to EFL teaching in Thailand.

The remaining chapters in this study examine a variety of different issues related to EFL teachers and their use of virtual communities in the OAS part of the socialization process. The next chapter will examine the research method used in this study including information as to how the study was constructed, conducted, and analyzed. Chapter three
will be a detailed description and discussion of the information provided by the EFL teachers through qualitative interviews. Chapter four will build upon these ideas by interpreting the themes and discussing their relationship to the field of organizational socialization. Finally, the limitations of the study, in terms of its conceptualization and conduct, are discussed in chapter five with accompanying areas of future research for organizational scholars examining socialization issues.
CHAPTER 2

Methods

On the surface, research into activities that take place within virtual communities seems to be a straightforward matter given that the material is textual and relatively easy to access at any moment. This simplicity belies a deeper set of interactions and implications. When the EFL teachers utilized EFL virtual communities as part of their OAS processes, they enacted a complicated process of individual-within-community meaning-making in terms of how they searched for pre-hire, OAS information-seeking points about living and working in Thailand. This study utilized a methodology that examined the ways in which the EFL teachers used the virtual communities to seek out information about living and working in Thailand. It also sought information about the post-hire experiences of the teachers who, once hired, would have to reconcile what they discovered and learned about in the pre-hire OAS process with what occurred after they entered a Thai educational institution.

Qualitative study was necessary in order to accomplish this and to develop a better understanding of the different ways individuals interact with the virtual communities and the members of the communities. In-depth interviews with EFL teachers in Thailand allowed a nuanced exploration of individual accounts of personal activities, especially in light of the exploratory nature of this study. This section will provide an explanation of the research methodology, illustrate the virtual communities used in the study through an example of forum area interactions, and, finally, outline the data analysis procedures used to analyze the teachers’ experiences.
Explanation of the Research Methodology

This section explains the research method that was used to examine the ways in which the EFL teachers utilized the virtual communities. This description of the research method includes an explanation of the site of the research, an explanation as to the collection of information and experiences about the teachers, and a description of the participants.

Site

This study took place in cyberspace, a unique space and place unto itself existing and yet not existing at the same time. The nature of the virtual communities examined here focused on teaching English in Thailand although it is understood that there are numerous sites for faculty members teaching English in countries all around the world. Table 1 lists the internet locations for the virtual communities used in this study. Many of the websites originally found for use in this study came from a search at Yahoo.com utilizing the phrase “teaching English in Thailand” or from my personal knowledge.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Virtual Communities</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ajarn.com: Living &amp; Teaching in Bangkok</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ajarn.com">www.ajarn.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stickmanbangkok.com</td>
<td><a href="http://www.stickmanbangkok.com">www.stickmanbangkok.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave’s ESL Café</td>
<td><a href="http://www.daveseslcafe.com">www.daveseslcafe.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John’s Life in Thailand</td>
<td><a href="http://www.geocities.com/~johni32/">www.geocities.com/~johni32/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The EFL faculty members in Thailand were selected because they provided an example of virtual socialization, whose experiences can be used to discover points of
emphasis that can be applied in broader contexts in the future. It is important to note that, while this study took place in virtual space, the respondents were located in both the virtual and real space since they were working in Thailand during the study or had worked there in the past, but are now engaged in teaching, study, or other activities elsewhere in the terrestrial world.

**Collection of Information and Experiences**

The method used to collect information and experiences from the EFL teachers was designed to learn more about what is occurring among the EFL faculty members during their interactions with the virtual communities. Since this study emerged from my personal experiences and those of individual teachers I knew in Thailand, the exploration of EFL teacher OAS processes was done without privileging or ignoring prior socialization research. In other words, the concept, methodology, and guiding research questions emerged from a combination of my experiences, the experiences EFL teachers were having in Thailand (and continue to have today), and organizational socialization literature points.

During the month of June 2007, prior to the Ohio University Internal Review Board (OUIRB) approval of my interview protocol (see Appendix A), I observed EFL virtual communities with forum areas in order to obtain a sense of the community and the social rules and norms in effect within the communities. This information assisted my efforts to identify potential interviewees and increase the likelihood of obtaining their consent to be interviewed for the study. At the end of this exercise, I was better able to
understand the message(s) and purpose(s) of the communities in general and the ways in which the community members adhere to and/or deviate from these general purposes.

Once I received OUIRB approval for my study, the information from the EFL faculty members was gathered through qualitative interviews. The interviewees were primarily selected through convenience sampling. EFL teachers known to me were interviewed in addition to those solicited through the forum areas in the virtual communities or provided by interviewees as referrals. Few requirements existed in order to be interviewed although the person must be/have been an EFL teacher, currently living and working in Thailand, moving from Thailand to another country, contemplating or actually preparing to teach in Thailand, or had previously taught in the country. A total of twenty EFL teachers were interviewed for this study.

Each individual interview was conducted via electronic/computer-mediated means. The interview protocol had five main parts beginning with a section for the teacher’s unique code name (e.g., A, B, C, AA, BB, CC) and email address. The first main section asked two questions (one of which had three sub-questions) about a teacher’s historical job search and post-hire information which was used to learn more about why the individual went to Thailand and/or chose EFL teaching as a career (in brief) and how they conducted that first OAS information search. The second main section included a set of two questions focused on an individual teacher’s experience with the first educational institution they joined. For those teachers who had moved into other teaching positions after this first job, a third set of questions was included to gather the same information as in the second set of questions, but for any or all of the
institutions where they were subsequently employed. The fourth main section of the protocol had one question regarding recommendation and contact information for another EFL teacher(s) that the participant believed might also wish to participate in the study. The last main section was a series of demographic questions about the participant, all of which were optional. The protocol questions were either asked of the teachers, along with impromptu follow-up questions, in instant message (IM) chat sessions or were e-mailed back and forth between the teachers and myself.

The use of computer-mediated means as an interviewing technique is not unique to this study (Andreson & Gansneder, 1995; Dillman, 2000; Lautenschlager & Flaherty, 1990; and Parker, 1992). Yun and Trumbo (2000) reviewed literature on the use of email for surveys and interviews compared to traditional paper-based mailings. They found emails received “lengthier and more self-disclosing comments on e-mail open-ended questionnaires” than for their regular mail counterparts (p. 2). While the authors seemed to discuss a mass email study versus a targeted one such as this study, they did find that “electronic surveys provide a faster reaction time than [traditional] mail surveys” (Yun & Trumbo, 2000, p. 3) and in their own study had over 80 percent of the emailed instruments returned within three days (with a significant number returned on the same day).

The primary method for conducting the interviews was the IM method. IM services such as Yahoo! Messenger or Microsoft’s Windows Live Messenger are free tools that can be downloaded to any computer. This study offered three different IM formats to the participants (Yahoo! Messenger, Gmail, Windows Live Messenger) and
each participant was allowed to choose their preferred service. IM was the preferred method for interviewing because the nature of the IM most closely resembles a face-to-face conversation in that the exchanges between individuals are relatively quick, yet the interviewee can take time to reflect on a question before answering. This level of interactivity is important because it allowed for prompt follow-up to interesting or unclear points made by the interviewee or clarification of questions I asked of them. Prior to the interview, the consent form was sent to the individual’s email (as a Microsoft Word document attached to the email) and when the IM sessions began, I explained how the interview would proceed and answered questions about the process or the consent form. In addition, the messages sent back and forth throughout the discussion remain in an active window until the session is terminated, allowing for quick copying and simple transfer of the conversation to a text file for storage and analysis. Gmail, for example, retained all IM conversations just as one would normally find their email messages stored in an inbox.

The second method of interviewing the EFL teachers was through email. The email interview provided a simple method to record an interview and save it for later analysis. The first email after an individual agreed to participate in the study had two attachments: a consent form (in Microsoft Word) and a copy of the interview protocol (in Microsoft Word). The text of the email included instructions as to the contents of both files and how to complete the questions and return the form to me with a sentence explaining the ten-day deadline to return the answers. The email option also allowed the individual more time to reflect upon their answers than the IM sessions before returning.
them to me. However, even with a ten-day deadline to return the questions, a number of follow-up emails were needed to get the answers back in some cases. Given the twelve hour time difference between Ohio and Thailand, the delay between my sending the materials and the participant returning them was an issue in some cases as multiple rounds of exchanges were needed to properly answer the questions and follow-up with additional questions. For these reasons, the email method was only used when absolutely necessary. Several participants requested email specifically because the institutions where they worked prohibited or removed the IM technology or the their home internet access was inadequate for handling the IM transactions making email the best available option. Thirteen email interviews and seven IM interviews were conducted. All IM sessions had between one and three follow-up sessions, which provided as deep an insight into the individual teachers’ experiences as did the email-based interviews.

Description of Questions, Phases, and Websites/Forum Areas Used

The search for potential interviewees and the completion of actual interviews took place over the course of approximately four months (28 June through 15 November 2007). Additional contacts with teachers were made between the middle of October and the interview deadline of 15 November 2007, but no additional interviews were conducted. Table 2 shows how many individuals viewed the sites used in this study over the course of the interview period as well as outcomes such as the number of posts made by individuals in a given thread. The information is presented in the order in which the sites were contacted and threads were posted. The virtual communities used in this study
varied by their main purpose, but all of them had the potential (resources and abilities) to act as a socialization tool.

Table 2

*EFL-related Sites Used in the Study*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website</th>
<th>No. of views</th>
<th>No. of posts</th>
<th>No. of respondents &amp; referrals</th>
<th>No. of participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase One</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Stickmanbangkok.com</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Travellerspoint.com</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Asia-expats.com</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Ajarnforum.net</td>
<td>622</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Thaivisa.com</td>
<td>633</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase Two</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Teakdoor.com</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Daveses1cafe.com</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 TEFLwatch.org</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>2577</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As of 29 November 2007, a total of 2,577 individual views of all of my threads were made. I was informed by emails sent from the different websites when a posting had been made in a forum thread or when a personal message was sent to me. The websites also had pop-up boxes when you first signed in alerting you to new messages.

The sites used in the study varied in terms of content, style, and interactivity levels. This diversity reflected the different ways in which my search/call for assistance was disseminated. For example, the posting at made at Stickmanbangkok.com was in one issue of the site’s e-newsletter and not in a forum or within the site’s reader posting areas, making it impossible to know how many individuals actually saw my information;
none of the participants indicated that they received information about the study from this e-newsletter.

Only a handful of participants were directly contacted by me or were known to me prior to the study. Most were contacted by posting a message (a thread) in a site’s forum area. By posting in forum areas to find participants, my message had the potential to be seen by a vast number of individuals. While forty-four individuals replied to the posts, thirty-seven indicated their willingness to participate, and fifteen teachers ultimately participated (the remaining five participants were offline contacts). Two of the individuals originally agreeing to participate opted out of the study when they realized it only focused on EFL teachers, but generally others who did not participate did not respond to my follow-up emails or did not return email questions I sent to them. While efforts were made to contact these individuals throughout the process, only two attempts per individual were made if the person did not reply to the original follow-up to their inquiry.

The data collection format used in this study is important because it gathered information in the manner most frequently used by individuals engaging with forum communities: email and IM. Interestingly, the textual responses from the individuals followed similar patterns to their forum exchanges – short, sometimes incomplete sentences.

The postings I made on forum areas were done in two phases in order to maintain control over issues such as contacting new participants or coordinating offers to participate, scheduling and conducting interviews, conducting follow-up interviews, and
analysis without becoming overwhelmed by the process itself. The first phase of postings began on 22 June 2008 with a letter emailed to either a forum administrator or to the administrators of a virtual community site explaining the research I wished to conduct at their site. Appendix B contains the letter of introduction to the administration or management staff of a virtual community. This letter was sent to the management of the websites in order to utilize the forum areas and to gain permission to speak with EFL teachers. Appendix C contains the letter of introduction I used when beginning a new forum thread to ask for EFL teachers willing to participate in the study. Both letters were derived from examples provided by Hine (2000).

Eleven sites either did not respond or turned down my request. In some cases where their permission was not given, (e.g., www.Britishexpats.com), a letter was sent to me explaining why I should not post. One site, www.Asiaxpats.com, said that they were a place of business for specific clientele and they did not allow anyone to post surveys, questionnaires, or other such materials in the forum areas. The management at another site, www.Asia-expatsforum.com, did not send me a letter, so I posted my thread, and fifty-one people viewed the message, two people responded with questions not related to the study, and ultimately, no one from the site was included in the study. Some of the sites no longer operated a message board, so there was no one to contact (e.g., one of the IATEFL sub-groups).

Other websites (e.g., www.Thaizine.com, and www.Yindii.com) were excluded from the study for other reasons. First, www.Thaizine.com’s website did not appear, but instead a message did stating that their domain name had expired. The forum at
www.Yindii.com showed an inactive link during numerous attempts to access it. Other sub-group discussion boards at IATEFL did not reply at all, with the exception of one discussion board, Young Learners. This board allowed me to post my message, and while the board administrator appeared quite enthusiastic, no one responded to my call for assistance.

With these sites excluded, the study then focused on the eight sites shown in Table 2. When granted permission to post on a site, I did so in areas where EFL teachers were most likely to visit such as a teaching in Thailand section or a newbie section and posted there with the thread subject heading saying either “need help with dissertation research” or “research help needed, please.” One site in particular, www.Stickmanbangkok.com, was often described to me while I was in Thailand as a place to go to find out about the real Thailand. The site provides information on living and working in the country although the community’s members have a section to post their own writings and thoughts on Thailand (see Pfahl, 2005). In this case, the site administrator was contacted and he provided me with an opportunity to post my call in his next e-newsletter. He suggested I post a brief, eighty-word summary in his “Weekly Notes” section for the week of 28 June 2007. This was done, but no replies followed and none of the participants indicated they found my study through the e-newsletter. One site, www.Travellerspoint.com, is devoted to exchanges of information by travelers on their experiences around the world. While I did provide information for anyone who was interested in visiting Thailand, I did not reach anyone who had taught in the country and no one from the site participated in my study.
Five websites remained: www.Ajarnforum.net (Ajarnforum.net), www.Thaivisa.com (Thaivisa.com), www.Teakdoor.com (Teakdoor.com), www.Daveseslcafe.com (Daveseslcafe.com), and www.Teflwatch.org (TEFLwatch.org). These sites were the main sources of participants for the study. In each of these cases, a letter was sent to the appropriate outlet, permission given to participate, and in some cases, advice was provided as to where I could post the call among the number of different forum area options available (e.g., Daveseslcafe.com). In order to contact other community members via each site’s personal message system (not simply through forum postings), I had to make a certain minimum number of postings to the forum areas. The requirements varied from ten to twenty postings depending on the forum. After asking the members at each site for advice, they told me to post messages on any of the forum areas or as one member instructed me, for example, to “Just type any old [icon of a pile of s..t]. That’s what most of us do” (Expatwannabe post, 28 June 2007). Once I did so, I was able to contact members and follow-up on their postings.

Ajarn.com’s forum area, Ajarnforum.net is one of the largest sources of information about EFL teaching in Thailand. It provides a range of information on EFL teaching in Thailand, job boards and advertisements, and an extensive forum section. This site had the most activity and garnered the most responses to help of all of the sites (nineteen). Ultimately, a total of eleven individuals participated (including referrals).

Thaivisa.com members also provided assistance (three individuals). This site is much like Ajarn.com only on a smaller scale. A few of the participants (e.g., participant H) indicated that they preferred this site to Ajarn.com and others for a number of reasons
including the friendliness of the community members as compared with Ajarn.com’s members.

After completing their interviews with me, several participants from Ajarn.com and Thaivisa.com returned to their forum areas and told their fellow community members to assist me if they could and posted brief testimonials about their experience. In some cases, individuals were singled out and told to help either in a posting or through non-forum contacts. Over time, the Ajarnforum.net administrator moved my thread to a sticky, which means that it appears at the top (first) of the “Teaching in Thailand” forum and is visible for all who enter the forum. Stickies are forum areas with information about a specific topic related to the forum area’s content. These can include, but are not limited to, the rules of the forum area, FAQ-type of information, and expected behaviors by posters.

The first interview took place on 30 June 2007, and interviews continued through 10 October 2007. These individuals also provided referrals and posted complimentary comments about their participation in the study and encouraged others to help out as well.

Phase two began on 11 July 2007 and included three new sites: Teakdoor.com (Teakdoor.com), Daveseslcafe.com, and Teflwatch.org. The first post was made at Teakdoor.com, which was followed by Daveseslcafe.com (17 July 2007) and TEFLwatch.org (13 August 2007). Although it is not an EFL site, EFL teachers do visit Teakdoor.com. Mainly, it is a site for expatriates in the country, specifically those in the building industry. A Teakdoor.com forum moderator responded to my inquiry and suggested that I post my letter in the moderator’s forum first and then place it in a forum
section. Once I received my confirmation of membership and acceptance from the moderators, I posted in the closest forum area I could find to a newbie section. Later, the thread was moved by the moderator to the “Captain’s Lounge,” a more social site with a wide variety of topic areas, in order to generate additional traffic. After my first post at the site, there were subsequent postings requesting further information about the study, negative comments about me or the work, and questions as to why I was using this site for the study. A reply with further explanation/clarification of my work seemed to resolve any doubts. Occasionally, questions were asked about what I wanted in terms of a teacher (e.g., were math teachers acceptable?). Two posts at Teakdoor.com (and one at Ajarnforum.net) asked if I would pay for their participation (answered “no”). A few postings at Teakdoor.com made derogatory comments about my work or me personally without ever asking me questions or learning about what I was doing. One poster asked why I did not conduct the interviews out in the open on the forum. Here the moderator posted a comment that some people might not feel comfortable sharing personal information with others in a public space and that statements made to help me could open individuals to attack by those who disagreed with the poster, a point I made in my reply posting.

These particular posters seemed to deride the dissertation work and/or academic life. I was told my personal life was in need of assistance or development, I was wasting time, or the state of my mental health was in need of assistance. The participant that suggested I visit this site indicated that the members were generally anti-EFL (D personal interview one, 2007). One Teakdoor.com poster even hinted that I had been “flogged”
and run off by posters at another website (Mr. T post, 2007, 15 July 2007). Once I responded to these types of comments, the community members did not engage in arguments or flaming (continuous negative postings) over my work. One person from the site ultimately participated in my study. Another offered, but did not reply after our early discussions.

At the end of the study, a formal thank you letter was posted on all of the sites (Appendix D) in order to update and thank the participants, but also to bring a sense of closure to the information-gathering phase of the study. Although this concluded formal interviews, I did leave the option open for anyone interested to contact me and provide information about their experiences. At the time of writing, one person did so, but did not return their responses.

My participation in and use of the forum areas was purposely limited. I was not conducting ethnographic research for this study, but I also did not want to completely remove myself from the process after the first posting. On several occasions, and separate from the dissertation work, I had instant message chats with participants, but these were short exchanges and did not go on for more than a day or so. In other cases, I went back to early participants to question them about points that later participants raised. This was done because several of the early participants provided a great deal of information and insight and the new issues were ones that I believed they could elaborate upon (e.g., Thai educational organizational members monitoring the forum postings). However, I would not say that friendships were developed in the course of these interactions, but establishing positive relationships with the EFL teachers was a goal.
The success of this and my chosen methodology can be seen in postings from participants in terms of their candor and willingness to express their viewpoints on various issues.

From these interviews, patterns of information-seeking and socialization behaviors emerged providing a rich set of information and experiences for analysis. As the responses were already in textual form, transcription was not necessary.

**Participants**

The participants in this study were the individual faculty members who were working, had worked, or wished to work in foreign language schools, colleges, and universities in an EFL capacity in Thailand. Important sub-sectors of this community include individuals who are in the process of searching for information about EFL teaching in Asia, are currently studying for appropriate teaching degrees, or are considering teaching English overseas. The individual participants were drawn from a mixture of contacts known to me, referrals from participants, and self-selected individuals who responded to my postings on various EFL-related forum areas. It is important to note the self-selected nature of individuals who responded to my forum postings. Due to the nature of the research, allowing individuals to determine their participation in the study does run the risk of having only participants who are active on the forum areas and/or the internet in general participate in the study. While this leads to a study that might not be representative of all EFL teachers in Thailand, this study is based upon those that utilize the internet and individuals in forum areas are more likely than not to use such an information source. However, the inclusion of participants who did not use the internet during their pre-departure preparations, some of whom were
personal contacts, acted to balance, compare, and contrast the experiences of those that did.

**Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

The participants in this study exhibited demographic similarities (e.g., age, country of origin), yet, each had their own reasons for leaving their home countries and beginning a new life and career in Thailand. This section details the demographic information of the participants in order to better understand and contextualize their experiences with the virtual communities in the chapter.

The average age of the participants is thirty-eight years old with an average of nearly five and one half years EFL teaching experience. Thirteen of the twenty participants were teaching in Thailand at the time of writing with only one teacher in the midst of obtaining a TEFL certificate and searching for a job during the interview process.

Seventeen of the respondents were male and three were female. While this might seem to privilege male respondents in the study, in actuality, men comprise a vast majority of the total EFL teachers in Thailand. For example, in five years of working in Thailand, I had at least thirty non-Thai male colleagues (of all academic teaching backgrounds) compared with five female non-Thai colleagues. One of these female colleagues was an American-Thai (left the country after three months), another was Thai, but raised in Australia from an early age, and yet another other was an American who left after nine months. Of the men I knew, over twenty were still in the country at the time of writing although one just moved from Thailand to Ecuador. In addition, there were two
other female teachers who indicated that they would participate and were sent the email version of the questions. One said that the materials would be returned on a particular date, changed that date, offered another, and changed it yet again. Ultimately, neither returned the study. Every effort was made to be inclusive, but as the participants were self-selected, there was little that could be done to balance the gender difference. Future studies that follow a longitudinal time frame will be better placed to offer a balance in perspective.

The study focused on non-Thai teachers of English. All of the participants are Western although several participants encouraged non-Western colleagues to contact me. None of these potential referrals ever came through, and thus, the study is comprised of a narrow selection of non-Thai cultural backgrounds. While this might be interpreted as a limiting factor, it is important to remember that these are EFL teachers and native English speakers offer an attractive, if not preferred, option for Thai schools and universities as they employ more Western teachers compared with speakers coming from other countries (e.g., India, the Philippines) where, despite fluency levels, English remains a second language. Table 3 shows the self-reported country of origin and ethnicity information of the participants.
Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Native Country</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>European</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>Other</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My conceptualization of the EFL teachers as I/RGRs can be seen in the career paths of this group of participants. Several of the respondents taught in places other than Thailand with an overall average of 1.06 countries taught in throughout their careers, although one teacher, participant B, previously taught in six other countries besides Thailand. The other countries the teachers taught in included Brazil, Abu Dhabi, Cape Verde, Ecuador, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, United Arab Emirates, New Zealand and the United States.

Despite the similarities in the demographic information of the EFL teachers, the teachers had different reasons or motivations for becoming an EFL teacher in Thailand including economic, social, and personal lifestyle goals, which are similar to Feldman’s (1988) content and process theories of job choice. Content theory spoke of different factors that influenced occupational choice (Feldman, 1988) and the information provided by the teachers indicated several content points were at work in their decision to become an EFL teacher including a personal dissatisfaction with cultural elements of his or her native land, boredom or frustration over existing social and other conditions, and
feelings of emotional need. Platonic and romantic interpersonal relationships also
affected an individual’s choice to become an EFL teacher as some teachers indicated they
were in romantic relationships with Thai people when they made their decisions to move
while others were encouraged by friends who traveled throughout the region or Thai
friends.

Feldman’s second occupational choice, Process, involves three areas: early career
formation (before college), the fit or congruence between needs, abilities, and the
occupations available, and the potential of actually obtaining a position in the career they
desire. In relation to the EFL teacher’s career and/or life ambitions, it appears that the fit
is the strongest process at work in their lives. This fit, however, does not begin with the
job, but rather with the desire to be in Thailand for a variety of reasons that are a means
to a higher order end motivator or a preferred lifestyle. Teaching is one option to achieve
these goals with relatively little experience, preparation, or training. Thus, it appeared
that the EFL teachers understood that if they wanted to be in Thailand, teaching EFL was
the best choice among few if any choices. Cultural differences (Gardiner, 1968;
Kunaviktikul, Nuntasupawat, Srisuphan, & Booth, 2000; McCann & Giles, 2006; Pfahl,
2002a, 2002b; Pfahl, Chomgnam, & Hale, 2007; Plamintr, 1994; Roongruang, 1991;
Taylor, 1993) as a barrier to these goals was never an issue.

The individuals also did not seem to specify an ideal Thailand that they expected
to find at the outset of their search processes, but did formulate different expectations
throughout the process. However, these individuals seemed to know what they needed to
find before beginning the information search in earnest (Soelberg, 1967).
An Example of Forum Area Interactions

Before turning to in-depth presentation and analysis of the interview dialogues I had with the teachers, it is important to become familiar with the general style of communication and information exchange that occurred on the forum areas during my research process. When a new or existing member seeks out information from other community members, the different perspectives and cultures of a particular community become clear. As an example, two illustrative forum threads were found on Ajarnforum.net, the forum area for the larger site at Ajarn.com (see Appendices E, F). These cases involve information-seeking individuals who were not, to the best of my knowledge, a part of my study as well as community members who did and did not participate. The threads were found prior to the start of the interview process and were not used as a comparison for the subsequent interviews I had with the teachers. These two threads will provide examples of how the forum areas operate in regard to an individual’s information-seeking and gathering processes.

The two threads are clear examples of the way EFL teachers can approach the forum areas as part of their search for various types of information. The two threads discussed here were initiated by individuals who wished to find information about living and working in Thailand and answers as to whether or not the poster would make it in Thailand, from both the community and, presumably, in their own minds and hearts.

On 14 July 2007, a self-described young teacher in the United States posted a thread seeking information from members of the website. He wanted to know, in their view, was he the type of person who would make it in Thailand as an EFL teacher.
His disclosed information as to his professional experiences (public education teacher; degreed) and that he wanted to leave the United States due to a growing sense of disillusionment with the American public education system. He made an initial critique of the forum area, specifically noting that the sticky postings in the EFL section could have been more helpful (without elaborating as to what caused his dissatisfaction).

Claiming to be someone who seeks adventure, he referred to a prior information search about options in Japan and mentioned he studied abroad in the United Kingdom and Canada. In terms of cost, he offered his opinion that Japan appeared worse than Thailand and he loved the big city life and did not want to take the chance of abandoning it by following a prescribed training and teaching program in Japan. He then turned the thread over to the community asking if he should go to Thailand.

Compare this posting with another thread initiated two days later. In this instance, the person informed the public that he was already teaching in Korea, was heading to Thailand without a job, and sought advice on places to stay. Whereas the first individual did not immediately sign his (or a) name, this person did. This second individual also promised free drinks to anyone who would show him around Bangkok. He also did not seem to mind that he did not have a job as he indicated he did not want to be taken advantage of and he preferred to do things face-to-face in-country.

The responses of the community members to the information-seeking posts began with a mixture of information points, jokes, and follow-up questions to the respective posters. The information addressed immediate, articulated concerns the posters had including where to live (e.g., Soi 1, Khao San Road) or types of housing (e.g., guest
houses). At the same time, the community members made jokes or comments either about something that was said or written in the original post (e.g., spelling the word *taught* incorrectly) or about the person in general. The individual coming from Korea immediately struck a chord with the EFL teachers who had taught in Korea before. Nearly all of them agreed that Thailand was better than Korea, was more fun than Korea and the individual would enjoy the country, although for things such as visas, they indicated Korea was better organized.

Since the first poster appeared to be a younger person and said he was disillusioned, the humor in that case tended to concentrate on what he would feel about Thailand (i.e., hate or love it). It was also suggested that if he sought happiness over financial gain, the quality of life in Thailand is better than in the United States. Other jokes made light of his *newbie* nature and what Bangkok would do to him (many comments here are inappropriate for publication). Humor seemed to be a common method for community members to socialize a person into the ways of the community and, in both cases, the members never really attempted to dissuade either individual from coming to Thailand. In fact, the overwhelming sentiment was for both to come and enjoy themselves.

In both instances follow-up questions were asked of the poster. These were especially important for the first poster as the other had been overseas before and had some handle on the situation in Thailand and EFL in general. In order to better provide information on the EFL teaching situation, questions were asked of the person’s financial position (e.g., advice saying having some savings in the bank would make Thailand a
better experience than Korea). One interesting exchange that occurred was when the young teacher mentioned where he was living in the United States and one of the community members said he had lived in the same place before. A set of exchanges then took place questioning the person about bars he recalled, and asked if the new person ever went to them. Some responses focused on social life and activities, others on job information and advice, others on places to live, and exchanges of similar stories whether it was about life in Korea (two or three members) or the United States (the one member).

Neither of these examples should be considered the only types of exchanges on Ajarnforums.net or other EFL-related sites in this study. However, the essence of the exchanges occurred often as during pre-interview periods when I observed the various forum threads (and continued throughout the entire time of the study and beyond). These two forum thread examples illustrated the nature and general purpose of the virtual community forum areas for a number of members (new and existing). Despite beginning with different contexts, both threads had similarities in terms of how the new person in the community was socialized into the culture of the community from the very outset and the types of interpersonal exchanges and questions used to elicit and share information. Each forum post that was added provided another piece of information that would, consciously or not, socialize the new entrant into the culture of the community, the culture of Thailand, and in a general sense, the culture of Thai educational institutions (although no institutions were directly discussed). The mixture of good-natured humor, question and answer exchanges among the members and posters, and the act of providing information to the new person are examples of a pattern witnessed repeatedly over the
course of the research at this particular website. Other sites such as Teakdoor.com and Thaivisa.com also seemed to follow this pattern, but the humor was more rude or sarcastic at Teakdoor.com and the information disclosure among participants at both sites was less than what was found at Ajarnforum.net (among the sample forum areas viewed).

The two example postings demonstrate the types of common interactions among current and potential or new members of the virtual communities I came across during my study. The next section explains the data analysis procedures used in the study.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Grounded theory was used as a foundation to gather and to understand the nature of EFL teacher interactions with the virtual communities. Glaser and Strauss (1967) described grounded theory as a “general method of comparative analysis” (p. 1). Researchers using grounded theory “[build] the research as it ensues rather than having it completely planned before beginning the data collection” (Charmaz, 2001, p. 351). The rationale behind the development of grounded theory was to advance research by finding an alternative to the “theory generated by logical deduction from a priori assumptions [logico-deductive theory]” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3). Ragin (1994) described this process as analytic induction calling it “a research strategy that directs investigators to pay close attention to evidence that challenges or disconfirms whatever images they are developing” (p. 93).

The use of grounded theory in social research is designed to be inductive, meaning that researchers “start with individual cases, incidents, and experiences and develop progressively more abstract conceptual categories to synthesize, to explain and to
understand...data and to identify patterned relationships with it” (Charmaz, 2001, p. 335).
The analysis based upon the information provided in the interviews is closely related to
the environment under investigation rather than a large scale generalization. In addition,
grounded theory has a layering affect on the information in that it allows for multiple
meanings (and levels of meaning) to be developed and a thick description of the context
under study to emerge (Charmaz, 2001).

The researcher also takes an active role in the process (Charmaz, 2001). My
analysis of the EFL teachers’ experiences became more focused over time because, as
grounded theory holds, “the researcher engages in data analysis while collecting data.
That data analysis drives subsequent data collection” (Charmaz, 2001, p. 338) in order to
continue along the pathway of theory development. While not seeking absolute
objectivity, grounded theory does allow the researcher to remain constantly aware of their
presence in the research process and keeps him or her focused on the context of the
research and engrossed in the information through continuous analysis.

Grounded theory is important to this study in two ways. First, the inductive
process is critical because of the prior knowledge I had about the populations under study
as well as many of the contextual factors they work within including their teaching
expectations, their career pathways, and the ways in which they are treated within the
Thai university system. This was especially true as I knew participants in the study or
several of the individuals who provided referrals (although not interviewed themselves).
In addition, previous work with one of the virtual communities under investigation (see
Pfahl, 2005) and a passing familiarity with two others could prejudice or compromise my
work if I did not adhere to the methodology of grounded theory. The constant comparison method helped to minimize the intrusion of personal bias or preconceived notions about a topic, text, or context.

Second, the grounded theory process focused on micro-level cases and generalized within the communities I examined rather than among other EFL communities related to other countries around the world. In doing so, I was better able to understand one culture of a community, building a grounded methodology for future studies to explore additional cultures of communities, and when appropriate, compare situations and seek broader commonalities and differences between them (see Pfahl, Chomngam, & Hale, 2007). This aspect of the theory is also helpful because of the narrow contextual area I chose to investigate (Thailand), the narrow range of virtual communities used, and the sample of technology-using EFL teachers. This investigation also limited the study to only the EFL world and does not seek to expand beyond that border. Subsequent studies will do so, but the creation of grand theory based upon this context is not a goal of this study, although the groundwork for middle level theory can be developed for the EFL community within Thailand.

When making sense of the information gathered, grounded theory holds that the first step in examining the information is to create codes that summarize different elements of the information gathered. “Much of the coding is devoted generating categories from the researcher’s own lived experiences in the scene—as these experiences were written in the research texts” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 219). The purpose of the coding process is to create categories that are not pre-conceived by the
researcher, but emerge from the gathering and analysis process. The data, in this case the transcripts of the interviews, are coded line-by-line (Charmaz, 2001; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The codes should be specific and active (Charmaz, 2001). Codes that continually reappear are then re-coded into a more focused coding process that encompassed large amounts of data into specific codes (Charmaz, 2001). This process is known as open coding (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002), but there is also in vivo coding which are “terms used by the social actors themselves” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 220) during the interviews.

The next step in the process was to create a codebook. The purpose of the codebook was to “list all of the categories, the code names for each category, examples of each category, the number of incidents coded, and the location of each incident in the data records” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 220).

After this was completed, the categories were revised and evaluated for deeper meaning (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Axial coding was used to find connections between the code categories and discover themes or higher order categories (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). The phrases, concepts, words, and other interview answers were the basis of the codes.

As the early interview process moved forward, I read the transcripts at the same time as I scheduled and conducted other interviews and constantly compared the information. Examinations of the transcripts as the interviews progressed allowed for classification of similar terms and concepts at a very early stage. Throughout the interview period, I purposely did not compare the transcripts and codes with the research
questions in order to allow the codes to emerge from the interview answers. By the completion of the interviews, all transcripts had been reviewed resulting in three hundred and fifty different descriptions of information (initial, open codes).

At this point, the transcripts were read again and additional codes were added to the first level codes. Then, each code was reviewed and this continued investigation and refinement of the codes produced eighty-one codes of significance. The reduction in codes is the result of combining similar codes into second level codes. For example, early codes such as *ease of life* and *dollar versus lifestyle* were combined into a second level code called *Life in Thailand*.

Continued reading of the transcripts and codes allowed for further combining producing a refined twenty-three third level codes of significance. In some cases, the combinations occurred fairly easily (e.g., places to live, places to eat), while for others, more time, reading, and reflection was required to understand the relationship of the lower level codes (e.g., disclosure issues). These third level codes were then summarized into four core primary themes/categories.

The four themes emerged as final combinations were made. The themes cover the major areas of importance as described by the teachers. Like the lower level coding process, some of the themes emerged easier than others.

Further, in order to most accurately understand and represent the participants’ responses as well as develop the strongest explanatory power in the codes and themes, a process of triangulation was followed. The participants’ initial interview information as well as information from follow-up interviews was informed by my pre-interview
observations of the virtual communities and forum areas through natural investigation and purposeful searching along with personal interaction with the members of the communities. The quotes from each EFL teacher used in this study were not edited for content, spelling, or grammar unless it became necessary to illustrate a comment (e.g., improving spelling and grammar for clarity of a teacher’s point) although undertaking the latter action was rare.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Charmaz (2001) suggested keeping memos throughout the research and analytic process. The memos can be written between the coding and analysis steps in the process (Charmaz, 2001) and helps you to “elaborate processes, assumptions and actions that are subsumed under your code” (Charmaz, 2001, p. 347). The main purpose of the memos is to engage in constant comparison with the information and categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and expose areas that require further investigation (theoretical sampling), continuing to clarify the information and create linkages among the categories (Charmaz, 2001). The results of these processes help to stratify the information and guide the analysis into the final write-up of the findings (Charmaz, 2001). Prior to engaging in formal writing processes, a total of twenty-seven memos were written throughout the interviewing process highlighting, among other things, interesting points made by participants, methodological obstacles and successes, and interpretations of conversations or websites. This information helped to develop the coding categories and major themes. An abridged version of my work or findings will be available for any participant who would like to have one.
This chapter examined the research method used in the study including a discussion of the site, explained the collection of information and experiences from the EFL teachers, and described the questions, phases, and websites/forum areas used in the study. Further, it provided descriptive information about the EFL teachers as well as an explanation of the data analysis procedures used to examine the interviews. Finally, an illustrative example of the forum area interactions I witnessed during the research process was included to better situate the teachers and the forum areas in the context of EFL teaching in Thailand and the ways in which the forum areas can be utilized. In Chapter 3, I review the in-depth interviews conducted with twenty EFL teachers in Thailand regarding their OAS processes.
CHAPTER 3
Data Analysis

This study was exploratory in nature because the context and content differed in several important ways from traditional socialization studies (e.g., pre-hire context, mediated nature of the interactions, mediated methodology). Traditional organizational socialization studies generally focused on offline, corporate, post-hire contexts with full-time employees being the most common set of participants. This study explored the nature of socialization and OAS process in an emerging context, that of online virtual communities that are outside of organizational control, primarily in pre-hire contexts with employees that are I/RGRs as they are a mixture of temporary, part-time, and full-time workers in the EFL world of Thailand. Information provided by different teachers regarding EFL teaching in Thailand specifically addressed the two research questions posed earlier in the study.

First, I will explain the nature of the interview protocol questions used to address the research question. Second, I will discuss the themes that emerged from the interviews and utilize quotations from the EFL teachers to support each theme. Finally, I also included a discussion of a unique point that emerged from the interviews. This point spanned both research questions, yet did not directly address either one. This ancillary point, individual-within-community will be discussed separately from the themes that addressed the research questions. However, it is important to note that this area influenced and was influenced by the two research questions. These points were examined, but not grounded in the literature, as they reflected points of previous
socialization research in some cases and new directions or alternatives in others. Following this, chapter 4 will provide an analysis based upon the responses to both research questions.

**Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol was designed to allow the individual teachers to explore and relate their experiences in Thailand (see Appendix A). The first section of interview questions sought to learn more about the teachers’ historical job search information including the extent to which they utilized virtual communities in their OAS processes. In other words, the questions were designed to allow the teachers recall and (re)examine their pre-departure, pre-hire OAS processes. For some, this was several jobs ago and for others their current position was their first position. In only one case did a teacher not have a teaching position in Thailand as she was in the midst of her OAS process and then involved in her TEFL certificate training during the interview period. Her interview focused heavily upon the OAS process she was involved in and left the remaining issues unresolved.

The first section of the protocol explored the reasons why each individual decided to become an EFL teacher and how they conducted their process to become one. This question took each teacher back in time (and in one instance caused a teacher to focus more clearly on her immediate OAS activities) because many of them had been in the country for a long period. I felt that this would be a way to focus them on past events, allow them to recall previous activities, and to provide a space for them to organize their thoughts for the remainder of the interview.
With their focus now on their OAS processes, each EFL teacher was asked to reflect upon their discovery and use of virtual communities during the period of time they sought information about Thailand or EFL teaching prior to taking their first/current position or even leaving for Thailand. Specifically, the teachers recalled the virtual community(ies) each had visited prior to leaving for Thailand and then described why and how each virtual community was used. Next, each teacher was asked to describe the information he or she sought from the virtual community(ies) at that point in the OAS information search. Finally, each teacher was asked how the information found affected them.

The next set of questions explored the connection between individual OAS processes and the socialization processes used by the Thai educational organizations. Given the variety of education organizations where an EFL teacher might find work, it became important to learn more about the types of information the organizations provided to a new hire and how that information related to information gathered during the pre-hire OAS process.

The teachers were asked a series of questions about the first educational institution they worked for in Thailand. The main purpose of the questions was to have the teachers explain the socialization and training they received upon taking their first (and subsequent) EFL teaching positions. Second, the teachers were asked to compare the information they found in the pre-hire OAS process to what they encountered at this first position in order to determine how they evaluated their OAS search processes and determined the extent to which the virtual communities were helpful in the socialization
process. The questions asked the teachers to revisit their arrival in the country (as a
teacher, not a tourist) to begin his or her first EFL teaching position. Each discussed the
types of training or introductory (socialization) information they received from the
organization. Next, they were asked about the ways in which the information they found
at the various virtual communities related to their experiences at their new position
(including life in Thailand itself). If the teachers changed positions since this first job,
another set of questions was used to have each teacher go through the same questions for
their current position. These questions involved previously discussed issues of virtual
communities used in the search for a new position, the relation of these sites to the ones
previously used, and the levels of socialization and training received at the new position.
All of the teachers except for two required use of this second set of questions focused on
his or her current teaching position.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1: How do EFL faculty members utilize third party virtual community
websites as an organizational anticipatory socialization medium?

This question sought to understand how the EFL teachers use third party virtual
community websites. While I believed that these EFL teachers were utilizing the
websites as a socialization tool, consciously or unconsciously, based upon my previous
interactions with EFL teachers, further investigation was required to demonstrate exactly
what information the EFL teachers sought and found from the virtual communities, to
learn how they accomplished the task of finding the information, and to better understand
how they viewed their individual OAS processes. The purpose of exploring such a
question was to obtain a better understanding of how the EFL teachers used these virtual communities as part of the OAS process.

Three themes emerged from the data in response to the first research question: *developing a process, how to live abroad, and how to work abroad*. These themes captured the ways in which different EFL teachers approached the OAS process and the different information-seeking points important to each teacher. For most of the teachers, issues about living in the country were more common than issues about working in the country. Given the reasons why many of the teachers made the decision to come to Thailand described earlier, as well as my own experiences working with EFL teachers, this might be due to the lifestyles sought by each teacher. EFL teaching can act as a means-to-an-end, rather than an intentional career move. Thus, their OAS information search processes involved financial, accommodation, visa or work permit and other issues relating to daily life in the country.

*Developing a Process*

Information-seeking and OAS processes on the internet have the potential to be effective, frustrating, enabling, and constraining. The discussion of this theme begins with an investigation into the processes used by individual EFL teachers in the OAS stage. The development of an individual’s OAS process seemed to be a complicated task that involved a number of offline and online factors. Even the online factors were complicated by the point in time that individuals encountered or utilized the online virtual communities. Once the virtual communities were utilized, the teacher would then have to determine what information points about Thailand were important to them and/or were
able to be found using the virtual communities. Of course, the teacher would then have
to be able to access the virtual communities and find ways to integrate the virtual world
with the terrestrial world.

The first step in developing a process appeared to be the understanding of where
the sought after information is located. The participants indicated that they utilized a
variety of information sources; not every person indicated that the internet was a primary
source for information at the outset of their information-seeking processes. Examining
how individuals approached the technology, specifically the virtual communities, will
provide a context in which to examine the types of information they sought from the
communities later in the chapter. Specifically, this section will examine aspects of how
the OAS processes were developed including early internet technology and virtual
community usage, growth in importance of the online world, integration of virtual
communities into OAS processes, and naming in the OAS process.

*Early internet technology and virtual community usage.* The teachers
determined that the online virtual communities were sources of information about
Thailand and EFL teaching. While some of the teachers had personal relationships with
Thai people or access to individuals who had, at the very least, overseas experiences, the
virtual communities were used in tandem with offline sources to conduct the OAS
process. The ability and willingness of the teachers to utilize virtual communities, then,
was partially based upon access to or understanding of the internet at the time of their
career decision-making and OAS processes and the ways the virtual communities were
chosen or used framed the types of information the teachers sought. Among the teachers
I spoke with, there were clear lines of demarcation between internet and virtual community usage and access/availability/understanding of the technology.

For five of the participants, the internet was in its infancy when they began their pre-hire information search before going to Thailand. Participant A, who worked in Thailand in the early 1990s, said, “To the best of my knowledge, there were no public, or widely accessible ‘websites.’ Even email was limited to large corporations” (A personal interview, 2007, p. 2). Another participant said, “when I first got certified (1995) there were no ads or websites on the internet for teaching, we did everything by fax and telex or we went personally” (B personal interview, 2007, p. 1). Even as recently as 1996, the information available to EFL teachers was limited. As one participant noted, “there really weren’t any forums, Thai bride, Asian dating service or anything. You couldn’t even search for pictures” (JJ personal interview, 2007, p. 1). In one instance, an individual had been living in the county prior to becoming an EFL teacher. Managing a bar with a friend, participant FF decided to become a certified EFL teacher, but said, “to be honest prior to Thailand I had no contact via internet” (FF personal interview, 2007, p. 1). Instead, he relied on colleagues who were teaching in the country to help prepare him for his new career. These teachers had to rely on more than just the virtual communities to find information.

Some of the participants indicated that they traveled to Thailand on holiday before thinking about EFL as a career with additional trips used to find more information about living and working in the country. There were two participants who visited Thailand specifically as part of their OAS process. These individuals believed that seeing the
country up close was an important aspect in their information search process. Prior to ever visiting the country, participant Q was thinking about the idea of teaching English and moving there. At the urging of a friend, he went to Thailand as part of a tour group. He then left his friend’s tour and proceeded to Chiang Mai by himself, “where I made a point of visiting the TEFL course that I later enrolled in” (Q personal interview, 2007, p. 2). In and around these trips, the virtual communities were deemed helpful for contacting the particular TEFL course provider (for TEFL certification) via an advertisement on Ajarnforum.net. His process utilized the web, but it was coupled with an actual visit to the country.

Another participant also visited the country prior to accepting a teaching position. However, for him, the decision to move to the country came after several visits. Unfortunately, due to personal circumstances, he “decided that my dream of living there was impossible. I was very depressed at the time, to let the dream die” (S personal interview, 2007, p. 1). However, a short time later, his situation once again changed and he utilized the virtual communities to find details about every university in Thailand (although he could not recall the site) and used it to arrange an interview tour of the country along with aid from a colleague where he worked who was friends with someone at one of the country’s largest universities. The virtual communities were a means to organize the tour and find information that would be helpful when interviewing for positions, but as he said, “I was not making applications online because I wanted to go back to Thailand to interview and make sure things were as I remembered” (S, personal interview, p. 2). When asked why he utilized the virtual means rather than other
information materials, he replied, “there just was no information in books at the time [early 2000s]” (S, personal interview 2, p. 5). The individual school websites were also inconsistent in terms of providing him with information. For example, “the language school in CM [Chiang Mai] was quite comprehensive…others were useless for job details” (S, personal interview 2, p. 5). From this, it seems as though the internet at the time was not ready to provide the information required by a new EFL teacher, so face-to-face visits were paramount.

**Growth in importance of the online world.** As these teachers illustrated, the early days of the internet and virtual communities meant that various sources of information had to be used to develop an OAS process. Historically, during the pre-hire process, information has been shown to come from a variety of sources including advertisements, job postings, television, and interpersonal interactions (Jablin, 1985, 1987, 2000). Job seekers relied on different methods to find a job or general information about a career. Today, as these EFL teachers have shown, job seekers can make use of new media and mediated technologies, specifically the internet, to find information on job openings (e.g., www.monster.com, www.theladders.com), organizational information, and skill development. The teachers also indicated that the virtual communities did not necessarily replace traditional methods of finding information, but rather the influence of this form of new media has grown in usefulness or importance to the information-seeker, especially for those who search for EFL teaching positions given the possibilities for work around the globe.
Information-seeking is an important part of any new organizational member’s pre-hire search process. In this case, information about a new country (e.g., Thailand) and working environment (e.g., EFL courses) can be incredibly important in terms of deciding whether or not they can or wish to make a move. Johnson (1996) described the information-seeking processes individuals use in general as being utilitarian, contextual, conscious, sub-conscious, or incidental. His description relates to the experiences described by the EFL teachers’ OAS experiences.

The previous section showed how teachers made use of the early internet and virtual communities in developing their OAS processes. As the internet technology improved and enabled more and easier access to virtual communities, so too did its place in the OAS search process. The fifteen participants did use the internet and interpersonal interactions with members of the virtual communities to varying degrees in their information search process. For some of them, the virtual communities were used almost exclusively during the OAS processes. The virtual communities gave the EFL teachers an avenue for active information-seeking at a fraction of the cost that travelling back and forth to Thailand would require. Morrison (2002) discussed the importance of such cost considerations in an information-seeking process. Further, the members at the various virtual communities provide information above and beyond what the community administration provides (e.g., textual descriptions of life in the country) and the individual community members began to act like socialization agents, a concept described by Comer (1991). The proactive search process of the EFL teachers mirrors organizational scholars’ understanding of proactive behaviors on the part of
organizational newcomers (Major & Kozlowski, 1997; Morrison 1993a, 1993b, 1995, 2002). These studies have shown individuals can exhibit levels of proactivity in obtaining information and take an active role in the socialization process upon entering an organization as well as over time in the organization. Proactive information searches, such as those by the EFL teachers, are driven by an individual’s level of need for information (Morrison, 2002). The EFL teachers who were interested in moving to Thailand prior to the widespread use of the internet and virtual communities might have felt the need for information as much as the individuals in the internet era, but could only satisfy that need with fewer options.

Despite the proactive turn and the inclusion of virtual communities in OAS process development, post-hire contexts continue to dominate organizational scholarship regarding the process of an individual’s search for information during the organizational entry process (Barge & Schlueter, 2004, Feldman, 1981; Major & Kozlowski, 1997; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Morrison, 1993a; Morrison, 1993b; Sias & Wyers, 2001; Teboul, 1994; Teboul, 1995; Tidwell & Sias, 2005). Even with organizational scholarship indicating an individual has a greater level of proactivity in the socialization process, studies tended to not investigate the pre-hire activities, reasons, or actions that could contribute to such confident, proactive behaviors. For example, the reasons for going to Thailand articulated by the teachers would play a role in OAS and post-hire actions. Studies have focused on the relationship between technology and socialization, but did so by discussing the ways in which organizations select and use technology to socialize (post-hire) new entrants into the organization (Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004; Rice, Collins-
Jarvis, & Zydney-Walker, 1999; Waldeck, Seibold, & Flanagin, 2004; Wesson & Gogus, 2005) rather than how the potential/new organizational members would use it to develop their OAS processes. The remaining teachers in the study developed OAS processes that relied heavily upon the virtual communities.

**Integration of virtual communities into OAS processes.** Since fifteen of the EFL teachers indicated they utilized the virtual communities on the internet in their OAS information search, it is important to understand how the virtual communities were used in the different OAS processes. While the virtual communities can affect teachers in a number of ways, these teachers appear to have integrated the virtual communities into their processes fairly easily indicating, among other things, a familiarity with the technology not seen in earlier years when some of the teachers went to Thailand. This increased usage of virtual communities is an important point in understanding modern day OAS search processes for EFL teachers (and beyond). The teachers explained the various ways in which the virtual communities were integrated and used in their OAS processes. Some used a *multiple source approach* to integrate the virtual communities with other sources of information, other teachers used a *targeted use* approach, a few teachers demonstrated *exclusive use* of the communities, and only one of the teachers (in the internet era) indicated *no use*. This section includes a general discussion of how individual teachers used the virtual communities in their OAS processes. An in-depth discussion of the specific information the teachers sought at the virtual communities during their OAS processes is provided in a later section.
A number of teachers utilized a multiple source approach to integrate the virtual communities into their OAS processes. In this study, friends, guide books, and interviews with people who traveled in Thailand were among the non-virtual community sources cited. The most recent person to arrive in Thailand and to participate in this study utilized the internet, including virtual communities, as the primary method of finding information during her job search. Her search began in the United States and, via a general internet search (i.e., internet search engines). She found one language-teaching preparation program that appealed to her. While her OAS processes led her to the program, she ultimately chose to enroll because “I read the testimonials of former students and because I was a visual communications major, picked the organization with the best website :)” (U personal interview, 2007, p. 1). This training program is based in Pattaya, Thailand, a tourist/resort area in the eastern part of the country. The program provided her with introductory materials for Thailand including “a folder of all information I needed before the trip, for example, Visa App [visa application] Health Insurance App [application] instructions on ow to fill all these out … they provided check list upon check list as to what I should bring and do prior to takeoff” (U personal interview one, 2007, p. 2). As she prepared to leave, she maintained a relationship with a program representative to help with “information in the packet, prices of airline tickets, questions about health insurance” (U personal interview one, 2007, p. 3). Once in Thailand, she began a one month training session that resulted in her being placed in a teaching position in Thailand at the time of writing.
When asked if she utilized any other sources of information besides the organization’s materials, she indicated that she spoke with “one of my best friends [who] was an Early Childhood major in undergrad and is in Beijing right now, teaching English” (U personal interview one, 2007, p. 1) and a former teacher familiar with Thailand while also consulting three books on the country, “Lonely Planet travel book, A traveler’s tales book and a brief history of the country” (U personal interview one, 2007, p. 4). She also “simply ‘google’ Thailand lifestyle or ‘living in Thailand’ and that would lead me to articles and testimonials from people who live or have lived there” (U personal interview one, 2007, p. 4). At my prompting, she recalled also having visited Ajarn.com and Daveseslcafe.com.

Similar to U’s process of finding information, participant DD “used a metacrawler to look for a job here [Thailand]. Found one and applied. I did no research on Thailand before coming (other than being friends with [many] Thais and Laotians” (2007, p. 1). He “vaguely remembered using ‘teaching’ & ‘asia’. I also did searches under Thailand and Japan” (DD personal interview two 2007, p. 1).

This combination of offline social networks and online virtual communities also benefited another teacher who “had a few contacts here in Thailand, it was quite easy for me to get information from people living and working here. Of course, I had used places like Thai Visa and Ajarn as points of reference” (CC, personal interview, p. 1). At the prompting of his girlfriend at the time, participant I enrolled in a TEFL course in order to move to Thailand and become an EFL teacher. The course tutors in the TEFL program encouraged him to use Daveseslcafe.com. He also used other sites, but described them as
“not very memorable” (I personal interview, 2007, p. 1). I asked if that meant they were not helpful and he replied:

Most tend to quickly start asking for money, or not have any particularly useful content. Dave's is instantly memorable from his content, the picture of Dave in his beret, and the fact that it comes so highly recommended by everyone. I've heard the forums on that site are useful, though to be honest I really only ever use the ideas cookbook and don't read anything else. (I personal interview, 2007, p. 1)

Others, like participant X who used this mixed methods approach, did so by using the internet to find, and subsequently use, virtual communities like Ajarn.com in conjunction with completing a TEFL course. At the same time he was using Ajarn.com, he questioned his brother about various aspects of living and working in Thailand, because “I had no idea of what was a decent salary and my brother wasn’t much help because is a wealthy engineer who has expensive tastes” (X personal interview one, 2007, p. 1).

One teacher traveled to Thailand, returned home, but made the decision to return and live in Thailand. He said “I think the only site I visited was Stickman’s [Stickmanbangkok.com] which I found quite helpful, but I hadn’t intended to stay permanently. Having a friend native to Bangkok was where I got most of my information” (Y personal interview one, p. 1). Thinking back, he added, “I probably only read Stickman after I had arrived here for the second time, when I was looking into teaching … All my research before my first trip here was what was found in the Lonely Planet book” (X personal interview two, 2007, p. 2).
While the teachers discussed above used a combination of sources in their OAS processes, several teachers utilized the virtual communities, but indicated that their use of the virtual community was targeted for specific information searches. For some, this meant career information searches about being an EFL teacher. For others, it meant searching for job information.

As an example, when moving back to Thailand with his Thai wife, participant E utilized the virtual communities. He used “www.ajarn.com for ideas about jobs; www.stickmanbangkok.com for information about bangkok and teaching in Thailand; www.eccthai.com I originally planned on doing the CELTA [EFL certification] course at this school” (E personal interview, 2007, p. 1). Mainly, he needed to learn more about the profession and whether it was possible to live and work in the country, saying, “I think the information proved that it was perfectly ‘doable’ to live and work in Bangkok” (E personal interview, 2007, p. 1).

One participant was teaching in Korea when he decided to move to Thailand. The virtual communities factored into his search process, but only for job postings. He utilized “Daves ESL Café, looking for employment, TEFL website for employment purposes and then offcoure Ajarn” (D personal interview one, 2007, p. 2). He was not interested in using the forum areas, but rather “when I came to Thailand, my source of information was Lonely Planet Guide” (D personal interview one, 2007, p. 2). He indicated that his previous experiences served him well in his search and never worried about the move because “well to be honest, living, working, and moving around Thailans is so easy and safe” (D personal interview, 2007, p. 2) despite knowing little about the
country except having knowledge “based on the King and I, and Siamese cats” (D personal interview one, 2007, p. 2). Ajarn.com was used “for employment really, but never found work through Ajarn. When I came to Thailand in 2001, I found work through the Bangkok Post [English-language newspaper in Thailand]” (D personal interview, 2007, p. 2). Subsequent positions were found using his personal, offline network. Before arriving in Thailand with his Thai fiancée, one teacher used Stickmanbangkok.com as a source for information and not long after discovered Ajarn.com and Thaivisa.com. He used these sites to find information on the EFL world of Thailand since he did not originally intend to teach English in Thailand, calling it “a back up plan” (H personal interview, 2007, p. 12). However, none of these sources helped him in obtaining a job. Interestingly, he found his first teaching position when he “was walking down the street and a girl said to me ‘you are white, can you teach English?’ I said yes and got my first job” (H personal interview, 2007, p. 7). While the circumstances surrounding his hiring were unusual, this person still conducted the majority of his information search via the virtual communities.

While several teachers indicated at least one other source, for example a guide book or friend, there were other teachers who exclusively used virtual communities in their OAS processes. It should be noted that any training conducted by a TEFL certification organization was not described as being a source of information by most of the participants, especially the teachers discussed in this section. Thus, exclusive use does include the possibility of a teacher taking the TEFL certification course as an information source. For the purpose of this study, however, teachers who said they only...
used virtual communities as part of their OAS process are included in this section.

One participant, G, began as a volunteer with Travel-to-Teach.com. He was trained as an EFL teacher by the organization and was then sent to Thailand to teach English. He also utilized Stickmanbangkok.com at this time. His first job was his only one to date as “I started in Isaan and stayed ever since” (G personal interview, 2007, p. 2). Isaan is located in northeastern Thailand. When deciding to come to Thailand, he stated, “I was only ever going to work in a school that supported me and cared about education” (G personal interview, 2007, p. 2), which is most likely why he has remained at the place where he first began teaching.

Participant Z said he used virtual communities exclusively. For him, “Ajarn.com – Thai teachers website, Daveslcafe – ESL website, hotmail.com, [and] lit.org – writing website” were all the virtual communities necessary to help him find the information he needed.

Earlier, I discussed the experiences of teachers who did not utilize the internet or virtual communities because of the inability to access the internet in Thailand or find information about Thailand on the internet during their OAS processes. However, one teacher who did have access to the virtual communities made a conscious choice not to use them. He said, “to be honest, prior to Thailand I had no contact via internet. I had been living here for a couple of years before I became a teacher or looked at Thaivisa” (FF personal interview one, 2007, p. 1). While he did not use these communities in his OAS process, he elaborated on his virtual community usage, saying, “I use/used the internet a lof but as far as Thailand/teaching are concerned the internet did not play apart
until after I had been here a couple of years. If that makes sense” (FF personal interview one, 2007, p. 1). It did because he was occupied in another career, but when the time came to become an EFL teacher, he used virtual communities, Thaivisa.com in particular, as part of his OAS process.

In sum, this group of teachers showed that developing an OAS process still requires different sources of information such as those discussed by Jablin (2000). However, these teachers demonstrated an increased use of virtual communities as compared with the group of five teachers discussed earlier who did not use the internet at all. Such a shift placed the virtual communities as important sources of information and substantial components of an OAS process. The teachers have also shown that they believe the virtual communities are important sources of information and are worth developing an OAS process based upon them.

**Naming in the OAS processes.** The preceding sections detailed the different ways the virtual communities were integrated into different, personalized OAS processes for the teachers. Before moving onto the second step in developing an OAS process, the information sought, I find it important to note that as I read through the interviews I noticed the virtual communities used in this study were not described or labeled as such by the participants. I was the person to use the term and I found this to be rather interesting because the term virtual community has been in use since the early days of the internet.

Despite the teachers not using the term to describe the sites they used, only one person asked what I meant by *virtual communities* when I used it. Participant S asked
me, “VCs?” (personal interview two, 2007, p. 7), and I described what they were, and he said, “I’m not much of a VC user, jargon or otherwise” (S personal interview two, 2007, p. 7). Although the teachers did not specifically use virtual community when describing the communities they visited, they highlighted common characteristics of the virtual communities including the mediated nature of communication, the use of social networks, and the socialization of new members, although it was not described as socialization either. In the latter case, this involved socialization into the country/culture of Thailand, the culture of EFL teaching as a career, and the cultures (in a general sense) of Thai educational institutions.

The interview sessions reflected on teachers’ experiences that spanned the development and growth of the internet and virtual communities. As with the development of the teachers’ OAS processes using virtual communities as a source of information, as computer-mediated communication (CMC) research evolved through the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, scholars in various disciplines began to see the emerging centrality of CMC in everyday life. As the internet emerged as a viable and important technology and drove the financial and technology boom of the late 1990s and early 2000s, many attempted to understand and explain its impact on our society.

BusinessWeek had a cover story in 1997 in which Hof, Browder, and Elstrom examined communities of individuals on the internet. In the article, the authors argued that while the internet (at the time) was still in an early stage, community development could be seen across the internet. While I would argue that the organic nature of the internet precludes an end-state, Hof, et al. have been shown to be correct in their prediction of
community development on the internet, or what have come to be called *virtual communities*. A constant work in progress, there is no single definition of what a virtual community is or what comprises one. Feenberg and Bakardjieva (2004) described online virtual communities, saying:

> At first, these communities grew out of existing professional networks and solidarities, but they eventually surpassed these origins to offer a new social space for people, strangers and almost-strangers, with diverse backgrounds and interests to come together as equals, as generators of ideas, to deliberate and act collectively, and in some cases to remain together in long-term association.

(p. 38)

The virtual communities in this study exist because of the connectivity of the internet and a central website that allows members to access and exchange information in a variety of ways including discussion boards, emails, forum areas, and postings to the website itself and built around a common interest; for example, being an independent musician or a participant in an online video game. While definitions of a virtual community differ (e.g., Feenberg and Bakardjieva, 2004; Mason, 1999), individual connectivity and a shared experience, interest in a topic, and rules and norms (Bruckman, 1998) are common elements.

Several of the participants critiqued the virtual communities, but one teacher in particular was troubled with the mediated nature of communication today. He said:

> As a professional communicator (B.S. Journalism, minor in Forensic Studies Management) I have worried for many years that the increasing use of virtual
Virtual communities are the members in that they are not static, but interactive and dynamic worlds that evolve and grow with the community members. Feenberg and Bakardjieva (2004) believed virtual communities enabled sociality and linkages between “virtual and real life” (p. 4) although not every online social network is a virtual community (Garton, Haythornthwaite, & Wellman, 1997). Foundational work in the area of virtual communities is generally attributed to Rheingold (1991, 1993). However, despite years of research, an important question that still remains is whether or not a group of people gathering together through a CMC forum constitutes a community (Bell, 2001; Feenberg & Bakardjieva, 2004; Herring, 2004). Cohen (1993) discussed the
importance of understanding the boundaries between and within communities as a way of understanding communities. Location, whether online or offline (Burnett, 1999), has also been a contentious issue. Feenberg and Bakardjieva (2004) also challenged the terrestrially-defined nature of community, stating, “if face-to-face contact is required by definition, then obviously no community can form online” (p. 37) and they supported this position by grounding their work in Anderson’s (1983) notion of imagined community where “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (p. 37) and virtuality or emergence (Massumi, 2002). I believe the EFL-related virtual communities are truly communal in nature. In other words, while the term virtual community is used here, they are actually communities with sub-communities included in each community; a notion of communities-within-community.

The online and offline information searches and OAS processes previously described reveal an interesting set of search processes. Clearly, some of the participants utilized methods described by Jablin (2000) and others (e.g., personal contacts, guide books). Other individuals found the virtual communities a useful departure point for their OAS processes and utilized the virtual communities (see Table 4) in conjunction with other processes or exclusively in their search. While I do not wish to generalize beyond this group of EFL teachers, their comments are suggestive in terms of OAS stage employment information searches and the development of an OAS processes based upon virtual communities. Subsequent research will be able to better understand and organize the processes EFL teachers are using today to find information during their OAS phases and their pre-hire information-seeking processes.
Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Virtual Community</th>
<th>Participants Visiting or Utilizing the Virtual Communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ajarn.com</td>
<td>B, C, D, E, G, H, I, O, Q, S, U, X, Y, CC, FF, LL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ajarnforum.net</td>
<td>B, C, D, E, G, H, I, O, Q, S, U, X, Y, CC, FF, LL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daveseslcafe.com</td>
<td>B, C, I, O, S, U, Y, FF, LL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECCthai.com</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESLpro.com</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESLusa.com</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESLworldwide.com</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Globalesl.net</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goasia.com</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stickmanbangkok.com</td>
<td>E, G, H, S, X, Y, CC, FF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teakdoor.com</td>
<td>D, Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEFLwatch.org</td>
<td>Q, CC, FF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thaivisa.com</td>
<td>H, O, Q, Y, CC, FF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel-to-teach.com</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The preceding section illustrated the ways in which the EFL teachers developed the first step in their OAS processes and the development of the virtual communities as information sources over time. The OAS processes were designed to identify, seek out, and make sense of particular points of interest to the teachers regarding life in Thailand. The next section moves to a second step in the development of an OAS process and
examines what information was identified as important and necessary by the EFL teachers. These points illustrate how the virtual communities were used by the teachers at the same time offering a glimpse into what was important to an individual teacher in terms of Thailand and EFL teaching further illustrating the OAS processes just described.

While the different OAS processes were tailored to fit individual needs and goals, what was actually sought by the teachers reflected both the role of the virtual communities in the OAS processes and the importance of certain information necessary to make the transition to EFL teaching and to Thailand. Exactly what information was searched for varied by individual EFL teachers, but a common set of information points was found. These information-seeking points are captured in the themes how to live abroad and how to work abroad (see Table 5 for a full listing of information-seeking points). How to live abroad are information points that the teachers sought and included such topics as accommodation, visa information, and entertainment and recreational information. How to work abroad captured the information that the teachers wished to know about working in Thailand including job postings, visa information, contracts, and actually teaching EFL courses to Thai students. While each theme is treated separately, the information they searched for can be described as interrelated, as salary at a job, for example, will determine a person’s living standards, accommodation, and entertainment opportunities.
Table 5

*Information-seeking Points Sought by EFL Teachers*

**Living in Thailand**

- Financial issues (e.g., cost of living items such as food, electricity, taxis)
- Accommodation
- Testimonials
- Transportation
- Packing lists (e.g., clothing to take)
- Medical information (e.g., vaccinations, first aid items)
- Visa issues
- Entertainment and recreational information (e.g., vacation sites, entertainment venues)
- Cultural information (e.g., points of etiquette)
- Language instruction or assistance

**Working in and for Organizations in Thailand**

- Financial issues (e.g., salaries)
- Job postings
- Working conditions, classroom conditions, teaching conditions
- Career advancement
- Position locations (including comparisons between urban and rural areas)
- Work permit, license, and visa issues
- Contract information
- Perceptions of teaching Thai students
- Perceptions of Thai education and institutions
- Language instruction or assistance
- Expectations Thai institutions had of EFL teachers
- Job descriptions, expectations
- Interview techniques and tips
- Recruiter information
- TEFL qualifications, certification, and organizations
- Business ownership
- Thai educational organization contact information
- Information about EFL lessons, materials, textbooks, et cetera

The development of OAS processes and the inclusion of the specific information-seeking points of the EFL teachers indicated that the virtual communities are now significant sources of information and are important to the development of OAS
processes. This belief moves the OAS processes beyond the use of mass search engines such as www.monster.com (Monster.com) or www.yahoo.com (Yahoo.com). The information about Thailand the teachers required was determined by each individual teacher and, in many cases, came from a source as close to the ground as possible: existing EFL teachers. The role of the virtual communities for the EFL teachers in this study was shown to be similar to (e.g., job advertisements) and different from (e.g., forum areas and interpersonal exchanges off/online) traditional information sources such as newspapers and advertisements indicating that the information and information sources necessary to make a career decision were changing.

**How to Live Abroad**

Based upon earlier evaluations of the organizational socialization literature, the post-hire socialization and information-seeking processes discussed by organizational scholars in the past have conceptual links with the OAS processes and information-seeking points of the EFL teachers (Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004; Waldeck, Seibold, & Flanagin, 2004). Like post-hire socialization, it is possible that pre-hire interactions with virtual communities can reduce uncertainty, establish connections with individuals in similar positions, although not necessarily at the same organization, and overall, aid in the understanding of what is to come once an individual lands in Thailand and assumes a particular teaching position. Various technologies (e.g., websites) “can facilitate anticipatory socialization by offering increased opportunities for communication and greater accessibility to organizational information” (Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004, p. 145) provided they are useful to new/potential organizational members and/or are used in a
targeted manner by organizational members (e.g., in the hiring process) (Ployhart, 2006). The results of such action can include greater realism (e.g., realistic job previews) regarding the nature of the job and the organization due to the input from and interpersonal exchanges with the members of different virtual communities.

Thus, it was important to learn more about how individuals are engaged with the virtual community environment. The points sought by the different teachers continued to address the first research question and describe the ways in which EFL teachers utilized the virtual communities during the development of their individual OAS processes. Nevertheless, there was one individual that stated he did not search for information in any way (offline or online) outside of speaking with friends from Thailand. Rather, he believed, “I was fearless so-to-speak. I consulted a few Thai friends and they recommended I go to Bangkok” (DD personal interview two, 2007, p. 1). However, it is clear from his comments, that while his approach might not have been formal, he did indeed engage in OAS processes albeit non-CMC ones.

The first theme, how to live abroad, captured issues related to living in Thailand, issues that were the most widely discussed points in the interviews and comprise a rather broad area that covered numerous aspects of an EFL teacher’s life in Thailand. Some of these aspects were applicable, yet tangential to the main purpose of this study, but nevertheless were sought by teachers (e.g., night life activities). This is not surprising as moving to a foreign country is filled with a number of different issues that have to be addressed just to get there, let alone survive and thrive. The participants discussed searches for a variety of information, but three in particular were cited by most teachers:
legal issues of living in Thailand, accommodation issues in Thailand, and day-to-day issues of living in Thailand.

**Legal issues of living in Thailand.** Not surprisingly, visa and work permit issues were an important aspect of the information search. Visa information is one of two points that straddle the line between living and working in the country (with salary being the other). A visa can be obtained to stay in the country although a work permit is necessary for legal employment. The participants indicated that teachers in Thailand did not always have both required documents and were essentially teaching illegally without work permits. The community members and information on the sites themselves were said to be of help in answering questions or providing information as to how visas can be obtained.

Working without a visa is not a desired method of staying in the country as it can involve fines, jail, or deportation. However, the information discussed and shared at the virtual communities about this method made it appear to be a possible alternative, at least until proper employment or a standard visa could be issued. Also, one teacher mentioned “when you look at ‘forim driven websites’ you have to sift through the nonsense to come to anything useful really. …Some of the information isn’t very accurate, and can differ from province to province when it comes to visas” (D personal interview one, 2007, p. 3). Participant D’s comments might be reflected in the case of participant Q who searched for information about “whether I’d get help on working legally (I never did), have to return to the USA annually (I had to)” (personal interview two, 2007, p. 2).

Visa information is complicated in Thailand, but the teachers referred to it in a
fairly straightforward manner rarely saying more than they sought visa information. This simplicity belies the importance of the visa and consistency with which it was mentioned. Clearly, this point was deemed important by the teachers as they developed their OAS process.

**Accommodation issues in Thailand.** After visa information, accommodation and where to work (e.g., Bangkok, the Isaan region) were important and complimentary information-seeking points. Hotels or long-stay hostels are not a preferred option for accommodation for the EFL teachers. A variety of housing options exist in Thailand. As an example of value for money, an average small studio apartment in Bangkok can cost between 3,000 to 7,500 baht per month (roughly US$95 to US$238) depending on where it is located in the city. Continuing the example, if a teacher’s salary is expected to be 24,000 baht per month (roughly US$761), then it is easy to see why accommodation and where to work were important OAS information items. This variability extends beyond Bangkok into the provincial regions of Thailand. When I was in Thailand, there was a perception that living in the provinces outside of Bangkok was cheaper than living in Bangkok. While no definitive agreement was ever reached, colleagues did say that the level of need for issues such as comfort levels in one’s apartment or proximity to the real Thailand would drive such choices. In any case, accommodation and where to work were shown to be key information points for the EFL teachers.

Of the twenty participants, three individuals indicated that they had a Thai girlfriend or wife at the time of the job search and did not need to seek information about living in the country, at least as far as accommodation, food, et cetera went. The
remaining teachers did seek this information. One interview elicited information about
the Bangkok-centric nature of the EFL virtual communities. Participant I is intimately
familiar with the management of virtual communities and commented upon the role they
can play in steering or determining where teachers choose to settle down and begin their
careers. He said, “if the site is too Bangkok-centric then you’re going to have a surplus
[of teachers] in Bangkok while upcountry are desperate for teachers, but fortunately that
is not the case anymore” (personal interview two, 2007, p. 5). He attributed some of the
shift to Bangkok-based schools becoming more strict with EFL qualification
requirements over the past several years which meant that “unqualified teachers have
been filling the jobs elsewhere in schools that are not so strict,” for example, northern
provinces — the upcountry he spoke of (I personal interview two, 2007, p. 5).

Several of the remaining participants indicated that they knew ahead of time
where they wanted to work, either through a personal decision or in discussion with close
others (e.g., girlfriend). Participant LL said that she “searched [the virtual communities]
and knew I didn’t want to live in Bangkok so I looked for lower paying jobs outside the
city” (personal interview, 2007, p. 1). As stated earlier, two participants indicated that
they traveled to Thailand at least one time and learned more about not only about the jobs
available, but the differences between urban and rural or northern and southern cultures
and lifestyles in Thailand.

During one particularly interesting interview, a teacher noted he observed a living
in Thailand issue consistently debated across the forum areas he used. This debate was
over whether or not the quality of one’s life in Thailand was more important than the
quantity of money (salary) one had upon arrival or earned through working (or vice versa). This discussion harkened back to earlier characterizations of the use of EFL teaching as a means to a higher order goal(s). Participant D said that the older members of the virtual community (by actual age) and those with longer tenure in the country would encourage new EFL teachers (and others) to seek a better quality of life rather than search for the highest paying job as one would really work for their salary. By work, these individuals meant that long hours (including multiple teaching positions) might be needed to reach a certain level of income. For example, participant S said he worked “seven days a week” (personal interview two, p. 6) at his first institution. This was seconded as participant D said, “many of the older posters advocate a quality of life-style above making a lot of money. I used to work 7 days a week for months on end. I’m not prepared to do it anymore, but know, if you want to earn good money, you have to work the hours” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 3).

Participant Z, on the other hand, came out and said directly that he went to Thailand because “it has little stress attached to it and I can make enough money to live comfortably” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 1). “People [visiting the virtual communities] need to be made aware of how easy it is there [Thailand] and how relaxed it is” (H personal interview two, 2007, p. 15). The information about individual teacher motivations for going to Thailand found in Chapter 2 also showed that many of the EFL teachers were doing so for more than just money. As stated earlier, the second step in developing an OAS process was to determine which information was most necessary to make the move to Thailand. The virtual communities were used to find basic information
about visas and accommodation. However, the issues of living day-to-day in Thailand comprised a third important information point for the teachers.

**Day-to-day issues of living in Thailand.** Information points such as legal issues in Thailand accommodation are important components of *how to live abroad*, but it is easy to forget the importance of the daily life issues of being in the country. For the EFL teachers I interviewed, a final key point in their OAS processes was the search for information in regard to daily living in Thailand. Here they focused on the importance of information pertaining to actual day-to-day living in the country and the practical and cultural implications this entailed. As stated earlier, cultural issues as barriers or difficulties were not often raised by the EFL teachers during their OAS processes. Culture shock was not addressed explicitly by many participants, but one did and said that it is real and “nothing you can read can actually prepare you for this” (D personal interview one, 2007, p. 7). One teacher, who had a Thai girlfriend (at the time) cited her as a reason for his easier transition to Thailand. He said:

> It would have been considerably more difficult [to move without her help].

> Things like arranging accommodation, buying household good, arranging deliveries and just adapting to the lifestyle. I can see why so many people go off the rails here. Luckily, I have had the advantage of a 5 year stable relationship with a Thai girl. (personal interview one, 2007, p. 3)

However, the search for information itself could help to assuage fears or concerns over the transition to Thailand. For example, one teacher said she was “getting very nervous lately [regarding her upcoming move], but then I will just sit back and realize how much
of an amazing experience this will be…and teaching, I just can not wait to touch lives over there” (U personal interview two, 2007, p. 4). When I specifically asked the female participants if they had any particular concerns or fears about being in Thailand (e.g., safety) they did not share any; none of the male participants did either.

When cultural issues were raised, they focused on work-related issues. In one case, “my Thai friends didn’t tell me about the fundamental differences between western business mentality and Thai, in that Thais seem to care about appearances rather than content” (DD personal interview, 2007, p. 2). Another teacher who did his TEFL training in Thailand believed he had an edge on his cohort members who were new to the country because his OAS work helped him “to communicate better with both my students and members of Thai administration…. [I] had already adopted the ‘mai pen rai’ [roughly meaning “no problem”] attitude needed to survive” (FF personal interview, 2007, p. 3).

Discussions of culture also raised issues of work/life in the country. For example, one teacher said he “found out [through the virtual communities] that many other teachers go screwed by the bosses and that this was a Thai/Asian thing. Also, I realized that many bosses ranked very low when it came to being intelligent. Thanks Ajarnforum.com” (DD personal interview one, 2007, p. 2). In fairness to the bosses of Thailand, during his second interview, he mentioned that the boss from his first job “cheated me out of money, lied to me about work/contract hours, and didn’t pay my taxes” (DD personal interview two, 2007, p. 2). While most of the participants had access to the internet and virtual communities in their search for cultural information, one teacher lamented the fact that he could not find information about these issues from
virtual communities during his OAS process because he was one of the five teachers who went to Thailand in the early days of virtual community development. He said, “I really just wanted to see something about the country. What did the people look like? How did they dress? What kind of food did they eat? What are some cultural behaviors to avoid? I didn’t learn much” (JJ personal interview one, 2007, p. 1).

The daily pitfalls of living in Thailand that individuals wanted to learn more about showed the importance of forum postings and interpersonal exchanges on the forum highlighting the role of virtual communities in OAS processes. The comments made by the teachers plus the examples of actual forum exchanges provided in Chapter 2 (see Appendices E, F) indicated that the sharing of stories and experiences is common on EFL-related forum areas. Direct questions about specific instances are just as common as “what is life in Thailand really like?” types of questions. In this instance, the anonymity of virtual community life allowed the new EFL teacher to hear the truth as to how individuals viewed life in Thailand. Key to this discussion are issues associated with the levels of disclosure about personal information and trust an individual feels they need to reach before participating in forum/community life and interacting with other members to share experiences and provide advice. These issues carried over into the third theme that captured another important area of information sought during the OAS processes: how to work abroad.

How to Work Abroad

At the same time the teachers searched for information about life in Thailand, they also searched for information related to working in the country (see Table 5). A
critical point where living in Thailand and working in Thailand overlapped during the
information-seeking process was that of the search for an actual EFL teaching position.
None of the teachers indicated that they had difficulty in articulating what they wanted in
terms of work information as compared with information about living in the country. I
only raised this issue because, if few if any of the teachers had contact with EFL teaching
prior to choosing the career, I did not know if they would be able to determine what
information was needed or have the ability to determine differences in the information
they found. However, as I said, the teachers did not have difficulty developing this
aspect of their OAS process. In fact, this was the area where most of the participants
indicated that they used the virtual communities extensively. Since most of the
respondents were not in the country for most, if not all, of the time prior to obtaining their
first job, it is not surprising that finding work-related information was a concern. Key
issues repeated by the teachers regarding working in Thailand include finding an EFL
position, salary information, and scanning the educational environment.

Finding an EFL position. During the interviews, participants described
employment issues as important points of emphasis in their search process. A few
teachers were in the country prior to internet access becoming widespread and obtained
their information from sources such as local newspapers or personal contacts.

For those who did use the virtual communities, they and their members were a
helpful source of information on EFL jobs in Thailand. Despite the varying opinions of
Ajarn.com members in particular, the overall job market for EFL teachers in Thailand
appears strong and finding a job did not appear to be too difficult a task for any of the
respondents. Beyond just having access to job postings and advertisements, the teachers utilized the virtual communities to find deeper and sometimes broader information about EFL teaching positions in Thailand. One participant in particular had the singular experience of literally walking into a job in that “[he] was walking down the street and a girl said to me ‘you are white, can you teach English?’ I said yes and got my first job” (H personal interview one, 2007, p. 7). While this is not a common occurrence, it does highlight the uniqueness of the job market in the country and the overall position of EFL teachers in the contingency/full-time workforce in Thailand.

The virtual communities helped participant B as he “tried to find out from other threads or posting the reputation of an organization or school. This has really helped me to avoid some potentially nasty situations” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 1). Likewise, participant G spoke of warnings about job dangers in Thailand, “Stickmans education guide gave me a little insight into the types of schools and pitfalls” (personal interview one, 2007 p. 1). He also commented on the ways in which other teachers’ discussions of their career experiences helped him to understand the positive situation he was in. He said, “to be honest, I battled hard for what I got. I was amazed on Ajarn.com how many people put up with crap from their school, how many people were teaching in a nonsense way” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 2). Similarly, participant I used the virtual community members’ stories and postings to learn about “the types of jobs available in the area I was looking to move to in order to convince myself that my plan wasn’t folly, and lesson plan ideas to help me with my TEFL course [certification course]” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 1).
Only one participant, U was not employed at the time of the interview, having just entered the country and only recently finished her TEFL course’s mandatory one month preparation course. The virtual communities led her to a TEFL certification program in which the organization would train her in teaching TEFL courses. At the completion of the courses, the organization would provide job search assistance. In her case, they would “recommend certain areas…areas closer to the training center. but also give you the freedom to go where you wish” (U personal interview, 2007, p. 13). However, if one followed the organization’s recommendation for work, then there was “guaranteed job placement” (U personal interview, 2007, p.13). After the interviews were completed, she indeed finished her program and, to the best of my knowledge is working in southern Thailand now. Thus, it appears from the participant’s comments that the job search process would be an important, but relatively straightforward prospect for a new EFL teacher.

**Salary information.** Another information-seeking point sought by the teachers about working in Thailand was information about EFL teacher salaries. While discussed by the teachers in relation to accommodation, salaries were also cited as an important piece of information for a new EFL teacher regarding working in the country because the money they earned (or had the potential to earn) seemed to determine the feasibility of the move to Thailand. Interestingly, the teachers did not discuss much about money outside of whether or not they could actually afford to make the move (all who were concerned said yes). In other words, although salary information was sought and
discussed, our conversations never really approached spending the money or what they
do with their money (a point I did not question them about).

Many stories were similar to participant Z in that information about salaries was
important “to gain an idea of the average pay packet so I knew what to ask for [in a job
interview]” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 1) or similar to participant E who said, “the
information proved it was perfectly ‘doable’ to live and work in Bangkok; that the money
would be enough” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 1). Like participant Z, participant H
said, “I used these websites [virtual communities Ajarn.com and Thaivisa.com] to read
comments about different schools and compare salaries … I was just interested in
working out the cost of living and planning a budget. Getting a job wasn’t priority, but I
wanted to work out how much money I would need and reading the stickman website
gave me a good/ accurate idea” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 3). Participant CC was
also forthcoming about salaries saying, “whilst salary is an important factor, I was
realistic enough to understand that I would be taking a significant pay cut. I wanted to
find out what people experiences were of living and working in Thailand, as that is very
different from the view that you get whilst on holiday” (personal interview one, 2007,
p. 2). Commenting on the salary issue and revisiting the quality of life versus quantity of
income debate, participant D said, “The money isn’t too great, but the conditions are
rather good. This is in line of what you’ll find oon the forum” (personal interview one,
2007, p. 3).

Participant E’s comment that “money would be enough” (personal interview
2007, p. 1) is a key concept here. Grand lifestyles or discussions of extravagant living
was not part of the discussion of salaries. The comments made by the teachers began to formulate a *means-to-an-end chain* where the EFL job might not be the ultimate outcome of going to Thailand, but the means to achieve higher order goals that might not necessarily reflect values or lifestyles from a teacher’s home country. A teacher who was more of an I/RGR than one who will remain in one institution or country can decrease his or her sense of displacement or liminality in Thai educational organizations by focusing on their personal goals or values with the knowledge that EFL can be taught anywhere. Their personal and career mobility makes rapid location changes possible, if not probable. The teachers’ comments indicated the salaries the I/RGR teachers would find at a particular job/country combination would be satisfactory to address their needs, at least for Thailand.

From personal experience, the first time in Thailand was wonderful in economic terms because the ratio of the United States dollar to the Thai baht made purchases appear cheaper until one calculates their daily or monthly cost of living expenditures in baht against a baht salary. For example, the exchange rate near the end of March was around 31.5 baht per United States dollar. An approximate average price of a meal for one person is 30 baht from a street vendor and in a typical restaurant around 65 baht. It is no surprise that a number of participants queried virtual community members as to what a typical EFL teacher’s salary could support in a given month. Of course, the members offered advice, but just as common was the caution that what you spend is determined by your desired standard of living and expectations.
Scanning the educational environment. In addition to examining or searching through job postings and salary information, some of the participants determined that information such as what the different schools were like or what life at a university was like as compared to teaching in high schools. Such points of differentiation are important in the OAS process as they drive many other aspects of working in Thailand. Different types of Thai educational institutions will provide different types of work experiences and, perhaps more importantly, assistance with remaining in the country on visas or properly paying taxes.

In regard to teaching, participant H was looking for “some tips, on how to deal with Thais at interviews” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 5). For participant Q, “I think I was seeking info about how difficult the classroom and staffroom conditions would be and whether I’d keep teaching ‘How are you?’ forever” (personal interview two, 2007, p. 2). He was concerned as virtual communities he visited, although could not remember their names, portrayed education in Thailand as being:

A shambles, that we [teachers] would be mistreated or our needs ignored and unmet. That the standards classes would be huge, the Thai teachers of English would be barely fluent and incompetent; that the classrooms would be outdaed and unbearably hot; the toilets would be squat toilets. That the students would be lazy cheaters whose English vocabulary was pitiful. That we would be respected by the students and the community, expected to love the crappy food, to learn the incomprehensible language and alphabet, etc. All of those things were accurate,
and I knew when sarcasm and humour were being employed accurately, before and after I found it to be true.  (personal interview one, 2007, p. 3)

In my follow-up interview, I commented upon this statement. Q added, “in the forum, it is obvious to a causal reader that these conditions and problems exist. Thus, the newbies know what they’ll be in for” (personal interview two, 2007, p. 3). In terms of expected or unexpected information regarding searching for information about schools or work in general, participant X said, “I learned [in his search] what salary to expect, the hours of teaching, the bonus system, and the return travel [to home countries] available with some schools. There were many things it didn’t prepare me for through. …lower standard of education…the amount of fraudulent qualifications” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 2) by other EFL teachers.

Participant S merely sought contact information for different types of educational institutions from the virtual communities (and school sites). He chose not to make applications online “because I wanted to go back to Thailand to interview and make sure things were as I remembered” (S personal interview two, 2007, p. 2). Caution was also being exercised by participant CC who searched for information about different schools and/or job positions. He said he found Ajarn.com to be:

Too tainted by it’s own self interests with it’s conflicts of interest by being sponsored by schools, whilst advertising work. Teflwatch.oorg in the past 18 months has brought a little more balance, but I do think people need to be very careful about the pitfalls of working here. (CC personal interview two, 2007, p. 2)
With these types of searches in mind, one virtual community was mentioned as a forum for open discussion about the merit of different Thai educational institutions (as well as others around the world): TEFLwatch.org.

Although not discussed by many teachers, participants CC and Q noted that a site such as TEFLwatch.org is important as it is a place where EFL teachers could express concerns and share information regarding the places they work. As participant Q described it, “another website I find useful, primarily for its initial purpose of informing people of bad schools to avoid” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 4).

The information provided by the teachers during the interviews spoke directly to the first interview question. Each teacher developed their own OAS process, but almost all included virtual communities as part of the process. In addition, the teachers’ determined what information they required from the various OAS sources including virtual communities. The information searches were focused upon two key themes, how to live abroad and how to work abroad. The second research question sought to better understand the different experiences each teacher had upon entering their EFL teaching career in Thailand.

**Research Question 2**

Research Question 2: After entering an organization, how did the EFL teachers reconcile the organization’s socialization efforts with the information gathered from the virtual communities?

This question explored the quality and extent of the match between what an individual learned from the virtual communities and the socialization processes used by
the organizations for which they will be working in Thailand. Given the variety of organizations where an EFL teacher might work, it became important to learn more about the types of information the organization provided to a new hire and how that information related to information gathered during the pre-hire OAS process. For some of the teachers, their first position was their current position. For others, it was the first in a series of positions over time. The interview questions were designed to address post-hire activities at both first, and if necessary, current teaching positions. Most of the teachers spoke of a lack of socialization and training from the Thai educational institutions. From an examination of the teachers’ descriptions of their post-hire experiences two themes emerged: the (mis)match and left to their own devices.

This section will first examine the overlapping nature of the pre-hire and post-hire processes as a way of introducing and contextualizing the themes that emerged from the second research question. Second, the themes themselves will be discussed in relation to the training and socialization efforts provided by the Thai educational institutions.

**Pre-hire and Post-hire Connections**

Research question two overlapped the pre-hire and post-hire processes intentionally. It was important to be able to understand the moment(s) when individuals began to reconcile the information they learned in their OAS processes with their actual experiences in the organization (Louis, 1980). Aside from providing information about the level of accuracy, questioning the teachers in this manner allowed a glimpse into the post-hire phases of EFL teaching in Thailand and provided an opportunity to compare the development of OAS processes in relation to their intended outcomes. Since elements of
post-hire socialization, in general organizational terms, was evident in the OAS processes of the teachers, having information about the post-hire experiences clearly showed the importance of connecting the pre-hire OAS processes with post-hire processes and experiences in order to understand each more thoroughly.

In the post-hire stages, technology can have an effect on information sought by new organizational members and provided by existing organizational members as:

Newcomers can learn organizational lessons critical to their ability to appropriately modify their behaviors and evaluate their socialization experiences. Technology use, then, seems to promise benefits to organizational newcomers seeking to reduce their uncertainty about the organization, develop positive connections with others, and fit in among experienced organizational members. ... possibly making [organizational socialization] more efficient, less stressful, and less ambiguous. … technologies can enable information to be more widely distributed and readily available to a broad range of organizational members than with more traditional forms of face-to-face socialization. (Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004, p. 143)

Pre-hire as well as post-hire interactions with virtual communities and virtual community members can act to reduce uncertainty, establish connections with individuals in similar positions in a manner similar to that of offline, interpersonal relationships.

Flanagin and Waldeck (2004) proposed a model to better understand how individuals use technology to obtain information and facilitate interpersonal relationships
upon entry into an organization (post-hire). During their discussion of technology use by individuals and organizations, they stated:

> Advanced communication and information technologies offer great promise during anticipatory socialization. For instance, many organizational Web sites offer extensive information about their products and services, career opportunities, and contact information regarding employment. Some organizations even offer “Resume Builder” technology that allows prospective hires to transmit their personal information directly to the organization. E-mail, often available directly through hyperlinks on the organization’s Web site, enables prospective organizational members to communicate with current ones.

(p. 145)

The authors believed that technology used in this manner “can facilitate anticipatory socialization by offering increased opportunities for communication and greater accessibility to organizational information” (Flanagin & Waldeck, 2004, p. 145). The results of such action would be greater realism (i.e. realistic job previews) regarding the nature of the job and the organization. While the authors addressed the impact of technology on anticipatory socialization, it is still viewed primarily from only the organization’s perspective.

Continuing this line of work, Waldeck, Seibold, and Flanagin (2004) explored the use and outcomes of Advanced Communication and Information Technologies (ACITs) as a potential resource for organizations and individuals to use during the post-hire organizational socialization process. Further, they believed that socialization is not a
one-time process, but a continuous one that evolves as the individual’s position in the company changes and evolves. While seemingly obvious, this point can easily be overlooked because of the limitations on time and scope inherent in scholarly study opportunities. Movement within an organization also exposes an individual to new and different socialization processes and time within an organization can create a greater sense of proactivity within an individual. In addition, intra-organizational change by an individual might also be accompanied by changes in socialization strategies and the methods used by the organization to achieve their socialization goals.

However, as with other socialization work, these studies take place in the post-hire organizational climate, well after an individual has developed perceptions/viewpoint and gathered information from pre-hire sources. In this case, the EFL teachers’ information-seeking behaviors used by an individual in the pre-entry stage impacted their post-hire experiences.

The EFL teachers in this study clearly indicated how their pre-hire OAS processes corresponded with the actual events they experienced on the ground. These responses indicated the two themes previewed earlier: the (mis)match and a (lack of) socialization and training described as being left to their own devices. While there were specific instances of positive socialization experiences, generally, the teachers indicated that there was little in the way of formal (and helpful) socialization and training opportunities offered by the Thai educational institutions.
The information found by the teachers during their OAS process developed perceptions and expectations about living and working in Thailand. Operating at the intersection of the OAS stage and the entry stage, perceptions are derived from personal motivations to become an EFL teacher and/or live in Thailand, the interactions with different individuals in the offline world as well as online at the virtual communities, and the sense-making processes of the information gathered. As the teachers were about their information process, follow-up questions were used to learn whether or not the information found on the different virtual communities or through conversations with virtual community members matched the actual experiences they encountered at their first position. The responses they gave were mixed.

As demonstrated earlier, the choice to become an EFL teacher was made for a variety of reasons; “the endless travel opportunities and growing industry” (H personal interview one, 2007, p. 3), “I cannot say that I was drawn to the Peace Corps by a keen interest in teaching ESL. Teaching ESL was mainly a means to an end” (A personal interview, 2007, p. 2), “I had a friend who had worked as an EFL instructor in Japan, so I decided to see the world and get paid (very little) while doing it” (B personal interview, 2007, p. 1), or “since the tsunami, [I saw] how much they are in need to native English teachers so, to be a part of that and to help that grow will be amazing” (U personal interview one, 2007, p. 2). These personal reasons, coupled with the OAS information-seeking process, can create a perception of what teaching in Thailand should be like (Schiappa, 2003). Only once an individual is in the country and engaged in EFL teaching
can sense-making take place and a resolution of the expectation versus actual tension be undertaken.

It is important to note that those who experienced a positive match between the information from virtual communities and their actual experiences found the sites to be accurate generally about what living and working in Thailand would be like. No teacher indicated that they found the information to match exactly with their experiences.

**Accuracy of information.** Accuracy is an easily recalled point for the teachers interviewed. “A huge essay on the Stickman site )not sure if it’s still there was a fantastic account of living and working in Bangkok. All information there was up to date and a great help when arriving. I found the range of jobs on www.ajarn.com to be accurate” (E personal interview one, 2007, p. 2). One participant, in describing his first teaching position at a private, for profit language school, said, “[The organization] did develop a website that fairly accurately portrayed their schools. There just wasn’t information about the day-to-day life of Thais, except from a tourist’s perspective” (JJ personal interview, 2007, p. 2). Another teacher with experiences in educational settings all across the world indicated that the advertisement posted for his first job “was accurate in every detail” (B personal interview, 2007, p. 4) although he did add that “it wasn’t written by a Thai but by aWelshman who served as the group’s Director of School Affairs” (B personal interview, 2007, p. 4). Speaking about Ajarnforum.net, participant Y believed the virtual community was helpful with “a lot of helpful people on there as well as a few idiots. …Most of the information was in ‘real time’ so it was fairly accurate. The only inaccuracies were probably due to bias, but I can’t remember any instances of anyone
being hopelessly inaccurate with any information offered” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 4).

In one instance, there was a mismatch between the information gathered and what the teacher first experienced, but he viewed the mismatch as a positive one:

One thing that is not made clear [on the forum areas] is Thailand is not as serious as it seems. New people to these websites read horror stories but don’t realize how easy and laid back Thailand is. My first teaching exp was pretty similar to what I thought it would be based on the accuracy of info from the sites. (H personal interview one, 2007, p. 8)

However, while this teacher found this discrepancy to be positive, he did continue to say that actually living in the country provided insights that could never be replicated in the forum areas or virtual communities. Later though, he indicated that “it doesn’t matter how well you teach in Thailand, it how well you deal with Thai culture and kiss your bosses ass … that is how you will succeed” (H personal interview one, 2007, p. 14).

Another teacher also found a negative mismatch to be a positive event.

Participant DD changed his perspective on his life and career in Thailand after encountering the virtual communities. He said:

I discovered that many others had similar problems from their bosses and the government. I realized that most had just accepted what was happening to them. I also discovered that other people made a lot more money than I did. I felt empowered after discovering this information. It was at this point that I started to vigorously move towards my goals. (DD personal interview two, 2007, p. 3)
One of the participants who used the internet minimally in the OAS process stated that the sites he visited must have helped strengthen his perception of teaching EFL in Thailand “because I decided to at least check it out, and visit a TEFL provider in CMai [Chiang Mai, a city in Northern Thailand] during those days before I made up my mind” (Q personal interview one, 2007, p. 1).

Another teacher found the EFL virtual communities portrayed the Thai educational institutions (educational system?) as “nonsense and this was portrayed accurately but the nonsense does not luckily apply to my school” (personal interview, 2007, p. 1). Commenting on the representation of the Thai academic system at the various virtual communities, participant X stated, “the introduction to Thai education standards is now pretty well covered in the forums” (personal interview two, 2007, p. 2). However, he went on to say that this still did not prepare him for his first experiences in the country as “this is my first [first] experience of working overseas so I don’t think there is much can be said or done [be said or done]…if I raised it [issues or personal concerns] I would be insulting many people” (X personal interview two, 2007, p. 2).

The positive experiences of some of the teachers were overshadowed by a majority that found a lack of accuracy between the information gathered during the OAS process and the actual events in their early careers. For some, this was an emphatic mismatch. “NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO. The info at interview at [a large, government university] was quite different once there [once he arrived in Thailand]” (S personal interview two, 2007, p. 6). He went on to provide an example of the disconnect saying, “after a couple of months, I mentioned to the Foreign Liaison that I was working

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seven days a week … she said they all were” (S personal interview, 2007, p. 6). For others, the lack of accuracy was not much of a concern, for example, “little to none as I was an experienced teacher/trainer” (B personal interview one, 2007, p. 3).

One participant indicated that the Thai advertisements on the EFL sites “paint a very rosey picture. Students eager to learn, good pay, health, supportive work environment, holidays etc. From my experience so far most of the places are purely run for profit, so teachers are an expendable commodity” (CC personal interview one, 2007, p. 5). However, he characterized his institution as excellent due to the “fact that it has an English boss” (personal interview one, p. 5) once again indicating a particular perspective on Thai organizational members and management.

This sentiment towards Thai management was seconded by two other teachers. After frequenting the various forum areas, one teacher believed that many teachers “got screwed by their bosses and that this was a Thai/Asian thing. …many bosses ranked very low when it came to being intelligent” (DD personal interview two, 2007, p. 3). Another said, “I was given 1 hour to watch another teacher teach and then the following day was my first lesson. I go no training and for the 18 months I was the DOS [unknown position] and manager never supervised me once or monitored one of my classes. Where else in the world would that happen?” (H personal interview one, 2007, p. 6).

In sum, the teachers believed the virtual communities were able to provide a glimpse into living and working in Thailand during the OAS process. While the virtual communities provided the information-seeking points the individuals were looking for regarding a variety of topics, there were mixed views as to how accurately this
information represented the actual events many teachers found in their post-hire experiences.

Thus, some of the teachers expressed a significant mismatch between what they learned during their OAS processes and the first experiences in the Thai educational institutions. A part of this mismatch was traced to inconsistent or a distinct lack of socialization and training from the Thai educational institutions. At least fifteen of the teachers encountered this and, in a few cases, this meant they were truly alone as he or she was the only foreign EFL teacher in the institution.

**Left to Their Own Devices**

Upon entering a Thai educational institution, it was believed the teachers would experience actual socialization and training efforts from a Thai educational organization. The training and socialization experiences of the teachers’ first positions were generally less complete than participant U who recently began her training process. This theme reflects the fact that many of the remaining teachers indicated, at best, they received little substantive training and socialization procedures were generally informal and self-directed.

However, the EFL teachers, in describing their experiences, were careful to distinguish between *training* and *socialization*. Training was commonly referred to in terms of EFL-related training (e.g., how to perform as an EFL teacher, what to teach in the courses) whereas socialization was described in terms of efforts made by the Thai organizations to help the EFL teachers transition into new organizational and national cultures. Thus, the stage process of socialization, as it is understood in this case with the
lack of socialization and training processes, might be better construed as a long OAS phase. A reason for this is can be that the second stage of entry into an organization is incomplete if the expected traditional descriptions of that stage are closely followed. In this case, the Thai educational organizations are not providing much of the traditional training and socialization, calling into question whether the individual EFL teacher at that institution is actually in the second socialization stage or not.

In order to examine the teachers’ experiences with Thai organizational training and socialization, this section will examine the extent to which each was offered to the teachers and the ways in which each was conducted. Specifically, training was described as being limited to none and limited, but provided. The teachers also commented on the relationship between institutional differences and training efforts. Likewise, socialization was characterized as being limited to none and provided, but limited.

Finally, the discussion of the teachers’ socialization (and training) experiences raised the issue of organizational responsibility to socialize and train new members.

**Training: Limited to none.** First, in terms of training, some teachers said they received none, while other teachers indicated that a little was provided. After having visited the virtual communities and passed a TEFL certification course, it cannot be said that the teachers have had no training at all. However, the marked lack of training offered by the Thai educational institutions highlights the importance of the virtual community exchanges and the importance of a well-developed OAS process. During these exchanges, teachers can share experiences and learn from each other; a form of training in and of itself. Whether or not this would be sufficient to begin teaching would
depend on an individual teacher. However, when asked about training, the results were mixed.

Examples of the near complete absence of training include the experiences of one teacher who said, “they told me of the requirements and went over the contract. They job was a ‘teach all’ type thing and they explained that. There was no training in regards to teaching. They also gave some Thai lessons” (DD personal interview, 2007, p. 2). In another instance, a teacher said, “None! I was given 1 hour to watch another teacher teach and then the following day was my first lesson. I go no training and for the 18 months I was there, the DOS and manager never supervised me once or monitored one of my classes. Where else in the world would that happen?” (H personal interview one, 2007, p. 6). Participant X was surprised to have gotten to work only to find “there was no curriculum, no textbooks, nothing. The previous teacher had left nothing and the school ha dno iea of what the kids were being taught” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 3). Similarly, one of the female instructors said, “Ha! … not much ‘training’ in thailand. … I got to observe other teachers for about 3 days and my boss gave me a quick lesson on tenses” (LL personal interview one, 2007, p. 3). Even the for-profit institutions failed to provide proper training as on teacher said, “the first company I worked for in Thailand offered me little to no support or training in any way shape or form” (C personal interview one, 2007, p. 2). Location of the institution did not seem to alter the trend as one teacher at a large public institution in the north of the country said he received “almost nothing…. I did get a nice little office. [the university] had no computers that worked. No training was given. I think they gave me an orientation booklet, but I am not
sure” (S personal interview one, 2007, p. 2) and he indicated that he overcame this by utilizing offline colleagues to find out important information much like the experience of participant Q at a “large, secondary, provincial government school that gave me very little info or training about anything.” Another female teacher said that her director provided her with “a home-made booklet with exercises in it” (O personal interview, 2007, p. 2) and that was all.

As noted earlier, several of the teachers went to Thailand because of personal relationships with Thais they were romantically involved with at the time. In one case, this relationship did not overcome the lack of training despite the Thai partner also being employed as a teacher at the same institution the EFL teacher applied to. In his case, “I was hired in Thai with my wife acting as translator for a small part of it, and showed to a classroom the next day wit little in the way of orientation, materials, curriculum, or support” (I personal interview one, 2007, p. 2). Perhaps the combination of having a Thai wife and one that was a teacher the same institution were enough to convince the management of this teacher’s ability to do his job? Perhaps not?

The experiences of this group of EFL teachers can be summarized by a quote from one of the teachers. She explained how she perceived the organization’s management style towards and general relationship with EFL teachers by saying, “’is it breathing’ ‘yep’ ‘let it teach’” (LL personal interview one, 2007, p. 3).

As a quick point of comparison, in my own training experiences, I received a brief tour of the campus and a set of manuals for different university rules, regulations,
expectations. I was also provided with paper copies of previous faculty members’ syllabi to help build my own. Otherwise, I too was left to my own devices.

**Training: Limited, but provided.** In the cases where teachers said they received some level of training, it still cannot be thought of as a comprehensive training session. Among the teachers that indicated some training was provided, non-TEFL related organizations (e.g., the Peace Corps) were cited as were some form of training provided by the educational institution. For example, one teacher “had a four day teaching seminar which went over general teaching tips and how to organize a class. It also told the teachers what to expect from Thailand culturally as well as the dos and don’ts such as touching someone with your foot…” (Z personal interview, 2007, p. 2).

In another instance, a teacher described the training as conducted by a non-Thai (an Englishman) as part of a training program for a for-profit language school. In addition to receiving a manual with the rules and dress code expected by the school, the sessions covered “‘code of conduct’ more than anything else …. It also covered the usual things, wear long sleeve shirt, don’t sit on atable. Don’t point with you feet. [and other cultural information]” (D personal interview one, 2007, p. 3). He described these sessions as lasting a few days and that he did not think the school was still doing the sessions today. Despite this, participant D believed that the sessions were of little help to him as he had years of prior teaching experiences and “the experience I gained from working with Thais and for Thais, came through trial and error I’m afraid” (D personal interview one, 2007, p. 3).
**Institutional differences and training efforts.** EFL teachers in Thailand have the opportunity to work for a number of different educational institutions ranging from private tutoring to university-level positions. One participant hinted that the type of institution a teacher worked for played a role in whether or not training was offered by the Thai educational institutions. Participant CC indicated that perhaps language schools (for-profit) were less helpful than traditional educational institutions in general. Like several others, he indicated he obtained is certification prior to leaving the UK, but “other than that it was pretty much on your own. … [I followed-up with the following question: were there discussions of do’s and don’ts?] … [He responded] Only from what feellow colleagues said. My first job was with a language centre, and I think in general these places are not known for being the most supportive” (CC personal interview one, 2007, p. 5). Participant U, the teacher in the midst of TEFL certification training when I interviewed her, said she faced the task of reconciling the information and training from the organization with that of her own OAS search processes. Her trainer provided “a month of training and getting acclimated to the culture and language and then they assist you in job placement” (U personal interview one, 2007, p. 1). The organization provided numerous checklists as to what to do in terms of preparation, packing, documents to bring and those that were needed, et cetera. To assist with her transition to Thailand, the TEFL certification institution (a pre-organizational, organization or PROO) provided a contact in the United States and one in Thailand. She indicated that “in the beginning I would [speak with the person] a couple of times a week” (U personal interview one, 2007, p. 3) regarding basic information on airline flights among other topics.
Socialization: Limited to none. As formal training programs were inconsistent at best and non-existent at worst, socialization efforts by the Thai organizations were described as equally unhelpful by the teachers. In other words, they were left to their own socialization devices. However, the description of socialization processes by the EFL teachers stressed the interpersonal exchanges between the teacher and various members of the organization. In some cases, the interpersonal interactions between faculty members provided the formal and informal socialization as opposed to faculty member – administration ones. The relationships between the EFL teachers and the Thai faculty and administration were a mix of positive and negative events.

First, in some cases, interpersonal interactions with colleagues (of any nationality) were described as minimal leading to a lack of any knowledge regarding organizational information or culture. One of the important aspects of virtual communities is the opportunity to share information with others in the same field or with the same interests. In the post-hire context, these interactions would be with other EFL teachers and/or Thai faculty and staff. However, many of the teachers did not indicate that this was the case. The minimal socialization efforts via colleagues were similar to the lack of training from the educational institution. Experience, rather than social interaction, seemed to be a better way for the teachers to be socialized into EFL teaching and life in Thailand.

For example, after examining postings on Ajarn.com, one participant said, “I battled hard for what I got [salary, et cetera]. I was amazed on ajarn.com how many people put up with crap from their school, how many people were teaching in a nonsense way” (G personal interview, 2007, p. 2). In one instance, participant B was introduced to
the person he was replacing, given a tour of the organization, and “left to my own devices for three weeks before I had to conduct my own course” (B personal interview, 2007, p. 3). The departing faculty member provided information on the organization, but this did not necessarily mean accurate information was shared. “I found out what some of the working dynamics were, the personnel dynamics, and about the expectations of life in the [local] community. I found much of the information provided by my predecessor to be largely inaccurate for the way I work and the way I live in a community, though” (B personal interview, 2007, p. 4). Reflecting this individual-driven approach to socialization, another teacher believed that “[he] learnt more from my own experiences and just being able to keep an open mind” (CC personal interview one, 2007, p. 5) as opposed, perhaps, to relying on colleagues or the institutional structures. Another teacher experienced far worse events than a lack of socialization. He was cheated out of money owed to him and required legal action to correct the situation (DD personal interview two, 2007).

**Socialization: Provided, but limited.** As with the training offered to the teachers, not all educational institutions lacked socialization efforts. A few teachers described their entrance into their organization as more positive albeit not overwhelmingly positive. In these cases, Thai cultural practices were cited as explanations for the socialization difficulties although accepted by the teachers. For example, one teacher said, “we have regular staff meetings, monthly and we have various training sessions. It is organized and we have input into what we do, as opposed to the other place [where he worked previously] which was Thai managed” (CC personal
interview one, 2007, p. 5). However, as demonstrated earlier, his statement indicated that the Thai institution he previously worked at was not like his current position due to the presence of a non-Thai management staff. Another faculty member indicated that some problems with management are universal, although accepting that “some are particularly Thai” (X personal interview two, 2007, p. 3).

Organizational responsibility to socialize and train new members. During the OAS processes described by the teachers, training in regards to teaching EFL courses and/or socialization and training efforts from the educational institutions were not commonly cited as information sought by the teachers. This might be due to the TEFL courses the teachers took and/or prior experiences they had, the fact that they were motivated by more than an EFL career, or a complete lack of preparation on the part of the organizations. The latter might indeed be the case, but there is a belief among the teachers that the Thai institutional administrators might have felt the teachers were already properly trained and additional training was unnecessary. A teacher might also be the only foreign teacher at a particular institution rendering a proper training and socialization program irrelevant.

In describing his institution’s training efforts, participant B said, “I was an experienced teacher/trainer. I was introduced to the person I was replacing, given a brief tour of the place and then left to my own devices for three weeks before I had to conduct my first course” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 3). One participant indicated that the school he went to work for knew that he had a TEFL certificate and he thought they did not feel there was a need to train him because of this. Specifically, he said, “I imagine
that the management remained aware that I already had a couple of years under my belt (in Korea) and therefore dealt more directly with their ‘newbie’ teachers and their needs” (C personal interview, 2007, p. 3).

Echoing this sentiment, another participant said many Thai educational institution administrators believed that most of the EFL teachers they hired “were either qualified or experienced enough to do the job” (E personal interview, 2007, p. 2) and then went on to list the information provided to him during training; “info on payment, visa regulations and expectations, holidays, sick leave etc” (E personal interview, 2007, p. 2). Qualifications were specifically cited by participant CC who said “I already had a teaching qualification which I had obtained in the UK – CELTA. Other than this it was pretty much on your own” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 4) and went on to say this first job was at a language school which he believed “in general these places are not known for being the most supportive” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 4). At his current institution, however, he was “luck[y] to get a 3 day orientation of the school…have regular staff meetings, monthly, and we have various training sessions. It is organized and we have input into what we do as opposed to the other place which was Thai managed” (CC personal interview one, 2007, p. 5), referring back to the perceptions held by some of mis-management by Thai educators described earlier.

Another teacher, who was a tutor rather than a teacher at a school, found similar circumstances to those of the traditional classroom EFL teachers. He received no training “as they assumed that I knew what I was doing because I had a shiny, new TEFL certificate” (Y personal interview one, 2007, p. 4). However, he fared a little better than
others as his “boss also provided any material for me without me having to resort to begging” (Y personal information one, 2007, p. 4). Privileging of previous experience was also cited by participant D who said he had taught elementary school kids for over a year before coming to Thailand and had done training before. He believed, “teaching wasn’t that new to me when I came [to Thailand]” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 3).

While active socialization from an organization is an assumption found in the organizational socialization literature, it is important to remember that not all organizational members want to spend time socializing new members (Gosset, 2002; Wiens-Tuers & Hill, 2002; Zabusky & Barley, 1997). This lack of willingness to perform socialization processes can become even more important when the new members are of the part-time and/or I/RGR varieties. These teachers might not stay long enough for an organization to recover the outlays in time, money, and effort (Jablin, 1987). This form of active non-socialization, or at least partial/unofficial socialization, is at issue in this case. In the absence of socialization efforts, new organizational members will find their own ways of obtaining information, especially prior to joining an organization. Distance, time, and perhaps other difficulties such as language could preclude active information seeking by individuals from organizational members (e.g., supervisor, dean, or other employees).

Turning to virtual communities can be a way of filling the information and socialization vacuum. The teachers did not indicate that they sought such information, but any questioning of the virtual community members about organizational life would, consciously or not, act in a manner that is consistent with socialization or training. These
statements indicated, first, a possible explanation as to why the organizational socialization practices are what they are for the EFL teachers in Thailand. This is important because organizational members and their reasons for training or not training the teachers were not explored as part of this study.

Finally, after reflecting on the teachers’ comments, I wondered if, in certain instances, the fact that the EFL teacher was the only foreign teacher in the program might also play a role in the organization’s choice to provide socialization and training for a teacher. For example, one teacher was the only non-Thai teacher at his school and was left to develop his courses on his own with his boss only telling him “[he] must love the students … I can’t recall more advice although they eventually provided me with some nearly worthless curricula” (Q personal interview, 2007, p. 3).

In sum, the teachers generally characterized their socialization and training experiences with Thai educational institutions as inconsistent to non-existent. However, this does not mean that the teachers received no socialization or training upon taking their teaching positions. Rather, they indicated that socialization and training took place, to some extent, even if it occurred during their TEFL certification courses with the pre-organization organizations (PROOs). While the experiences of the TEFL training process were not explicitly described in this study, these organizations offer another level of complexity in the overall socialization and training of EFL teachers in Thailand. However, when the individual teachers took their first teaching positions, it is clear that socialization and training by Thai educational institutions were not always in place nor adequate in scope and content to ease the transition into the working world of Thailand.
**Individual-within-Community**

The interviews with the EFL teachers provided information that spoke directly to the research questions used in this study. However, as the interviews progressed, I noticed a trend among the different descriptions of OAS processes. As part of their discussion as to how they utilized the virtual communities for OAS and information-seeking purposes, the teachers also discussed a tension between being an individual, in some cases with significant teaching experience prior to moving to Thailand, and the participatory or interpersonal opportunities inherent in virtual community forum areas (community membership). As the teachers visited and utilized the virtual communities to better understand living and working in Thailand, they also began to negotiate their personal comfort with becoming an active member of the community, a member that provides experiences and advice for others at the same time using the experiences and advice from others versus remaining fairly anonymous and passive, yet still using the information they found.

This emerging concept is connected to the needs, wants, and desires an individual has for their life and career in Thailand (which drove the information search) and has a strong potential to be reinforced through the use of virtual communities in individual OAS processes. The information and interpersonal interactions at these communities also developed pre-hire perceptions of organizations, places, careers, and people. For example, if someone was not aware of the sex industry in the country, such as I was not during my information search and early days in the country, the information they found
on some of the virtual communities could affect their perception of both Thailand and themselves.

The information-seeking points determined to be necessary and important by the teachers as part of the development of an OAS process brought the EFL teachers into contact with the virtual communities. The EFL-related virtual communities vary by the level of social interaction offered to community members and non-members alike. The interactions with community members offer an opportunity to provide information to the EFL teachers during the OAS process. More often than not, community members acted as resources to answer direct questions from a new individual as well as questions asked about the individual members as illustrated earlier in the chapter. At the very least, this interaction is a space where community members can challenge or support information and beliefs about Thailand focused on the OAS process and co-construct what life and work is like in the country. In any case, as we are constantly shifting among communities (Mafessoli, 1996), there must be a negotiation the tension between being an individual and a member of a community. This individual-within-community notion is the result of a set of themes that emerged from the interviews about the social interactions of the teachers with the virtual community members: experiencing the sites, trust, disclosure, and coping, and time factors.

**Experiencing the Sites**

OAS processes that sought information about living and working in Thailand converged at the forum areas of the virtual communities. While previous sections discussed the types of OAS processes the teachers’ used and the types of information
they sought from the communities, this section examines the related issue of how the teachers used the virtual communities as places of social interaction during (and many times after) the OAS processes. Whether the teachers discussed work-related issues or just light-hearted debates about sport, the forum areas at the virtual communities provided social experiences for community members. Much like post-hire social encounters among colleagues in traditional, offline socialization contexts and processes, the teachers could interact with each other at the virtual communities and get to know each other on a personal level. During these discussions, individuals made choices as to the extent he or she would participate in a particular discussion or if they would be content to merely read the postings.

**Teacher participation in the forum areas.** If a teacher chose to participate in a forum discussion, they also chose their level of participation which then determined their experience with the community. During the interviews, the teachers would describe their views about forum participation and what these interactions did (or did not) do for them. Not only do these comments shed light upon an individual’s viewpoint towards the forum areas or virtual communities, but the comments also expand upon the information points that the teachers visited the virtual communities to learn more about (and why they were crucial to begin with) as well as how the forum areas fit into individual OAS processes. For example one teacher said:

I have used and use the forum areas. They are a good aea to look at as there is lots of good information, although it is often buried amongst tons of shit (Sorry for the language). Forums are better than static information as they are more of a
living document, so as to speak, where as static information can quickly become
dated. (CC personal interview one, 2007, p. 2)

By static information, he is referring to the information posted by the virtual community
administrators at places such as “living in Thailand” sections on Ajarn.com or
Stickmanbangkok.com. Another teacher said, “by using the forums socially, I man to go
on there and join in the less serious postings, or to play the various forum games ‘add a
word’ etc.” (I personal interview one, 2007, p. 4).

Emotional release was also cited as a part of the virtual community experience.
“The culture here [Thailand] is complete different to the west. As open minded as you
try to be sometimes you can have steam coming out your ears. I really needed to
differentiate what was TIT [This is Thailand] and what was idiotic management at my
school” (X personal interview one, 2007, p. 4). The use of TIT is common among long
term residents of the country. This is Thailand (TIT) is a phrase I was accustomed to
hearing in Thailand and generally refers to those times when a person living in the
country cannot understand why something is done as it is being done and must simply
accept it. It is a cross-cultural notion, but not necessarily one born out of intolerance;
usually it emerges from confusion, lack of time or ability for thoughtful reflection, and/or
an inability to grasp the cultural implications of the moment. Generally, the TIT
encounters become normalized and the phrase turns to that’s the way it is rather than
that’s not the way it should be.

The virtual communities offer “lots of different experiences and points of
view” (CC personal interview one, 2007, p. 6), which highlights the importance of individual agency and choice and the ways in which perceptions are developed, reinforced, or altered through interactions on forum areas. “We are all aliens in a very foreign environment. It is a big help to be able to swap notes with people of similar backgrounds (immature idiots aside). Some of the advice … published has been very important, especially on visas and work permits” (X personal interview one, 2007, p. 4). Participant Q (2007) is an example of this because he believed his perception of Thailand and/or EFL teaching must have been altered through virtual community interactions because he continued to search for TEFL courses and job openings in the country after his first encounter with the idea of EFL teaching. Due to the differences of tutoring students versus EFL teaching, namely the solitary experience of being the only tutor, he indicated, “I might have gone crazy without the virtual communities, If I frequented pubs, I might have found some heavy drinkers in the Chiang Mai taverns, but that’s not my lifestyle” (personal interview, 2007, p. 6). While not necessarily thinking of the sites as virtual communities, the participants did exhibit loyalty to the sites they used. This was do to a variety of reasons including not liking forum area members on one site as compared to another (e.g., Thaivisa.com versus Ajarn.com) (e.g., FF, 2007), the relevancy of information at a virtual community to personal interests (e.g., D, 2007; H, 2007; X, 2007), or the “ability to discuss things like adults (or rather like children)” (Y personal interview, 2007, p. 6).

Despite the general positive interactions and feelings toward forum area interactions, the sociality of the forum areas left much to be desired by some. One
participant exhibited particularly strong feelings towards the users of forum areas and
downplayed their importance as a social function in socialization. His comments
indicated the tension a teacher can experience between being an individual and an
individual-within-community that occurs in the virtual community forum areas. He said:

  Thailand is a breeding ground for ‘bar-stool pundits’, if that makes sense. … To
  be honest I distrust most people in Thailand full stop. And, I’ve found that most
  people considered experts in fact aren’t. …I do not normally even give advice
  online, I’d probably just ignore it. (FF personal interview two, 2007, p. 2)

At the end of an interview session, one participant summed up his feelings about forum
areas, saying they are not useful because of “the whole idea of it. The idea that it’s us
against them and that all the schools are bad and al the teachers are good. Again, in
principle it’s a good resources but the problem with the internet and forums is that
anyone can post a lie or negative opinion an it is automatically give credit” (FF personal
interview one, 2007, p. 4).

Interestingly, when I visited the virtual communities and posted a thread seeking
assistance with this study, many community members were welcoming and curious.
However, at one community in particular, a few members took the opportunity to
question aspects of my sanity. Aside from asking to get paid for their participation, some
community members believed that my research was impractical because “[it] seems
pretty pointless really when there could be so many things about education in Thailand
that could be beneficial to the community at large” (Klongmaster post, 2007) or that I
should engage the ladies of the night in order to calm myself and not be as uptight as I
appeared to them. After making another post to address and assuage the concerns of the community members, Klongmaster returned and approved of my thoughts, saying “thanks for taking the time to answer sensibly … gives a better picture of your endeavours” (Klongmaster post two, 2007). Further negative postings did not occur after this.

Despite declarations of the negativity that can be found in the forum areas, some participants did not hold such animosity towards online community members, but still chose to not utilize the social aspects of the forum because of personal preferences. One example from participant S suggested that he preferred the solitary life of an EFL teacher, saying, “I’m just not like that … I don’t socialize much on any level … I am a private sort of guy, not quite antisocial” (personal interview two, 2007, p. 7). He indicated later in the interview that he did post at other, non-EFL related virtual communities despite not utilizing the EFL-related forum areas. The EFL teacher U, who was in the midst of training for her TEFL certificate for most of the interview period, spoke with many people offline for advice and information, including people who visited the country as tourists. She indicated that she was not interested in posting in forum areas, but said that “im sure I will once im there [Thailand]” (U personal interview two, 2007, p. 5).

These comments highlight the communal nature of the EFL sites as experienced by the teachers as well as raising important points about how and why the sites are used. The teachers’ descriptions of social life in the communities reflect the real and perceived (inter-/intra-)cultural aspects of this form of social life. They also raise important issues of trust and disclosure.
Trust, Disclosure, and Coping

As the teachers experienced the sites, they made decisions regarding the extent to which they would become involved in the community. Earlier in the individual OAS processes, a teacher determined their level of proactivity in terms of the information search. When interacting with virtual community members, a teacher would once again determine the extent to which they would be proactive (active) and participate in the communities, generally through the forum areas that were offered by all of the virtual communities except for Stickmangbangkok.com which only offers to post submitted reader/community member narratives. This activity is captured in the theme of trust, disclosure, and coping.

The virtual communities function somewhat differently than their offline organizational counterparts due to the anonymity offered by the forum areas, but consistent users developed a personality or identity through personal disclosures in their postings. During the interviews, I raised the issues of trust and disclosure with the teachers. The issue of coping was also raised, but not by me and not using that particular word. Rather coping was raised by a participant using the phrases social place and safety net to describe the use of coping in the forum areas for coping. These three areas are important to the OAS process because the extent to which an individual interacts with a virtual community and its members can determine what they learn from the community. Further, if an individual sought accurate information on a topic, for example good houses for rent in the Nawamin area of Bangkok, then they must be able to interact with
community members in a way that allows them to both share and disclose information about themselves and trust the information they are receiving from others.

**Virtual community social interaction compared with post-hire social interactions.** The social interactions among virtual community members are similar to that of the interactions between organizational newcomers and existing members in the second stage of socialization. Ideally, the two groups would share personal narratives and experiences with each other in an effort to learn more about each other and share information about expectations and organizational life. Personal levels of trust, disclosure, and coping are as important in the virtual interactions as they are in the offline, post-hire context. If these interactions do not take place or are inconsistently found in post-hire situations at the Thai educational institutions, and the comments made about socialization and training indicate this is the case, then the social aspects of the virtual communities have a strong potential to take the place (or at least augment) the type of social interaction commonly found in post-hire situations. At the same time the communities function as an OAS, pre-hire information-seeking and perspective forming mechanism.

If we return to the traditional concept of a stage model of socialization, what the teachers experienced in their virtual community interactions resembles occurrences in stages two and three of the models. This would be especially true for those teachers who had little social contact with other foreign teachers (and Thai faculty members and staff). Over time, stages two and three were often the focus of studies that explore questions as to how individuals and organizations interact in the post-hire processes (e.g., Allen, 2006;
Comer, 1991; Louis, 1980). Learning, such as what an EFL teacher is or does, takes place in both the second and third stages, where a new member learns more about an organization (Ashford, 1986; Callister, Kramer, & Turban, 1999; Finkelstein, Kulas, & Dagas, 2003; Jablin, 1987). Organizational members and institutional policies socialize new entrants into the organization by utilizing a number of different methods (Kim, Cable, Kim, 2005; McMillan-Capehart, 2004; Nazir, 2005; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) and tactics to address issues such as turnover and information-seeking (Allen, 2006; Carr, Pearson, Vest, & Boyar, 2006; Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2002; Saks & Ashforth, 1997). In addition, there are topics that involve or influence the socialization process such as individual socialization knowledge (Chao, O’Leary-Kelley, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994), job standardization (Hsiung & Hsieh, 2003), memorable messages (Barge & Schlueter, 2004), and teams (Chen, 2005).

**Extent of social exchanges and interaction at the virtual communities.**

Generally, when engaging in the forum areas, the EFL teachers would ask questions of the other members, at least until they felt comfortable providing information to others as shown in the forum exchanges in Appendices E and F. These occurrences are similar to the ways in which newcomers to an organization will seek out information either from organizational sources or organizational members in order to reduce uncertainty (Mignerey, Rubin, & Gorden, 1995), which is “a major feature of newcomers’ organizational entry experience” (Miller & Jablin, 1991, p. 94). Individuals seeking information in this manner were found to utilize different strategies, five of which were described by Miller (1996): overt questions, observation, third-party
questioning, indirect tactics, or testing limits. In the case of the EFL teachers, they were able to ask questions of both individuals at the virtual communities and at their places of employment. However, as some of the teachers indicated, they were the only foreign teacher at the institution making observation and other methods of obtaining information or learning more difficult. In any case, most teachers continued to utilize the virtual communities in the post-hire phase, perhaps as a way of addressing issues they could not at their workplace.

For the EFL teachers, perceptions of EFL teaching and Thailand come into contact with similar and dissimilar viewpoints in the organizational and living contexts. How a teacher reconciles these is part of the process as to whether or not a teacher will trust and utilize information or viewpoint he or she finds at a virtual community or encounters role conflict or negotiation (Jablin, 1987) in terms of who they are as EFL teachers. The social activities of the EFL teachers in virtual communities exhibited similarities to the issues and ideas of previous socialization research from the post-hire stages, specifically issues of trust, disclosure, and coping in addition to the aforementioned information-seeking activities were described.

The issues of trust, coping, and disclosure have been examined in other contexts, but not as often in literature directly related to socialization in pre-hire contexts, especially in virtual situations. Disclosure (Andersen & Guererro, 1998; Petronio, 2002) and trust (Weber, Johnson, & Corrigan, 2004; Yum & Hara, 2006) have been important variables in interpersonal relationship exchanges, generally in terms of emotional support.
A few common places where EFL teachers posted comments and ideas included sections about general life experiences, teaching issues, and areas related to travel, sport, and visa information. One participant indicated that he would “normally post if I see threads giving [teachers] a hard time” (CC personal interview, 2007, p. 4).

Some of the participants were straightforward as to their participation (disclosure) and ability (and/or willingness) to trust information and perspectives at the virtual communities, for example:

I have and do [participate] in the social forums on Ajarn.com. I also am free for anyone to contact me regarding information about working or living in areas that I’ve been. My colleagues and former trainees still drop the occasional email to ask about lifestyle issues, job possibilities and professional development questions. (B personal interview, 2007, p. 4)

One participant reflected the way in which a number of other participants approached the information presented to them and could trust the content. He said, “I would say as long as the person had a normal level of common sense and could tell apart the true info from the bad, the info used … is pretty accurate” (H personal interview one, 2007, p. 4). In another instance, and in response to a question regarding information found on the community sites and the effects it might have on an EFL teacher’s relationship with other organizational members, one teacher believed “there is a lot of negative stuff, it is very easy to take a very defensive attitude from the outset. That is also a dangerous thing to do. You need to have some balance between knowing what some of the problems are, and what some of the positiveies are” (CC personal interview two, 2007, p. 5).
Interestingly, one participant linked emotional well-being with posting activity in that “if a teacher is happy with his job then the chances are he will not post anything on a forum as there are better sources for information and help. The main reason why people post on forums is that they feel strongly (and therefore usually negatively) enough to do so” (FF personal interview one, 2007, p. 3); he continued to say that Thaivisa.com, his preferred site, is no different than other sites in this respect. He also differentiated between the Ajarn.com site and its forum areas on Ajarnforum.net because he felt the management of Ajarn.com does its best “to promote good working conditions for foreign teachers in Thailand. …[but]…the forum (as with most internet forums) whilst set up with the best intentions is just breeding ground for pessimism and negativity” (FF personal interview one, 2007, p. 3).

Another teacher said that he did not reveal too much personal information about himself or his school, but otherwise was candid in his comments, but only about topics he felt he had “something to offer” (X personal interview two, 2007, p. 3). Others appeared willing to help, but were much more guarded in terms of their interactions online and what they disclosed to the community members. “I don’t like to give out info on the net, even small details. Some people can find out who you are and make problems for you if they don’t like you. Most of the advice I give on the net is in regards to visa and immigration. I don’t think I’d ever write a story like on of the ones on stick [Stickmanbangkok.com]” (H Personal interview one, 2007, p. 13). What this teacher is referring to is that at Stickmanbangkok.com, there is a section dedicated to reader submissions of their experiences in Thailand. While these submissions can cover a range
of topics, an individual’s sexual exploits (and their consequences) are often found in these sections (see Pfahl, 2005). H went on to state that he really only contributes to the Thaivisa.com forum.

While selective contribution and disclosure is one issue, a complete lack of trust is another. One teacher, speaking of individuals in Thailand, both offline and online, said:

To be honest I distrust most people in Thailand full stop. And, I’ve found that most people considered experts in fact aren’t. I guess this has worked out well for me though as I suppose I’m an ‘expert’ now. I do find it amusing that since moving here at the age of 21 I’ve had to give so many men more than twice my age advice on careers/finances/women etc. (FF personal interview one, 2007, p. 2)

I asked him whether or not he provided advice specifically in the forum areas of the virtual communities. He replied, “I don’t normally even give advice online, I’d probably just ignore it” (FF personal interview one, 2007, p. 2).

Despite cautious participation in a particular community, another teacher described a situation where offline trouble was caused by individuals who did not like him in the online world (see Q personal interview, 2007). Relating the actual events of the story would breach my confidentiality agreement with the participants (as well as personal discretion) which prohibited such indiscretions. Suffice it to say that the caution utilized by teachers such as H (and others such as Q) is justified even if the experiences of offline trouble are rare.
Having to walk the balance between truth and fiction made one participant rely more on his offline contacts because “my friends were better in terms of detail because I knew my friends and can make discrepancies between their truth and the actual truth; whereas on websites, one needs a general set of rules when looking for jobs or reading about school/work information” (DD personal interview two, 2007, p. 4). The teacher who was in the TEFL training program said she placed her trust in this organization in general, but did comment that during her information search process, “I also checked out the forums of teachers at daves esl café….but I had to be careful, because a lot of the forums were 2-3 years old” (U personal interview two, 2007, p. 5). One participant waxed philosophic on the topic and articulated a belief that individuals will be able to make up their own minds as to the level of trust and credibility to give the sources of information in the virtual communities, yet also seemed to show that an individual is not immune from the information provided by fellow community members as many of them said they were. He reflected:

There is no objective, philosophical truth about Thai EFL. I spent a career determining truth as [an American government official], and there was no objective evidence, no sworn testimonies with substantiating evidence. My criteria from my prior life were useless. But after decades of work in the real world, I developed an intuitive grasp of what testimony was credible. Once I arrived [in Thailand] and started work, I could smell the bullshit. (Q personal interview one, 2007, p. 4)
Speaking about forum area interactivity as leading to more credible information, participant H did not find this to be the case as “people can write what they want … Stickman was monitoring all the info on his site before it was made public. … So if I want quick accurate info, I will use stickman” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 5).

Caution and balance, then, seem to be the general sentiments towards personal disclosure and trust in the information found on the EFL sites because, as one participant pointed out, “you don’t know if the poster is having a laugh or not” (Z personal interview, 2007, p. 2). This caution and balance is not out of place in organizations where new members must determine the extent to which they will disclose information to their new colleagues (Petronio, 2002). Derlega, Metts, Petronio, and Margulis (1993) placed closeness at the center of their work on disclosure. This study utilized their definition of self-disclosure which they described “as what individuals verbally reveal about themselves to others (including thoughts, feelings, and experiences, plays a major role in close relationships (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, and Margulis, 1993, p. 1). In this case, EFL teachers are entering a new organization (the virtual community) prior to entering a new organization (the Thai educational institution) instigating a dual-cultural encounter and socialization.

Two types of self-disclosure can occur in interpersonal and group settings. First, is personal [self-disclosure], which is what an individual chooses to reveal about themselves, and the second is relational [self-disclosure], which refers to revelations about relationships or interactions with others (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993, p. 5). Often, analysis of these disclosures are verbal in nature and focus on the
messages disclosed and how another person receives these messages (Derlega et al., 1993). CMC contexts do not use verbal messages, but rely on text- or sign-based interactions, although the possibility exists for friendships and other types of relationships to develop, perhaps flourish, as intimacy is achieved through mediated encounters (Hu, Fowler Wood, Smith, & Westbrook, 2004). More recently, however, scholars have begun to focus on the textual and structural aspects of CMC including online communities in order to apply the previous self-disclosure theories in a new context in an effort to understand the significant similarities and differences.

How an individual chooses to disclose information about themselves can determine the nature and extent of relationships with others (e.g., Derlega, et al., 1993; Kammeyer-Mueller & Wanberg, 2003). Not expressly discussed is the lack of willingness to have others bear emotional burdens or act as emotional trashcans due to disclosing issues or feelings about a particular topic.

While different people said they would post in different places within a site’s forum areas, trust in fellow community members was mixed in terms of willingness to trust others with disclosed information or trust oneself with providing information to others. The level of trust needed to engage the community in a way that allows a person to cope with personal difficulties or helping others with theirs is also closely related to whether or not a sense of community and trust is a part of the community experience. Advice provided to help one cope most likely has to be seen as trustworthy before it can be accepted and utilized.
The issues of post-hire proactivity as well as those of trust, disclosure, and coping are somewhat similar to online exchanges found at virtual communities related to health care issues. Virtual communities and the roles they play in the dissemination of health information and the support their members provide on health-related issues has become an important area of both computer-mediated and health-related scholarship since the explosion of the internet in the late 1990s (Borberg, Gustafson, Hawkins, Chien-Lung, Bicker, Pingree, & Berhe, 1995; Braithwaite, Waldron, & Finn, 1999; Hardey, 1999; Hughes, 1998; Jones, 1998; LaCoursiere, 2001; Pitts 2004; Winefield, 2006; Wright, 2002).

Living in Thailand can be an emotional experience. The trust, disclosure, and coping are necessary because of man factors including link to offline social opportunities or social networks. As participant D said, “maybe it’s some kind of security for us. …provide a place where you can share ideas as well” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 4). During one interview exchange, I asked participant X to comment upon a conversation that took place in our offices at Bangkok University one day. I told him, “A gentleman I worked with in TH once remarked that everyone in TH (farang) is running away from something. The office debated that for a while, but there might be some truth in it.” He replied, “I would not say running away. I think that is wide of the mark. Many TEFLrs stay settle down and lead stable lives. Fugitives keep running” (X personal interview, 2007, p. 4). Some participants noted that the forum areas offered them support when they (and other members) had difficulties, for example, participant D explained that he “visited a member in jail today that was arrested a week
ago here in Hat Yai, and so on” based upon a sense of community and concern for each other (personal interview two, 2007, p. 8). The emotional rollercoaster that is put in motion by moving to Thailand and beginning a new career can become difficult to handle. In the absence of a social or family network, the virtual communities can become a place to turn for support. This non-organizational interaction and socialization is widely examined, although Fedor, Buckley, and Davis (1997) leave the door open for additional non-organizational socialization interactions or processes.

The intersection between the EFL teachers’ use of virtual communities and health communities is at the point where the teachers use the virtual communities to cope with the transition to another country/profession by seeking out others in the virtual world. For example, participant CC was of the mind that “the majority of members [of the virtual communities] are expats then it gives you a bit more of an idea of things from an expat point of view. It also makes you realise you are not here on your own” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 3). Generally, he felt the social environment was positive, but did discuss the occasional trolls, individuals who purposely seek arguments and confrontation online, who “use the internet to feed their own feelings of self importance” (CC personal interview one, 2007, p. 3). Participant Y believed, “Sometimes you just need to interact with people who are similarly minded especially if you spend most of the day with Thais, kids or in my case Koreans. …When I first started working in Thailand I did use the teaching part of the Ajarn [Ajarn.com] forum, but I quickly realized that my type of work [one-on-one tutoring] wasn’t particularly compatible with those working in a classroom environment” (personal interview two, 2007, p. 6). He indicated that he
spends more time on Teakdoor.com, a site favoring non-EFL teachers (e.g., expatriates) in Thailand, versus places such as Ajarn.com as he wanted to move away from teaching and into other opportunities in the country.

In speaking of the forum areas at Ajarn.com, participant X mentioned he witnessed the community of teachers rallying around each other in times of need, saying, “the response when postes need is quite surprising to me and shows the camaraderie that the forum creates” (personal interview two, 2007, p. 3). This camaraderie is also illustrated by the earlier quote by a participant who visited a community member in jail (D personal interview one, 2007). Participant I linked the offline and online worlds by saying that the EFL teachers were a part of a community of foreigners in Thailand “all sharing a similar experience working within the Thai working environment. Sometimes, they are the only [foreigner] in the school and sometimes in the whole town” (personal interview one, 2007, p. 3). The interactions among these teachers “provide a sources of information, and has a socializing function” (D personal interview one, 2007, p. 4).

However, in describing Thaivisa.com to me, but also hinting at a generalization to other sites, one teacher indicated that these communities had or had the potential to have:

A pecking order. It can be quite difficult for newbie to express points of view or ask questions for fear of being ridiculed. There are lots of brave people online although I doubt very much that they are as clever when dealing with someone face to face. (CC personal interview two, 2007, p. 2)

My own examination of the EFL-related virtual communities revealed a newbie section (although the popular Thaivisa.com did not have one) and these sections expressly forbid
attacks on new posters, although this did occur while I monitored the sites during the interview process. However, in general, the community members I observed appeared helpful and friendly towards each other and new members, if a little too sarcastic towards the new members as illustrated by the examples provided in Appendices E and F.

While the participants did not always explicitly use the word community to describe the sites, evidence of this existed in descriptions of the forum areas and the fact they trusted the sites enough to post on them, disclosing personal information to some extent. As these individuals participated in forum interactions, trust, disclosure, and coping are enacted at the moment of interaction between an individual and the community members. The virtual communities have the potential to function as places for EFL teachers to reduce uncertainty or at least expect to reduce uncertainty. If little training or socialization is provided, further if organizational contact is insufficient, the virtual communities, vis a vis the community members and social exchanges, become the socializing mechanisms and training provider. The traditional seeking of information from co-workers, etc., appears, in whole or in part, to be done at the virtual community.

The community aspects of the virtual communities has been in evidence throughout much of the discussion of trust, disclosure, coping, and social interactions on the forum areas, the individual remains quite evident within this context. How each teacher experienced the virtual communities is due in large part to their preferences for social interactions and the information they wish to learn from (and share with) the community members. These interactions relate back to the development of an OAS process because once a teacher begins to interact socially at a community, their beliefs
about the role of the communities in their OAS process and/or the information they original thought important can change. Time spent in the virtual communities was stated by the teachers as being an important part of the community experience. The theme time factors captures the essence of the way temporal issues affect OAS processes and the development of an EFL teacher.

**Time Factors**

In addition to how a teacher experiences the virtual communities and how he or she addresses his or her individual levels of trust, disclosure, and coping, the length of time an individual spent at a community (e.g., occasional visits, contributing community member) was cited as important to social interactions within the virtual communities. Time factors is a theme derived from the different perspectives on time and the level of activity an individual teacher exhibits in virtual community interactions.

**Time and involvement.** The teachers made connections between length of time, level of involvement, and understanding of what they were experiencing. For example, one participant said he “posted more and more I started to get more into the general banter and ‘piss-taking’ as I would (I am English after all) is a formal face-to-face environment” (Y personal interview two, 2007, p. 5). He went on to describe how his involvement with the community blended into offline meeting with members, something that three other participants also indicated. However, he also noted, like others before him, that there were some people who let their egos dictate their relationships and postings and noted that “I have also noticed that forum life can take over from real life to
a fairly large extent, to the point where some people (myself included) get annoyed if they spend too long offline” (Y personal interview two, 2007, p. 5). The latter point can be an important indicator of the potential effects the virtual communities can have on members and their perspectives on life and work in Thailand, especially in the post-hire phase when primary social interactions can be online rather than off.

**Time and self-expression.** In addition, self-expression and contributions became easier over time for some of the teachers. One participant likened the forum interactions to having a “delayed chat [with a] stranger at a pub” (H personal interview one, 2007, p. 8). He believed that “with Thaivisa and Ajarn, you can express your own opinions and contribute to the conversations, so it is deffinently more social” (H personal interview one, 2007, p. 5). However, he also mentioned that it is possible for visits to the forum areas to be detrimental to potential/new teachers, but “that all depends on the persons attitude who is reading the info” (H personal interview one, 2007, p. 8). In discussing the many hours spent on Thaivisa.com and TEFLwatch.org, one teacher said that even when he does not post on the sites, he still has contact with the members. This “keeps me in touch and gives me a chance to express myself” (Q personal interview one, 2007, p. 4). The comments related by participants D and Q hint at the potential for a solitary or removed life of an EFL teacher, especially for an individual who tutors students rather than is employed as a classroom teacher. Yet the teachers’ comments help to explain why many might turn to the virtual communities, especially post-arrival, for social contact.
In sum, this chapter examined the various themes that emerged from the interviews with the EFL teachers. The first research question sought to understand how the EFL teachers used virtual communities in their OAS processes. The responses from the teachers were organized into the following themes: developing a process, how to live abroad, and how to work abroad. These categories captured the ways in which different EFL teachers approached the OAS process and the different information-seeking points each had at the beginning of their search.

The second research question explored the quality and extent of the match between what an individual learned from the virtual communities and the socialization processes used by the organizations for which they will be working in Thailand. The responses indicated two themes, the (mis)match and a (lack of) socialization and training in which the teachers were left to their own devices.

Finally, while the interviews with the EFL teachers provided information that spoke directly to the research questions used in this study, a third element emerged. As part of their discussion as to how they utilized the virtual communities for OAS and information-seeking purposes, also articulated a tension between being an individual, in some cases with significant teaching experience prior to moving to Thailand, and the participatory opportunities inherent in virtual community forum areas. The individual-with-community notion is the result of a set of ancillary themes that emerged from the interviews about the social interactions of the teachers with the virtual community members: experiencing the sites, trust, disclosure, and coping, and time factors. The next chapter will provide implications and conclusions drawn from a careful examination of
the themes addressing the two research questions and the ancillary theme that emerged from the interviews.
CHAPTER 4

Discussion

The themes described in Chapter 3 addressed the two research questions of this study and provided a glimpse into the OAS processes of EFL teachers in Thailand. First, the themes illustrated the different ways virtual communities were utilized by EFL teachers in Thailand as part of their OAS process. Second, the themes highlighted the experiences of the teachers when their pre-hire OAS process encountered post-hire events in Thai educational institutions. The information provided by the teachers built a foundation for a better understanding of OAS processes of a group of EFL teachers in Thailand. The outcomes of their OAS processes and the fit (or lack of fit) between the teachers’ expectations and the socialization and training efforts by educational institutions in Thailand were examined.

The themes have broader implications for the use of virtual communities in the OAS process for EFL teachers in Thailand (and beyond). This section will examine how the teachers’ descriptions of their OAS processes gave rise to three different implications regarding the use of virtual communities during the OAS process. First, the data used to answer the research question 1 about how the EFL teachers use the EFL-related virtual communities illustrated the need to re-conceptualize the traditional views of realistic job previews (RJP) and to examine how conscious an individual is towards a socialization process and realistic job previews. Second, research question 2 provided data that showed the lack of socialization and training by the Thai educational institutions and the continued use of the virtual communities by teachers in post-hire contexts. Both of these
instances add further support for re-conceptualizations of socialization process linearity as the EFL teachers utilized the virtual communities to augment or replace many of the social interactions found (or expected) in the post-hire context. Finally, beyond the research questions, the study found career development and vocational anticipatory socialization process issues raised by virtual community interactions.

**Research Question 1**

Research Question 1: How do EFL faculty members utilize third party virtual community websites as an organizational anticipatory socialization medium?

This question sought to understand how the EFL teachers used virtual communities in their OAS processes. Specifically, the interview questions examined what information the EFL teachers sought and found from the virtual communities, learned how they accomplished the task of finding the information (the OAS process), and better understood how they viewed their individual OAS processes. The purpose of exploring such a question was, first, to obtain a better understanding of how the EFL teachers used these virtual communities as part of the OAS process and second, to contextualize their pre-hire experiences to better understand the post-hire context.

The EFL teachers utilized the virtual communities to find and, in certain cases, to exchange information with others during the OAS process. The teachers developed different OAS processes, outlined in the theme developing a process, to seek and find information living and working in Thailand captured in the themes how to live abroad and how to work abroad. While these are distinct themes, there were points that
connected all of them, especially, the living and working abroad searches. Upon examination of the themes, two important aspects of socialization via virtual communities were raised. First, there is a need to re-conceptualize realistic job previews in light of the potential socialization capabilities and effects of the virtual communities. Second, as a result, the ways in which the virtual communities provided information on EFL teaching, accommodation, visas, salaries, et cetera act in way that allows for socialization to occur despite an individual’s consciousness levels of socialization and realistic job previews.

Re-conceptualize Realistic Job Previews

The OAS searches conducted by the EFL teachers were indicative of a lack of RJP information provided by Thai educational organizations. While the educational institutions do provide job advertisements and descriptions through sources such as Ajarn.com or possibly through their own websites, information about life in the country, accommodation, entertainment, and other specific points sought by EFL teachers were not presented. Individual teachers used different OAS processes, many utilizing virtual communities in combination with other means, as a way of replacing or augmenting existing information provided by the Thai educational institutions. According to the EFL teachers, they examined the various virtual communities related to EFL teaching and life in Thailand, including information from interpersonal interactions with community members via forum areas, to learn more about the realities of life and EFL work in Thailand. The result of the teachers utilizing the virtual communities in this manner is the transformation of the EFL-related virtual communities from mere information sources to a form of RJP. The following sections will examine historical RJP, EFL RJP in
Thailand, the lack of control by the Thai educational institutions over these RJs, and, finally, the re-conceptualization of the RJP.

**Historical RJs.** RJs have been an important way for the organization to provide information to a potential newcomer. Kupperschmidt (2002) defined the RJP as “a balanced presentation of all relevant (positive, neutral, and negative) and favorable and unfavorable job-related information” (p. 280). Breaugh (1983) stated, the RJP is an “accurate description of the job” (p. 612). The RJP itself has traditionally taken the form of a written job description provided to an individual that explains “both positive and negative job aspects as faithfully as possible” (Avner, Guastello, & Aderman, 1982, p. 103). More recently, videos, interpersonal interactions with employees, and a variety of textual materials have been added to the job description (Knouse & Strutton, 1999; Thralls, 1992).

Information about the organization and a particular job position is the cornerstone of RJP efforts. Holcombe Ehrhart and Ziegert (2005) argued that the “richness of the information communicated to applicants could influence the accuracy of individuals’ perceptions of environment characteristics” (p. 911). Of course, for the information to be perceived as accurate, it must be accurate and not just framed to present the organization in a favorable manner (Cable, Aiman-Smith, & Edwards, 2000).

In addition to providing information on the job activities an individual would be responsible for, Griffith and Hom (2001) believed “previewing a job makes their [a potential/actual new hire] entry expectations more accurate and thereby lowers the chances that those expectations will be disconfirmed at work” (p. 47). The
disconfirmation Griffith and Hom spoke of can lead to a number of different reactions or outcomes for the new organizational member with turnover being quite important. The concept of a RJP has “generated a great deal of interest since Wanous’ (1973) initial research suggested a strong relationship between RJP and the subsequent reduction of turnover rates” (Fedor, Buckley, & Davis, 1997, p. 211). Studies examining the relationship between RJP and employee turnover (Avner, Guastello, & Aderman, 1982; Breaugh, 1981) were conducted because scholars believed “RJP represents a proven technique for reducing turnover among new employees. Job previews represent comprehensive profiles of a job, describing both its positive and negative features to new hires during employment interviews or orientation” (Griffith & Hom, 2001, p. 47). A great deal of faith was put into RJP to produce a “(1) more optimal self-selection among applicants, and (2) inoculation of entering employees against potentially negative job attributes” (Fedor, Buckley, & Davis, 1997, p. 211). However, despite much of the initial enthusiasm over RJP, the claims of turnover reduction were ultimately inconclusive (Breaugh, 1983; Fedor, Buckley, & Davis, 1997).

Despite the wide-ranging research on RJP, studies into this area conceptualized RJP as primarily organizationally-driven in the sense of being created and utilized to bring new members (e.g., new employees) into the organization. However, the organization might not always be viewed as the most credible source (Fedor, Buckley, & Davis, 1997). Other sources of RJP information, for example discussions with a current organizational member, might be viewed as more credible (Fedor, Buckley, & Davis,
RJP Holcombe Ehrhart and Ziegert (2005) described. The internet offers a means to provide more current information to potential employees than any other medium in the past and the way in which this information is delivered (e.g., a website) might “serve as a signal of other organizational attributes” such as the organization’s level of technological sophistication (Holcombe Ehrhart & Ziegert, 2005, p. 912).

An example of an organizationally-driven, CMC-based RJP can be seen at BellSouth, now a part of AT&T. The BellSouth section of the AT&T website has a human resources section with information for potential hires including several video RJP's. The video RJP's can be viewed by visiting the BellSouth website which can be found at the following address http://www.bellsouth.com/employment/Preview/index.html. Entitled, *Realistic Job Previews*, BellSouth’s online video RJP provides information about the expectations of three career opportunities at BellSouth. Little textual information about the job positions is available, but the upbeat and overwhelmingly positive content of the videos provided a job description and duties, job requirements, and expectations for the type of individuals BellSouth wishes to hire (e.g., dynamic, customer-oriented individuals) for each of the three positions.
The high-quality images and positive nature of the videos coupled with examples of actual employees and daily tasks is an important point of differentiation from mere written job descriptions or company histories located on websites. The online RJP is accessible (to those with appropriate internet connections), can be read or watched repeatedly, and engaged the viewer with both visual and audio. However, a transcript for each of the videos was not available as a back-up in case of technological difficulties with the videos.

Despite the interesting and progressive aspects of CMC-based RJP s such as the BellSouth video RJP, they still adhere to traditional definitions of what an RJP is including the retention of control by the organization. Not surprisingly, the messages are framed to present BellSouth in a positive manner indicating jobs at BellSouth are filled with challenges and rewards. The company consistently reinforces its desire to have highly-motivated, successful individuals join in the BellSouth tradition. The EFL-related virtual communities in this study represent an important departure from this form of RJP as none of them are aligned with a Thai educational organization. While the Thai education institutions, especially private language schools and/or PROOs, might sponsor or advertise on a particular virtual community, they do not control forum content, rules, or management.

**EFL RJP s in Thailand.** As Fedor, Buckley, and Davis (1997) suggested and the teachers described, non-organizational sources can also function in an RJP capacity, providing information on the job and expectations of the new organizational member. The virtual communities examined in this study provided information and experiences
(e.g., forum area exchanges) in ways consistent with organizationally-driven RJP's in
substance, if not style. For example, the teachers described the different information
points they sought in their OAS process; items such as job and salary information,
accommodation, and food as part of their search for how to live and work in Thailand.
While organizationally-driven RJP's can be expected to provide information about a job,
salary, and responsibilities, it is less likely that they would provide cultural information
such as entertainment, food, and travel. Thus, the EFL-related virtual communities
provide RJP information above and beyond what can be or is provided by Thai
educational institutions.

The argument for non-organizationally driven socialization efforts made by
Fedor, Buckley, and Davis (1997) is exemplified by the EFL virtual communities in that
the communities are providing RJP's that have been traditionally conducted by
organizations, all or in part, as EFL teachers turned to the virtual communities as part of
their OAS process. Career websites such as Monster.com or Theladders.com, have
something to offer the information seeker, but do not function at the same level of
community as the EFL-related virtual communities, at least at this point in time. Despite
information accuracy remaining a constant concern for information seekers, whether
online or offline, Fedor, Buckley, and Davis (1997) argued that “information is more
likely to come from employees than from the organization [and their RJP]” (p. 218).
However, in this case, the EFL teachers have little social interaction with the educational
institution members in the pre-hire stage paving the way for virtual communities, and
more specifically the community members, to provide (missing) information. In other words, offering a RJP.

The concept of a virtual community-based RJP and any subsequent socialization and training the virtual community administrators and/or its members offer to potential or new EFL teachers means that control of the socialization process has shifted. When an organizationally-sponsored RJP is provided to an individual, whether at the hiring or post-hire stage (or in the case of BellSouth, at any point in the process), the individual in question would only encounter organizationally-approved socialization (e.g., messages, rules). The EFL teachers who visited the EFL-related virtual communities were (and still are) exposed to more perspectives and messages about living and working in Thailand or life as an EFL teacher than can be found at an RJP provided by a Thai educational institution (e.g., school website or job interview discussion). The messages and perspectives encountered at the virtual communities might be positive or negative, including information and messages that run counter to the messages or goals of the institutions.

No longer are the educational institutions in sole control of the EFL experience in Thailand. Different EFL teachers indicated that their interactions with the virtual communities and community members ranged from active (e.g., forum participation) to passive (e.g., reading information or forum postings without social interaction). Somewhere in the middle lies a host of active/passive activities where information about living and working in Thailand, EFL job opportunities, job descriptions, and TEFL requirements are encountered. Despite the level of participation by an EFL teacher in
community life, he or she engages with a perspective or number of perspectives regarding living and working in Thailand which shapes their OAS process and transforms the virtual community into a form of RJP.

However, this does not mean that EFL teachers rely (or should rely) solely on the virtual communities nor do they believe everything they read, as illustrated in Chapter 3. Rather, the teachers’ comments about social interactions and the ways the teachers utilized the virtual communities as they developed an OAS process indicated a love-hate relationship with the forum areas, including personal usage in the post-hire period. While many of the teachers touted the positive aspects of the sites (e.g., social networks, information about EFL), they also discussed the negative sides as well (e.g., attacking new members, quality of information). What is important here is that by using the virtual communities, the EFL teachers in the past and potential ones in the future will be exposed to multiple levels of socialization or the socializations of cultures. In this case, *cultures* means there is an overlapping of socialization processes regarding EFL teaching as a career, EFL teaching in Thailand, working in Thai organizations, Thai culture/life itself, and the culture of a particular virtual community (e.g., Ajarn.com, Stickmanbangkok.com). The contestation of truth between a teacher’s personal view of Thailand and the views encountered among the virtual community members during forum interactions is as much a part of the socialization process as basic information on accommodation, visas, and entertainment.

From acceptance to rejection, there is a range of responses to these multiple socializations. These responses can include a belief that the information provided at the
virtual communities needs to be taken with caution (despite its usefulness), the decision to leave Thailand or not come at all, changing one’s mind about beginning an EFL career, or remaining in the country, but attempting to minimize contact with other foreigners or other perceived negative aspects of living and working in Thailand. All of these responses were discussed in one way or another by the teachers as decisions they faced themselves or witnessed in friends and colleagues.

The higher order motivations for moving to Thailand or levels of virtual community usage given by the teachers indicated that whatever they feel/felt about EFL teaching, they were satisfied enough to remain in the country and found the virtual communities useful enough to continue to use them after they were hired. The virtual community as a RJP did not deter them from going to Thailand; the ways in which this preview was conducted was satisfactory for them (i.e., having met their goals). In some cases, this might mean more of a compromise or satisficing (Feldman, 1988) meaning the teachers found the information to be adequate for their purposes.

**Lack of control by the Thai educational institutions.** The lack of control exercised by Thai educational institutions over the virtual communities is important to understanding the purpose, content, substance, and freedom exercised by the virtual community administrators and community members. The lack of educational institutions in the virtual communities might work to encourage greater openness and information-sharing among teachers. If this is the case, then the RJP provided by any of the virtual communities is as real as possible. For example, if the community members of Stickmangbangkok.com view their portrayal of Thailand and EFL teaching as accurate
the same extent the members of Ajarn.com see their portrayal as accurate (Schiappa, 2003) even if it might not conform to the virtual communities’ administration’s view. Since this study did not include Thai educational institutional members (e.g., heads of English departments or language programs), it is uncertain as to the extent to which they are aware of the forum areas, virtual communities, or the potential for multiple socializations and RJP's. Thus, it is difficult accurately discuss the extent to which or reasons why organizational members would or would not make the forum areas and virtual communities part of their organization’s socialization plan. In an effort to discover the extent of the Thai educational institutions knowledge or use of the virtual communities, I contacted four teachers who were deeply involved in virtual community life to see what their thoughts were, especially since some of them had experience as forum administrators or held administrative positions in Thai organizations. Two individuals replied. One did not know of any monitoring or other form of engagement with the virtual community by Thai educational institutional members. The other teacher did provide some insight into this situation. He said that schools did monitor the virtual communities and:

It is usually done by word of mouth, etc. Some school even have a clause in the contract that says if you are caught looking at those forums or loooking for another job whilst employed, you will receive a big fine. I think one school, I forget the name but it is on one of the forums, fines teachers 50,000 THB [33.4 baht per US$1 as of 6 December 2007] for giving a phone number to a student, 100,000THB for having a student go to their home, and 200,000 THB for looking
for another job. I guess they could try to set you up, some how, or create fake jobs that people would apply for. I don't really know how they could get you for sure, but some places do it, not many, but it does happen. (H personal interview three, 2007, p. 1)

Without investigating the Thai educational organization’s administration in detail, the extent of the knowledge of these virtual communities is unknown.

**Re-conceptualization of the RJP.** As this study has shown, the minimal amount or absence of organizational RJP, socialization, and training offered to the EFL teachers means that the virtual communities become an RJP source (multiple RJP if multiple communities are used) in the OAS processes of teachers and teachers-to-be. As the teachers developed their OAS processes, the virtual communities were shown to become more important to the teachers over time. The teachers who went to Thailand in the early days of the internet utilized the virtual communities in their OAS processes far less than the more recent teachers. However, most indicated they used the virtual communities after they were hired and settled in the country.

Hence, there is a need to re-conceptualize previously held notions of what an RJP is or how RJP are conducted. The EFL-related virtual communities illustrate the need for a re-conceptualization of RJP because they highlight the potential each community has to replace or to augment organizationally-driven RJP, socialization, and/or training throughout the career of an EFL teacher as they move from position to position or remain with one organization. This study envisions a re-conceptualization that reflects the inherent *in-betweeness* present in the socialization processes described by the EFL
teachers. Such a situation creates a process of *liminal socialization* given the life experiences of the teachers, the use of virtual communities in their OAS processes (and beyond), and the varying levels of socialization and training each teacher described as having received from their educational institution. The major themes of this study emerged from the experiences and information gathered from the EFL teachers in Thailand, especially the re-conceptualization of RJs, the non-linearity of the socialization process, and the tension teachers feel as they exist as individuals-within-communities, are meant to act as a departure point for additional investigations into the computer-mediated and virtual aspects of socialization and the liminal experiences they can produce.

As foreign workers in Thailand, the teachers are liminal beings to begin with as they carry with them the cultural elements of their past experiences and open themselves up to the new cultural elements of Thailand. Their liminality is made even more apparent by their ability, and in some cases demonstrated willingness, to move within the region or around the world (e.g., I/RGR).

The virtual communities and community members that they encounter and interact with add to this sense of liminality as well. As far as I could tell, no teacher used their actual names in their forum interactions, but rather, they used aliases as is common in such contexts. Their guarded sense of disclosure, yet willingness to share information with (and to receive from) new and potential EFL teachers through the virtual communities does not allow for full personal disclosure, but does empower the teachers to choose which aspects of their lives they wish to include in a discussion. The
disclosure decision-making process adds to the liminal nature of the teachers. In addition, the act of visiting the virtual communities, which are located in cyberspace, to find information on Thailand further places them in between worlds. The community members themselves increase the complexity of the situation by existing in the virtual world and the terrestrial world simultaneously, although they are not always located in Thailand.

Finally, the positions taken by the EFL teachers allow them to be a part of a Thai educational environment, but the limited or lack of socialization and training prevents them from achieving a high degree of integration into their organizations. In addition, the fact that several teachers noted that they actively seek to not engage with other foreign teachers or Thai colleagues adds to the liminal aspects of their lives in Thailand.

Given the state of socialization and training for EFL teachers described by the teachers in this study, it is not surprising that the information, perspectives, and discussions found at the virtual communities provide a form of RJP (and socialization and training) for the teachers. However, the utilization of the virtual communities and their accompanying forum areas during pre-hire and post-hire processes means that the socialization and training is both on-going and ever-changing. The socialization process, then, becomes one that is potentially useful (depending on one’s perspective), but also separate from the individual educational organization (e.g., lack of control over a message) for which the individual works. This makes direct application of knowledge gained through OAS work a complex process when comparing such information to actual events in a teacher’s daily job routine.
All of these liminal aspects of an EFL teacher’s life in Thailand come together to form a liminal socialization experience. The ultimate question of whether or not this is good or bad for an individual’s socialization process was determined by the individual teacher. For the field of organizational socialization, however, the existence of such a situation and the potential for similar ones to emerge in the future, offers an intriguing area of study.

Even though the EFL virtual communities can offer RJs, socialization, and/or training to a new or potential EFL teacher, it does not necessarily mean that the role of the organizational RJP is diminished or rendered ineffective. The call for re-conceptualization does not mean eliminating traditional notions of the RJP from the socialization process, but rather expanding how socialization scholars and practitioners envision, utilize, and evaluate them. The technological enablers that gave rise to the virtual communities have created a new form of liminal socialization (and training and RJs) that can occur at the same or different times as those from the traditional, organizationally-driven ones. Individuals in the EFL world must navigate between the virtual community-based RJP information and the RJP and other information (or lack thereof) provided by the educational institutions in Thailand or other sources (e.g., offline personal contacts).

An interesting aspect of the EFL virtual communities as an RJP source is the fact that the teachers I interviewed did not immediately indicate or perceive the virtual communities to be either an RJP or socializing them into life and work in Thailand. Only when asking how a teacher might improve a generalized EFL-related virtual community
did the participants begin to utilize the language of socialization as they identified points that should be in every virtual community to help new or prospective teachers learn about living and working in Thailand.

**Consciousness Levels of Socialization and Realistic Job Previews**

Not all teachers spoke of the potential for the virtual communities to socialize a new or prospective EFL teacher or initially viewed themselves as being socialized by the communities. An important aspect of the RJP discussion that emerged from this study is whether RJP/socialization from the virtual communities must be consciously understood by the teachers to be called socialization? Unintentional internalization of organizational culture can take place via organizational osmosis, which has been examined in post-hire contexts and occurs when an individual adopts the ideas, values and cultures of the organization (Gibson & Papa, 2000). In this case, the organization in question is less likely to be a Thai educational institution and more likely to be a virtual community. As noted earlier, teachers visiting and using the virtual communities are being exposed to the culture of a particular community (Mafessoli, 1996) as well as views and perspectives about the culture of Thailand, the culture of EFL teaching in Thailand, the culture of EFL teaching in general, and, to varying extents, the cultures of Thai educational institutions and their members.

**Research Question 2**

Research Question 2: After entering an organization, how did the EFL teachers reconcile the organization’s socialization efforts with the information gathered from the virtual communities?
This question explored the nature, quality and extent of the match between what an individual learned from the virtual communities and the socialization processes used by the organizations for which they will be working in Thailand. Given the variety of different English language teaching positions or educational organizations where an EFL teacher might work in Thailand, to the greatest extent possible, it became important to learn more about the types of information the organization provided to a new hire and how that information related to information gathered during the pre-hire OAS process. The teachers indicated that little to no organizational socialization and training information was provided by the Thai education institutions. This formed the basis of the two themes for research question two: the \textit{(mis)match} and left to their own devices. Analysis of these themes showed how the linearity presupposed in socialization models can be inaccurate as OAS information was sought in post-hire contexts. In other words, there is a \textit{re-conceptualization of socialization linearity via virtual community usage}. In addition, the analysis shows how the \textit{virtual community social interaction augments or replaces organizational social interaction}.

\textbf{Re-conceptualization of Socialization Linearity via Virtual Community Usage}

The comments about post-hire socialization and training were decidedly negative in that the Thai educational institutions were not providing much in the way of socialization, training, or other information for a new EFL teacher. Further, the teachers described a lack of interaction with school administrators and other organizational members, especially those teachers who indicated they were the only EFL teachers at a school, yet described how they interacted with the virtual community members. With
such limited information and social interactions, the teachers indicated that they continued to use the virtual communities from the pre-hire stage once they had taken a teaching position or they began using the virtual communities after they took a teaching position even if they did not use the communities much in the past. The latter were the teachers who went to Thailand early in the life of the internet.

Due to this lack of socialization and training as well as opportunities for social interaction, the virtual communities, as part of the OAS process and providers of RJP(s) to potential/new EFL teachers, also blurred the lines of distinction between traditional stage model approaches by retaining OAS features in the post-hire environment. This section begins with a re-examination of the stage process as well as the encounter stage in particular. Second, the teachers’ continuous information-seeking blurs the stage process boundaries.

**Re-examination of the stage process.** The stage process of socialization generally discussed in the socialization literature offered a solid set of guidelines for investigating socialization issues, but it is not perfect. The nature of any stage-based system pre-supposes linearity in socialization behaviors by both individuals seeking to enter an organization and by organizational members seeking to find and socialize new members. To offset this belief in relation to socialization processes, it is important to remember the potential for flexibility and non-linearity in the process (Jablin 1987). Further, Jablin (2000) outlined several concerns about the stage model process. The first concern is that the stages do not necessarily pre-suppose clearly defined beginning and ending points. Second, few studies are longitudinal in nature, generally relying on
collecting data at two or three points in a newcomer’s socialization process. Finally, stage process studies do not adequately address variability in employee behaviors during the process and that “newcomers’ attitudes differ more in degree than kind over time” (Jablin, 2000, p. 759). Hess (1993) also argued that the stage processes of socialization are adequate, but must be re-conceptualized in a nonlinear manner. He suggested that certain events be “grouped in terms of when they rise to prominence” (Hess, 1993, p. 195) and proposed overlapping “clusters of events” (Hess, 1993, p. 196) that retain the labels established in earlier socialization research, but overlap each other and remove the discrete stage-to-stage linearity. I agree with Hess that the socialization process is nonlinear and his event clusters offer an intriguing way of examining the wide variety of organizational socialization processes that can occur, even within a single organization. After examining the OAS processes of the EFL teachers in Thailand, Hess’s clustering processes might be in evident in the continuous socialization offered by the EFL-related virtual communities.

By blurring the line between the point where pre-hire processes end and the post-hire processes begin, the EFL virtual communities and how (and when) they are used by the teachers necessitates a re-conceptualization of what post-hire actually means, especially when, as in the case of the EFL teachers, the act of taking a new teaching position did not necessarily signal the end of the OAS process. Some of the non-linearity of the teachers’ socialization experiences can be attributed to the fact that the EFL teachers are in a new country/culture and cannot be expected to know the details of their new Thai life within a given period of time because of the vast amount of information to
learn. In the early interview questions, a teacher’s first teaching experience was explored. Many of the teachers in the study accepted a teaching position while outside of Thailand and begun teaching immediately upon arrival. In that time, it is unrealistic to expect a teacher to understand Thailand and it would not be unusual for them to continue to use the virtual communities to learn about and compare their actual experiences with the information provided by the community (and provided before arrival).

The act of using the virtual communities in the pre-hire and post-hire periods implies a near continuous socialization as they are constantly learning new cultural (organizational, local, and national or Thai) lessons that reinforce and challenge existing knowledge. Since the pre-hire EFL-related information search on any number of culture(s) was limited to begin with, any expectations and pre-conceived notions of EFL work are quickly altered by the actual experiences of the first job.

*Continuous information-seeking blurs the stage process boundaries.* A broader explanation as to why the teachers continued to use the virtual communities after taking a job lies in part with the continuous information-seeking process as well as the changing nature of their positions with regard to job duties and job knowledge (e.g., how to be a better teacher of English). During traditional post-hire socialization, an individual would be expected to continually experience new aspects of the organization the longer they are with the organization. For example, learning about new policies and procedures or encountering new organizational members they did not meet during the entry and encounter stages. However, as described earlier, the Thai educational institutions did not
always provide RJP(s) or other socialization tactics to new teachers the virtual communities an option for socialization and training.

Further, the lack of social contact with organizational members (including administration members) meant that the RJP(s) provided by the virtual communities, the social exchanges of the forum areas, and the constant comparison of pre-hire/pre-arrival expectations/perspectives with post-hire/post-arrival experiences (e.g., forum exchanges) fill the void and blur the line of demarcation between stages. Although not mentioned in the interviews, the watchdog nature of virtual community (e.g., TEFLwatch.org) means that the social interactions among members can be full of negative commentary or perceptions of working in Thailand. This has the potential to affect the way a teacher views/assesses a school or job advertisement. For example, if an individual EFL teacher had a negative experience at a school, their description of the place could be perceived as the way all teachers were experiencing the place.

With such discussion taking place and the earlier discussion of what types of information the teachers sought about living and working in Thailand, the teachers indicated little to no information search efforts or discussions with virtual community members took place regarding working with or for Thais. In line with their information-seeking points, this might mean the practice of teaching EFL courses or becoming an EFL teacher might not be a primary, or at least limited reason for their information-seeking behaviors. One implication of this lack of inquiry is that the faculty members are not actively seeking information on EFL-related aspects of this move. For teachers with previous teaching experience, the reliance upon their experiences and previously
developed skills precluded deep or active information searches. For others, the EFL career might not be considered difficult enough to seek information on what to do. Still others might have utilized the organizations that provide the TEFL certification and deliver some level of training in EFL-related matters. The perception of EFL teaching (much like living in the country) can be significantly different from the actual events that took place at the first job.

The individuals who did not utilize the virtual communities at the outset of their search process, in all instances but one, began to utilize and continue to utilize the virtual communities after arriving in the country. This can also be considered an example of the non-linear socialization process where the communities play OAS roles in different points in time, functioning as a pre-hire socialization OAS mechanism as well as a post-hire continuous socialization mechanism after a teacher arrives in the country or at his or her job.

As with the pre-hire OAS process, these situations illustrate how the virtual communities allow an individual continued access to a set of information, beliefs, and perspectives that is not static and is accessible to them even in the post-hire stages, especially upon exiting one institution for another. This means that while engaged with the EFL work at a Thai educational institution, the EFL teachers are still in contact with the same pre-hire community that continually offers new information and perspectives about living and working in Thailand. These perspectives can have any number of effects on a teacher including the traditional socialization topics of turnover or organizational exit (Jablin, 2000).
In addition to the interviews, I witnessed discussions among community members at the various forum areas. These discussions included comparisons of individual experiences regarding different issues and such interactions expose individuals to different ideas about what Thailand is. Again, as with the pre-hire stage, whether they agree with or accept such information is a different matter all together. The difficulty of such a situation is understanding what effect this will have on the teacher (from their viewpoint and that of the educational institution) and when such effects would manifest themselves. By continuing to participate in a virtual community after they are hired, an individual EFL teacher can continue to be exposed to socialization information that can act counter to or in conjunction with organizational experiences they have. The contact an EFL teacher has with the virtual communities will continually affect each of the post-hire stages in the socialization process and/or cause an EFL teacher to constantly compare experiences of other community members with his or her own experiences in the organization. The effect on their satisfaction with their position or institution can very greatly because of this continuous exposure and (re)socialization. This continued usage of the virtual communities makes it necessary to re-conceptualize socialization and reinforces the notion of overlapping stages or clusters (Hess, 1993) rather than discrete stages of socialization.

**Virtual Community Social Interaction Augments or Replaces Organizational Social Interaction**

The continual use of virtual communities and the lack of socialization and training also relate to the online and offline social interactions the teachers experiences in
Thailand. The social interactions that took place at the virtual communities among community members (including the teachers’ self-described experiences) is similar to that of organizational newcomers and existing members because the two groups share personal narratives and experiences with each other in an effort to learn more about each other. In doing so, the newcomer to Thailand or EFL teaching learns more about the macro-level organizational culture of the Thai educational institutions and the micro-individual cultures of his or her colleagues despite the potential for each person to be affiliated with different educational institutions. This section examines the social interactions at the virtual communities as a way of overcoming, replacing, or augmenting social interactions in the post-hire period.

The entry and encounter with a virtual community occurs at two points in time. The first takes place in the pre-hire OAS phase when the individual enters and engages with the virtual community seeking information. This information was described by the participants as being wide-ranging, for example, information about visas, housing, cost of living, and entertainment. In this case, the individual is learning about Thai organizations via the experiences of others even if these descriptions do not discuss organizations by name, with an exception being TEFLwatch.org. Here, they also learn more about EFL as a career, Thailand as a country and place to live, and Thais as co-workers and management. Later, he or she will physically enter an organization and the traditional definition of *encounter stage*. However, the teachers have already been presented with an RJP and organizational information via the virtual communities, even if they are not aware of it or it did not mention their institution by name. This can be seen in the
accounts of how Thai organizations provided little to no socialization and training to the new hires.

The lack of formal socialization and training efforts indicated that social aspects of the forum areas found at virtual communities provided social contact more commonly found in post-hire situations. Through this, the forum areas function as an OAS, pre-hire information-seeking and perspective forming mechanism. The descriptions of the social interactions and individual-within-community tensions such as emotional release, social safety nets, and to what extent an individual discloses information are similar to issues that emerge in post-hire socialization among new and existing members.

The teachers in this study indicated that the virtual communities offered a safety net or place of social contact for the teachers. Using the virtual communities in such a way would most certainly carry over into the post-hire process. For those teachers who did not use the virtual communities until after they began working in the country show how, over time, the social aspects of the virtual communities grow in importance and continue to help all teachers who use them obtain a form of continuous OAS information and/or seek the social interaction absent in their organizations such as the case of participant Q was the only foreign teacher at his institution. Still other teachers can (and did) utilize the virtual communities for guidance as to how to they can perform as an EFL teacher, especially when the Thai educational institutions did not provide any (or much) training or material for teaching especially if he or she had never taught before, EFL or otherwise. The social interactions at the virtual communities are similar to offline interactions with other organizational members and can be positive or negative.
An example of the use of the virtual communities as post-hire social interactions replacements or augmentation came from participant E. He used Ajarnforum.net prior to obtaining his first teaching position and like most of the teachers I spoke with, he sought out typical OAS information (e.g., visa information, salary ranges, EFL expectations) as he learned more about EFL teaching in Thailand. He continued to use the site after he was hired, indicating that the site provided him with social opportunities and that he liked the interactivity offered by the forum areas. In fact, he said, “I’ve met quite a few people from the board, worked with a few also and consider many to be friends” (E personal interview, 2007, p. 3). In another example, participant G continued to use Ajarnforum.net after gaining employment as well. He claimed to use the site daily to keep up with EFL related news and “hopefully help and inspire people that what I do works” (G personal interview, 2007, p. 3), but also indicated that he saw many of the negative situations fellow EFL teachers were going through, but was fortunate because in his case, “the nonsense does not luckily apply to my school” (G personal interview, 2007, p. 2). Another teacher claimed that his sanity constantly hangs in the balance unless he is able to access Ajarn.com indicating that the forum areas are used for post-hire social interaction and disclosure of work-related/life-related experiences. Specifically, he said, “Ajarn.com keeps me sane! I have only been in the forum since May but since November of 2005 I have visited the site most days and read almost every article I could find. I knew about TIT [This is Thailand] but knowing and experiencing the details is very different” (X personal interview one, 2007, p. 4).
What these comments showed is that the teachers utilize the virtual communities for social reasons. These reasons vary, but are essentially grounded in the lack of interpersonal exchanges that take place at their educational institution. If one cannot maintain sanity offline, it appears as though it is found online. When searching out these social interactions, the teachers can, for example, share experiences and learn from each other, much like a new teacher would when examining the virtual communities to determine whether or not to move to Thailand (see Appendices E, F).

Participant X’s thoughts suggested that constant exposure to the virtual communities socializes and re-socializes an EFL teacher in regards to living and working in Thailand. He noted that negativity from the virtual communities or forum interaction can prepare a teacher for living and working in the country, although he did not indicate a tipping point whereas such exposure begins to have a detrimental effect on the teacher. On the other hand, he noted that an EFL teacher can draw strength from the experiences of others, even the negative ones, creating an identity separate from the backpackers. From this, I infer he means the tourist backpackers who visit the country and occasionally find employment as EFL teachers to remain in the country after their tourist visa expires. With comments such as these, it is not difficult to see why one’s experiences might seem poor in comparison (in constant comparison) to someone else’s lifestyle description on a forum area (even if it is not true, how can one truly tell?). This situation could be made worse if the teacher visits sites that are described as anti-EFL teacher such as Teakdoor.com.
Thus, the virtual communities were resources for pre-hire OAS information and remained so in the post-hire stages. They were a place of social engagement and a method for continuous learning as to how to be an EFL teacher after taking a teaching position. There is an overlap or interaction between pre-hire and post-hire processes with the virtual communities being the connecting point between the two. The lack of a clear division between the two areas challenges the linear thinking associated with early socialization work. The virtual communities explored in this study might offer another way of explaining the non-linearity or perhaps Hess’ (1993) notion of clusters of events within the socialization process by illustrating such overlapping processes. In either case, the reliance on pre-hire information sources in post-hire contexts renders the concept of lock-step stage socialization less credible. The varying responses to the continuous effects of the virtual communities indicated, first, that the socialization process lasts as long as a person chooses to engage with the virtual communities. This is a critical point given the lack of training, socialization, and general leadership from the Thai educational institutions as indicated earlier by the majority of participants. For the most part, the virtual communities can replace organizationally-driven RJP, socialization, and/or training methods throughout the career of an EFL teacher as they move from position to position or remain with one organization by using the virtual communities. Second, the uncertainty of what the effects of such continuous, non-linear socialization will be and when they will manifest themselves should be an organizational issue as these virtual communities lay outside of the control of most organizations in Thailand.
A teacher’s interaction with virtual communities or community members, in general, did not end with him or her taking a teaching position. Rather, the teachers indicated an initial or continued usage of the sites after they were hired. Specifically, in the post-hire phases, they compared the information they found in the OAS process with the actual experience of working in a Thai organization. The combination of the pre-hire OAS process and post-hire continued use of virtual communities has important implications for the pre-hire period in the organizational socialization process.

Career Development and Vocational Anticipatory Socialization Process Issues Raised by Virtual Community Interactions

The EFL teachers were exposed to RJP via the virtual communities and used the virtual communities in pre-hire and post-hire contexts, blurred the lines of socialization linearity, and utilized the virtual communities in ways that would be traditionally considered post-hire interpersonal exchanges with organizational members in pre-hire and post-hire contexts. This section examines an important area that emerged from the study is how the vast majority of EFL teachers (19 of the 20) did not begin their careers or have a first job as an EFL teacher. Despite different reasons for doing so, all of the participants in the study did become EFL teachers. Their experiences in this career selection/development process raised issues in terms of career development and understanding of EFL teachers in Thailand via virtual communities. First, the nature of the changes that bring about the decision to become an EFL teacher is important in terms of understanding subsequent decisions and OAS actions by the teachers. Second, the dissatisfaction with a teacher’s native culture, whatever that might be, is also an impetus
for the OAS decisions made by the teachers and learning more about the links between the causes of the dissatisfaction and an individual’s choice of OAS steps and virtual community interactions is important to better understanding how and why these individuals react to the socialization as they do.

While this study focused on OAS and information-seeking behaviors, vocational organizational socialization (VOCS) was evident and a part of the OAS process since not one of the EFL teachers interviewed said that EFL teaching was originally a career choice for them. Rather, different circumstances led them to become EFL teachers and each learned of this career through offline and online others (Chapter 2). The multiplicity of views as to what an EFL teacher is or how an EFL teacher should be allows the individual to tailor their career perspective (and developed their OAS process and information-seeking points) to whatever they would like it be and utilize it to accomplish whatever motivators or goals they have for their lives in Thailand.

The near simultaneous development of VOCS and OAS processes is interesting. The move from one country and career to another (Thailand; EFL teaching) among these teachers was less about career aspirations in the traditional sense. The career choices each teacher articulated appear to be a means to an end, although several participants indicated that they took their jobs quite seriously and dedicated themselves to improving the language skills of their students (among other academically-associated goals).

**VOCS, OAS, and Life Changes**

Several of the participants indicated that important, and sometimes dramatic, changes in their lives were the cause of the decision to make such a career and location
change. Of these, two indicated that they were more interested in a solitary or at least less social (in terms of other non-Thais) existence in Thailand. For these teachers, the virtual communities allowed them to remain separate from offline social circles without becoming separate from society. The choice to actively avoid offline social contact, or at least minimal social contact, with other teachers at the outset of their time in Thailand has significant impacts as to the teacher’s choice of living and working in Thailand, entertainment, job types, and other aspects of their OAS processes. While several teachers indicated that their virtual community usage behaviors changed over time and that they became more active after they had been in the country awhile, they still did not actively seek to use the virtual communities in their OAS processes. This change in usage is an important one, especially in terms of understanding an individual’s participation in a virtual community and how they achieve a balance between their individual goals and community membership requirements.

Since many of the participants were new to the idea of teaching EFL courses (at least in broad terms), the descriptions of the ways in which they learned from the virtual communities and the virtual community members placed the virtual community in the role of a generalized mentor in the sense that the virtual community and community members offered career planning and advice, conscious or otherwise, to an individual. In other words, the virtual community and community members socialized or contributed to the socialization of the teachers in terms of life as an EFL teacher, specifically, an EFL teacher in Thailand.
At the same time, this socialization regarding VOCS points was not one that the teachers accepted blindly, but rather kept in perspective by the teachers. This study did not examine or find teachers who changed their mind about their career choice or move to Thailand based upon virtual community usage. However, the teachers seemed to exercise judgment as to the extent of the VOCS socialization efforts they encountered. For example, “people’s negative experiences in Thailand are their negative experiences not mine, and are, in my opinion, largely brought on by themselves…[I] dislike a certain type of foreigner in Thailand. But I wouldn’t say I let that affect my opinion of people in real life” (FF personal interview two, 2007, p. 3). Another teacher, participant D, was straightforward in his assessment of his perceptions, “I can honestly say my views haven’t changed in any way by interacting with the forum” (D personal interview one, 2007, p. 4), although he did admit that he consciously chose not live near many foreign people and he claimed to be the only foreign person in his townhouse complex. He was unclear as to whether this was because of the influence of the virtual community, personal past experiences, or some combination of the two.

Participant S also claimed he was unaffected because, “a forum post would almost always be school specific and probably not necessarily true in the next school OK not always like that, but sometimes. … like [school] and exams – a bitch about that would mean nothing to others” (S personal interview two, 2007, p. 9). After he said this, we discussed unintentional socialization aspects of the virtual communities and how these forum area anecdotes, even if they did not happen directly to a person viewing them, are part of a larger and ever changing picture of EFL life in Thailand and the effects might
not be directly known at that moment, but could manifest themselves later or never at all.

He said, “I suppose – never thought of it like that … but I am still not the best subject
because of my antisocial tendencies hehe” (S personal interview two, 2007, p. 9).

Earlier, Feldman’s (1988) content and process theories were discussed in relation
to why the teachers made the decision to live and work in Thailand. However, the EFL
teacher, having not begun their career with EFL teaching intentions, is affected by other
factors described by Feldman (1988) including \textit{bounded rationality} (especially in terms
of what to expect as a teacher/EFL teacher) and \textit{satisficing} in which “one alternative…is
good enough to be acceptable” (p. 39). The quality of life versus quantity of money
argument of the virtual community returns to the fore and the individual EFL teacher can
turn to the viewpoints expressed by a materials found at a virtual community site or the
members of a virtual community.

To an extent, Feldman’s (1988) notion of \textit{meaningful differentiation} is also at
work in the EFL teachers’ decision-making processes in terms of job choice. Information
provided by individual school or university websites was only examined by a few EFL
teachers (e.g., Q, 2007; S, 2007). Most relied on the members of the virtual communities
(and their own perspectives) for their information regarding the job search process, the
hiring methods in Thailand, et cetera. In doing so, a nuanced view of how schools hire or
what they look for in an EFL teacher, for example, can be lost amidst the noise of what
schools \textit{are} like in discussions on virtual community forum areas (see Schiappa, 2003) in
much the same way \textit{Thailand} or \textit{EFL teacher} can be. In other words, with many
competing discourses about what Thailand \textit{is} makes for a challenging experience when
individual EFL teachers make sense of the information they find in their OAS searches and determine if EFL teaching (especially in Thailand) is the career for them. The lack of information provided by Thai educational organizations coupled with the main sources of information used by EFL teachers in this study (EFL-related virtual communities and guidebooks) indicate that the potential EFL teacher might not adequately understand the face-behind-the-face as it were when it comes to organizational information and the actuality of being an EFL teacher with the accompanying organizational experiences. This point is even more important for those EFL teachers who did not go to Thailand in the pre-hire OAS stage, but obtained their job while in their native land and then went to Thailand (as was my situation).

**VOCS, OAS, and Social Interaction**

The social interactions among community members described by the teachers also play a role in the careers of the EFL teachers. These interactions might explain why so many of the EFL teachers can be classified as I/RGRs. If the teachers are looking, not at the EFL job, but at the lifestyle they desire, then the EFL job becomes a way of obtaining the higher order goal of a particular lifestyle or aspects of the lifestyle (e.g., freedom). This is also related to the person-organization fit as it is based upon the individual’s perception that a certain position will allow them a certain lifestyle. In other words, while the accuracy of the information teachers find within the communities and the actual/perceived person-and-organization match/mismatch manifests itself in the perceptions drawn from the virtual community compared to what an individual actually experiences in the position is important, these actual versus perception experiences also
occur in the pre-hire stage as well. This occurs most frequently in the discussion of what an individual teacher wants from their experience in Thailand versus what the communities tell them they will experience, such as at TEFLwatch.org which acts as a monitoring community for educational institutions around the world (including Thailand) and might be filled with negative commentary about institutions or EFL teaching. A clear example of such a discussion is the quality of life versus the quantity of money (read lifestyle) that a person desires from their time in Thailand.

In sum, the EFL teachers provided an interesting glimpse into their OAS processes and post-hire experiences. Building upon these two areas, three important points emerged. First, the experiences of the teachers calls for a re-conceptualization of what a RJP actually is, when it is conducted, and who conducts it. Second, the use of virtual communities in both the pre-hire and post-hire stages shows that the process of socialization is made up of less distinct stages than has been discussed in the past. Finally, the examination into OAS processes uncovered VOCS processes and issues that were at work simultaneously with the OAS processes in the anticipatory socialization process given the nature of how the EFL teachers arrived at their career choice. The final chapter will examine the limitations of this study. These limitations will be addressed by providing avenues of future research based upon virtual communities and organizational socialization in the world of EFL teaching in Thailand and elsewhere.
CHAPTER 5

Limitations and Future Directions of the Study

This study was exploratory primarily because of the unique nature of the individuals who participated in the study and the context in which they worked. In addition, the decision to neither privilege the literature on socialization nor ignore it was made because the study involved participants who operated between the full-time and contingency workforces, in a combination of online (virtual communities) and offline (Thailand) contexts, and have been historically underrepresented in the literature on organizational socialization. The literature has generally focused on full-time workers, offline contexts, and traditional, corporate organizational members. Thus, a purposely grounded and narrowly focused study was designed and conducted. Despite the careful crafting of the conceptual foundation and research methodology of the study, certain constraints and limitations were unavoidable. Each limitation discussed here is an invitation for future organizational socialization research regarding EFL teaching in Thailand as a context, EFL teaching in general, and other non-EFL organizational socialization situations.

With the goal of building upon these initial points regarding the liminal socialization experienced by these teachers in Thailand, this chapter examines the inherent limitations of the study as well as future research directions that can be undertaken by organizational scholars. First, issues of participant selection will be addressed. Second, the limitations relating to the scope of the study, the demographic composition of the participants, and the inevitable time constraints of the study will be
discussed. Third, the *convergence of VOCS and OAS processes* in this context offer further areas of study. Fourth, while only given cursory treatment in this study, structured and detailed examinations of the *website content* of the EFL-related virtual communities in Thailand (and beyond) offer a more holistic understanding of the how and what the communities do. Fifth, this study concentrated on EFL teachers in Thailand, but the perspective of *educational institutions and other organizations in Thailand* is also important and necessary to better understand the overall OAS (and socialization) process for EFL teachers. Sixth, although there is evidence of persuasion at work to convince an individual to become an EFL teacher in Thailand, less is known about the ways in which *career dissuasion* works at the communities. Seventh, although this study focused on EFL teachers in Thailand, it raised issues about examinations of the OAS processes within the world of *contingency and other workforce members*. Finally, the extent to which this study can enable and enlighten future studies of *virtual communities and traditional corporate contexts* will be explored.

**Participant Selection**

Identifying, contacting, and working with appropriate participants can be a difficult task for any study. In situations where individuals self-select themselves to participate in a study, as in this case, the final results can leave areas of improvement which must be addressed by future studies. However, it is important to remember that the information sought online and through the virtual communities is not necessarily accurate or generalizable (Flanagan & Metzger, 2000; Metzger, Flanagan, Eyal, Lemus, and McCann, 2003) for scholars, community members, and other interested parties.
Metzger, et al. (2003) examined credibility issues in the current media environment. They concluded the mediated environment has important limitations which need to be understood when evaluating online information-seeking. These limitations include a lack of professional gatekeepers, the convergence of genres especially advertising, a lack of established reputations among websites, organizations online, and communities, and the propensity for information to be altered without warning. In addition, Flanagin and Metzger (2000) conducted a study on credibility and the internet and found that “information obtained via the Internet is perceived to be as credible as that found through magazines, the radio, and television (irrespective of information type)” (p. 529), but there is concern about misinformation on the internet versus other media sources (e.g., books). They also reported that “the Internet is ranked second only to newspapers in its perceived credibility for reference and commercial information” (pp. 529-530) which is important to understand how and why the EFL teachers developed the OSA processes they as well as where and why they used the virtual communities. My conversations with the teachers, however, appeared to include open and honest reflections about individual experiences with a number of teachers giving sharp and clear comments about a number of issues.

The Flanagin and Metzger (2000) study is also important because of the interviewing and analytical methods used in the study. The possibility exists for teachers to believe the information they find credible because the author of a series of writings about living in Thailand on a particular site, for example, simply because he said he taught for twenty-five years in Asia. Internalizing and making sense of this hypothetical
author’s information is a part of the socialization process that is not under the control of the organization or necessarily in the consciousness of the individual.

The credibility warning is important for scholars in terms of building conclusions and making generalizations based upon research into one or two virtual communities. Examining the cultures of these (and other) virtual communities should allow researchers to generalize within before generalizing among the cultures of different virtual communities (see Pfahl, Chomngam, & Hale, 2007). However, the online world offers significant research opportunities and, as Schneider and Foote (2004) said, the internet “has challenged scholars conducting research to both adapt familiar methods and develop innovative approaches that account for the unique aspects of the web” (p. 6). With these cautions in mind, the limitations of the study can be described and addressed.

**Self-selection by the Teachers**

To participate in this study, teachers would have read my posts, decided whether or not they wished to help, and then taken the initiative to contact me. Thus, the teachers who responded to my posts more often than not tended to be ones who utilized the forum areas at virtual communities rather than an EFL teacher who happened to have been at Ajarn.com or Thaivisa.com at a particular moment or EFL teachers who do not use such sites at all. While the teachers who actively used the forum areas were the type of teacher the study was designed to meet and learn from, this limits the study to only those teachers who are active forum area users, or at the very least, active internet users. Despite the important socialization information provided by the teachers in this study, the individuals who utilized the forum areas might not accurately represent other EFL teachers who did
use the internet or virtual communities as part of their OAS and information-seeking behaviors.

To address this concern, further research can be conducted to find teachers who did not use the internet or might not visit forum areas regularly by going to Thailand and interviewing these teachers face-to-face. To the greatest extent possible, this study did seek to include teachers who indicated that they used the internet and/or forum areas infrequently in order to have a basis for comparison with those who were active forum area users.

Scope, Demographic Composition of the Participants, and Time Constraints

Every effort was made to learn more about the OAS processes of the EFL teachers in Thailand in order to generalize within this particular community rather than among all EFL communities. It is by design limited in scope (e.g., Thailand) and demographic composition of the participants (e.g., seventeen men, three women) with time constraints (e.g., six months).

Scope

The decision to examine the OAS processes of EFL teachers in Thailand came about from my experiences in the country and the depth of understanding I have of the educational environment there. As I conducted this study I hoped to minimize interpretive mistakes or other inaccuracies on my part since I was intimately familiar with the EFL teaching environment and other aspects of the educational processes of the country. However, in addition to further study into the world of EFL teaching in Thailand, future studies can broaden the scope virtual communities and OAS processes
by examining OAS and socialization processes of EFL teachers via virtual communities in Thailand’s regional neighbors (e.g., Malaysia, Vietnam) as well as other areas around the world (e.g., Europe, South America). Doing this will build a foundation to better understand the liminal socialization of the EFL teachers and the nature of the use of virtual communities by the EFL teachers in order to avoid generalizations based upon narrow research contexts. It is important to maintain the grounded nature of the work (see Pfahl, Chomngam, & Hale, 2007) and not rush to make generalizations across communities of teachers or virtual communities since the potential exists for online socialization issues to differ from traditional offline issues.

**Demographic Composition of the Participants**

The scope of this study is one important limitation to address. There is also a need to achieve a better balance of voices among the community members of the different virtual communities. This balance includes gender and cultural backgrounds.

First, this study involved a majority of male EFL teachers (seventeen) as compared to female teachers (three) with all coming from Western countries. Even though Thailand and the Thai EFL virtual communities might not be comprised of a majority of male teachers, pre-research examinations of several of the Thai EFL-related virtual communities provided preliminary evidence that the virtual communities, the materials they provide, or large segments of their membership can be Western male-dominated and, as one participant discussed, even blatantly misogynistic. When specifically asked about such issues, the female teachers involved in this study did not say gender issues at the virtual communities affected their personal goals and desires for
going to live and work in Thailand in any substantive way. They did indicate that
differences in experiencing Thailand existed because they were women. This was not
explored further and more work needs to be done in order to better understand what these
issues are and how they are perceived by potential teachers.

For an exploratory study, the demographic composition of the teachers is
acceptable because I used a sample of convenience. Future studies can seek to include
more female EFL teachers by actively seeking female participants as well as expanding
the study into other places (e.g., Malaysia, France) or specifically seek female EFL
teachers in Thailand from the virtual communities used in this study.

Beyond gender similarities, cultural similarities also existed among the teachers in
the study. At a particular cultural level, stereotypes and preconceptions abound regarding
who EFL teachers are. During the interviews, EFL teacher stereotypes such as
backpackers and sexpats were raised, but in describing their own experiences, the
teachers were shown to be individuals with a variety of different experiences and
backgrounds. As stated earlier, non-Thai EFL teachers from non-Western countries were
sought for this study, to the extent that a teacher spoke to his colleagues about
participating, but none ever came forth to participate. Thai educational institutions, as far
as English teaching is concerned, do prefer to hire native speakers for EFL positions.
Future studies can work to broaden the culture(s) represented in the world of EFL
teaching. While such diversity is important, there must also be awareness that because
there is a need for EFL teachers around the world, certain groups of EFL teachers with
certain backgrounds (e.g., American or British teachers) can be privileged because
English is his or her native tongue. This should be considered more a contextual requirement rather than a weakness in any particular study or privileging of a culture or background.

**Time Constraints**

In addition to the important scope and demographic limitations, the study was conducted over a traditional period of time in the dissertation process and could not continue to follow the EFL teachers who were undergoing training at the time of the interviews or anyone who might have changed positions after the interviews were conducted. When possible, multiple interviews were conducted with the teachers, but examinations of an individual’s experiences must be tracked over a longer period than was achieved by this study. First, because of the gap in time between occurrence and recollection and second, a longer view can capture the entire process as it unfolds.

While important and productive knowledge was gained through this study, longitudinal examinations will allow for an improved, perhaps more nuanced, understanding of the teachers’ perceptions, thoughts, and ideas especially for teachers at the beginning of or in the midst of the OAS process as well as teachers who have just entered Thailand and are encountering living and working in Thailand in a particular moment rather than teachers who must recall OAS processes and other events a year or more after they occurred. Individuals who were interviewed at the beginning of their EFL careers (e.g., participant U) did not have enough time in the country and/or at a virtual community to fully formulate their thoughts and make sense of their circumstances. Perhaps because of having lived in Thailand for an extended period, there
were teachers who noted they could not recall exactly what happened to them during their OAS phase.

Lastly, the teachers in this study were in other occupations prior to becoming an EFL teacher. Following teachers from the VOCS stage and career determining moments of becoming an EFL teacher, through the OAS and subsequent socialization processes (including PROO experiences) is a more comprehensive method of study. This might include in-depth study of several new EFL teachers and following their progress through the entire process. Such approaches will be better placed to examine the similarities and differences between teachers with previous EFL teaching experiences and how these individuals interact with virtual communities in comparison with brand new EFL teachers or teachers who just entered Thailand (or another country).

**Convergence of VOCS and OAS Processes**

Important limitations previously discussed in this chapter include issues of participant selection, the scope of the study, the demographic composition of the participants, and the limitations of time. Moving beyond the limitations discussed, this study noted the convergence of VOCS and OAS processes via the virtual communities. VOCS, as a part of anticipatory socialization, was only briefly examined in this study as there was only one question as to why EFL teaching was chosen as a career option. The teachers articulated a number of different reasons for making the decision to move to Thailand and teach, but did not actually list teaching itself as a primary reason for choosing the EFL career and moving to Thailand.
This is a significant point of understanding in terms of drawing tighter linkages between how the EFL teachers made career and employment decisions and subsequent OAS processes. The VOCS/career decision was itself a liminal exercise as it placed the job of EFL teacher between various personal (and professional) goals. The ability to access individual via virtual communities and engage with them as they encounter the OAS/VOCS convergence is an important departure point for better understanding future actions (individual and/or organizational) within the socialization process.

Several teachers in this study indicated that they were in their first job (e.g., immediately following college) or had undergone career/life changes which caused them to seek a career in Thailand teaching EFL courses. In order to continue early scholarship about VOCS and OAS processes as well as introduce the ideas into the context of virtual communities, there is a need to establish a better foundation as to why and how individual EFL teachers arrived at the decisions to pursue foreign teaching and living in foreign lands. This insight should then be linked with information-seeking behaviors as a possible manifestation of individual needs and wants for their careers (lives). Subsequently, this information can provide a foundation for targeting individual perception development and the perception-versus-actual events moments that followed in the post-hire phases of organizational socialization. Finally, understanding such motivating factors is useful when examining forum area interactions and interpersonal exchanges or determining appropriate levels of trust, disclosure, and coping needed for the exchanges in virtual socialization studies. Given the different types of forum areas
available for EFL teachers to utilize, it is important to understand career decision-making processes in order to better understand OAS choices.

**Website Content**

In order to best understand the experiences of the EFL teachers and their perception and use of the virtual communities, no systematic study of the virtual communities themselves was done. While I did informally examine the communities prior to beginning the interviews, the virtual communities themselves must also undergo additional examinations. The lack of a formal study as to the content of the virtual communities meant that the descriptions of and comparisons between them could only be done through the comments of the teachers. In other words, there was no formal study as to the types and nature of the information available at the different virtual communities as well as a stronger understanding as to how the forum areas function. Rather, this study relied on the descriptions of the virtual communities as provided by the EFL teachers.

While this is not without merit, it does limit the study to only multiple perspectives from one source about the virtual communities; these perspectives favored or privileged some virtual communities over others. The teachers did provide comments that compared the virtual communities with each other, but with the changing nature of virtual content, the constant evolution of the forum areas, and the ebb and flow of community members and their participation, having a template for examining the virtual communities would probably better serve OAS examinations. These studies would better situate the *what, how, why,* and *to what extent* questions inherent in information and perspectives provided by the virtual communities to their *members.* Future studies would
be well-served to conduct content analyses of the virtual communities to accurately represent the features, functions, information, and perspectives found at the virtual communities as part of examinations into the overall OAS process since most, if not all, virtual communities are managed by an individual or individuals with goals and ambitions not always the same as those of the community members who utilize the sites.

**Educational Institutions and Other Organizations in Thailand**

This study investigated issues related to EFL teachers and EFL-based virtual communities, but did not include other possible entities at work in the EFL socialization processes in Thailand. The interviews with the EFL teachers highlighted the level of complexity inherent in the OAS processes of EFL teachers in Thailand as each teacher discussed other organizations that had an impact (to varying degrees) on the OAS process. Through this study, several different types of organizations and organizational members became relevant to the discussion of EFL teachers information-seeking and OAS processes, but with different reasons for their relevancy. These organizations and organizational members are *Thai educational institutions and institutional members*, *virtual community administration*, and *pre-organizational organizations*.

**Thai Educational Institutions and Institutional Members**

First, the Thai educational institutions that would employ EFL teachers, such as university language centers (e.g., Bangkok University Language Institute) or private, for-profit language schools (e.g., ECC Thailand), were only examined from the teachers’ perspective. Even these perspectives were limited to where the teachers had or currently worked. Specific OAS processes and socialization efforts of the Thai educational
institutions were discussed as part of the ways in which the Thai educational institutions socialized and trained the teachers. A few participants suggested that Thai administrators and/or staff members monitored the virtual communities. However, little is known about how the Thai educational institutional members actually perceive the virtual communities and/or the impact this has on the administrators’ perceptions of the teachers.

In addition, the different methods and procedures Thai educational institutions utilize in the recruiting, hiring, socializing, and training of new teachers are not clearly understood. The reasons behind the lack of socialization and training efforts as experienced by the EFL teachers needs to be explored from the perspective of the educational organizations/organizational members in order to better understand what socialization and training processes (or lack thereof) were used and why they were chosen.

Finally, with such information, the accuracy of the EFL teachers’ comments or recollections can be checked and actual participation or awareness levels of virtual communities by Thai educational administration members will be better understood. I do not believe that the information provided by the teachers was inaccurate; far from it, but I do believe investigating EFL teaching and socialization issues from multiple perspectives can only strengthen our understanding of the context.

**Virtual Community Administration**

A second important organization in this discussion is the virtual community including its administration, managers, or management teams (e.g., Dave Sperling at Daveseslcafe.com). While some of these perspectives are illustrated through the EFL and
other materials available at the virtual communities and in descriptions of sites provided by the teachers in this study, a systematic examination of what was included on the sites or why this information was included (and what was not) is missing from this study.

Having a more solid grounding as to the mission, goals, and perspectives of the virtual community administration will serve to better understand EFL teacher reactions to and perceptions developed from the information provided by the communities. This point becomes even more important when moving beyond the communities of Thai EFL teaching sites and into those related to other countries or other organizational/work environments.

Although not directly relevant to the EFL world of this study, there is a virtual community context that holds intriguing possibilities for other organizational socialization contexts (e.g., traditional corporate socialization): *counterinstitutional* websites/communities (e.g., Daisey, 2002; Gossett & Kilker, 2006). These communities offer a traditional corporate context for the emerging issue of virtual communities as RJPs. The “Counterinstitutional Web sites blur the boundaries between organizational insiders and outsiders; this enables a wide variety of individuals to share information and voice their concerns with specific firms or entire industries” (Gossett & Kilker, 2006, p. 64). While this type of sharing can occur to an extent at the EFL virtual community forum areas, the concept of a counterinstitutional community is an important addition to studies of OAS and information-seeking processes in the virtual world. Even among the virtual communities in this study there were communities that demonstrated aspects of the counterinstitutional communities (e.g., TEFLwatch.com,
Examining such communities in light of an individual’s OAS process would be instructive and help to better understand how individuals make sense of negative or counter perceptions of an organization in the virtual world and how these virtual communities are used by individuals as part of a broader OAS process.

**Pre-organizational Organizations**

A final group of organizations that are generally part of a Thai EFL teacher’s OAS process is the TEFL-certification granting institutions. These organizations are pre-organizational organizations, or PROOs, that might act as a form of organizational socialization. These organizations did factor into the information-seeking behaviors of the EFL faculty members or at least those who wish to work legally in the country. However, the question of how the PROOs function within this process, outside of comments made by teachers that they obtained certification from these organizations, is left unanswered as is the extent of their influence in socializing new teachers into the world of EFL and Thailand.

The PROOs function in a similar, yet different manner to the virtual communities in that they offer information and pre-hire socialization information as part of an intermediate step, and possibly a concurrent one in the case of virtual communities, between career decision-making and organizational entry, but the relationships that some of these PROOs have with Thai universities or schools means that they might be acting as an extension of the university’s or school’s socialization and training expectations and/or practices.
Intermediate institutions such as these are interesting to OAS studies because they function as RJP's themselves by offering information on living and working in Thailand, EFL teaching as a career and the act of being a teacher, as well as providing pre-hire social interaction opportunities among classmates which, like the forum areas, mimics the socialization aspects of the post-hire period.

In all three cases, these different organizations were not examined beyond the information provided by the participants. Further study is needed to better understand the role of these institutions in the information-seeking and OAS processes of EFL teachers as well as the linkages or relationships PROO members have with educational institution members in Thailand (and elsewhere). These types of organizations reflect the complexity of the overall socialization process for the teachers and the multiplicity of RJP's and socialization efforts an individual must encounter and reconcile before even entering a Thai educational institution.

**Career Dissuasion**

Throughout the study, the issue of persuasion to become an EFL teacher and to live in Thailand surrounded the dialogue between potential and new EFL teachers and the virtual community members. However, as I examined the ways in which the EFL teachers used the virtual communities, I became interested in the extent to which the communities, especially interactions in the forum areas, would dissuade potential teachers from pursuing an EFL teaching career. After observing the exchanges on different forum areas, I noted the ways in which new forum posters were treated. Sarcasm and humor were consistent across all communities, but there were instances
where the new community member argued with other members or was dissatisfied with their treatment at the hands of the other members. Also, the teachers themselves explained their views of the different virtual communities and associated community members, oftentimes speaking of each in negative ways. However, many of these same teachers also said that they did not let such interactions dissuade them from going to Thailand. However, it is unclear how many teachers did not go to Thailand as compared with the teachers I interviewed.

Future work can explore where people did not go to teach and live as well as the reasons why they made this choice. In this instance, existing EFL teachers can describe both their socialization processes for the countries and jobs they did like and, at the same time, explore the reasons why they did not go elsewhere (if such a decision was necessary). Additional insight might be gained by examining reasons for changing jobs or the extent to which an individual’s personal goals superseded career goals, making Thailand more important than the EFL teaching.

The more difficult study is one that examines why and how the virtual communities dissuaded a person from becoming an EFL teacher, specifically those with no prior teaching experience, EFL or otherwise. There are a number of ways to find these individuals, such as beginning with existing teachers and seeking referrals of people they know who ultimately chose not to become an EFL teacher. Also, speaking with university and college TEFL and TESOL program administrators in the United States or the United Kingdom might be an option to identify individuals who began the certification process, but left. The same can be said of the certification programs
(PROOs) who have people begin their training for the TEFL certificate and then leave. While not everyone would leave for the same reasons, starting with these organizations is a way of finding the EFL teachers who chose not to pursue the career at all or abandoned it after beginning their training.

**Contingency and Other Workforce Members**

The conscious use of a mixed workforce of full-time and contingency workers in this study offered an opportunity to address important issues raised in the socialization literature. First, there is a need for organizational communication scholars to examine the modern workforce beyond only full-time members and, second, to examine the workforce outside of the United States (e.g., American citizens working abroad, non-American members of the workforce in general) (Niehaus Bauer, Wolfe Morrison, & Roberts Callister, 1998). This study did not view the teachers as traditional expatriates, but rather as I/RGR because they are American (and other nationalities) working abroad of their own volition and an undergoing socialization into multiple cultures (e.g., Thailand, EFL teaching, Ajarn.com).

The nature of EFL teaching includes the potential for full-time and contingency work as well as the opportunity to move about a country or region (e.g., I/RGR). These types of workforce members can encounter far more and dramatically different socialization experiences than individuals who remain within their home country and work in predominantly full-time positions for organizations throughout their careers. Additional inquiry into the nature of socialization beyond the American borders, especially that which involves multiple RJPs or socialization processes as in the case of
EFL teachers would add breadth to OAS process and virtual socialization studies and offer a more direct comparison to previous corporate-based, post-hire socialization work. The use of CMC technologies has made it possible for extensive socialization and information-seeking to take place in careers such as EFL teaching or in occupations such as volunteerism, for example the Peace Corps, where access to information about places around the world is required to make the move/not move decision. Broadening traditional organizational socialization studies in the terrestrial world as well as the virtual world offers the field a rich set of possibilities for study into different socialization processes and types of work beyond traditional, full-time corporate positions. The use of virtual communities as socialization mechanisms and RJP will only grow as individual mobility among organizations (e.g., changing a job) increases and the need for quick access to information becomes a part of the modern world.

**Virtual Communities and Traditional Corporate Contexts**

A final area of future inquiry is to take the lessons learned at this early stage of research about socialization and virtual communities into the traditional organizational context. Throughout the study, I have alluded to or directly mentioned the corporate organizational context in relation to the ideas and issues raised here. At the beginning of this section I also highlighted the focus on the EFL world as a conscious limitation of the study. However, I would like to re-visit the issue of broadening the study of virtual communities in relation to socialization by examining important areas and questions that could be addressed through such a move. This study raised issues and situations that I believe exist in the more traditional corporate world, but the ways in which they exist or
the extent to which individuals use the virtual community sources is relatively unknown.

In this section, I will examine a few issues related to how the specific EFL-related information of this study might influence and drive virtual community and socialization research in traditional corporate contexts.

First, the virtual communities in this study were clearly focused on Thailand and/or EFL teaching. However, there are also virtual communities associated with the corporate context including the counterinstitutional websites mentioned earlier and job sites such as Monster.com, www.careerbuilder.com (Careerbuilder.com), and Theladders.com. These communities function in a unique way, separate from and related to the discussion of virtual communities in this study. In addition, research efforts might uncover profession-related virtual communities like those of the EFL teachers that offer specific career information and guidance as the EFL-related virtual communities did for the teachers. As with the EFL-related communities, these possibilities raise the important issue of examining the structure and offerings of the communities in a way that will highlight the ways in which the communities can be used by visitors and members, the interactivity levels of the communities, the engagement with the corporations seeking new members, and a host of other issues. Providing a rich contextual analysis will also help to differentiate the types of communities offered to corporate job seekers much like the EFL-related communities differed in size, scope, function, et cetera. Conducting such an analysis lays the groundwork for more detailed investigations into community life.

Second, examining EFL teachers has demonstrated the importance of understanding how individuals utilize the virtual communities in a broad sense as well as
in relation to job seeking activities of all kinds. The interactions between the community members, community administrators, and corporate organizations that occur at places such as Monster.com can be researched in order to better understand how individual job seekers utilize the sites especially in relation to their OAS processes and, possibly, VOCS processes. To date, there is a lack of research into these issues that perpetuates the privileging of organizationally-focused studies of post-hire socialization processes. Rather than generalize that the ideas, processes, and experiences of the EFL teachers in Thailand are representative of job seekers using virtual communities across career fields, grounded and nuanced examinations of the virtual communities and experiences of the community members in the corporate context can be undertaken to learn more about the role of virtual communities in these types of socialization processes.

Third, as with this study, the organizations involved in recruiting and hiring the job seekers in a traditional corporate context can be examined as well. Their use of and responses to the virtual communities is an important contribution to socialization literature. Yet, it is unclear how corporate human resource departments might perceive and utilize the communities as well as the individuals that they find at the communities. Further, the ways in which the communities represent corporate work or specific professions or corporations might be an important area of research. Companies spend a great deal of time and money to present an image of themselves and the jobs they need to fill. The extent to which the virtual communities counter or support these images is unknown, making examinations into the linkages between the virtual communities,
community members and corporate entities critical to understanding pre-hire and post-hire socialization processes (and the success or failure of such processes).

Finally, cross-cultural, intercultural, and non-Western examinations of socialization have been called for in the field of socialization research (Niehaus Bauer, Wolfe Morrison, & Roberts Callister, 1998). However, a number of issues including language, distance, and expense have made such examinations difficult to accomplish. The global potential of a given virtual community allows scholars to have greater, albeit not complete, access to job seekers in various places along the socialization process. Further, the nature of mediated communication and the use of forum areas present new opportunities for data collection than existed before. This study examined a specific set of individuals in order to understand their experiences, but a beneficial result of the study was the ability to examine Western job seekers and teachers in a non-Western context enabling cross-cultural socialization research. Despite the limitations of not interviewing the Thai educational institutional members, the study still reached across cultural boundaries in a way that socialization research has rarely done. Numerous opportunities for such interactions exist in the corporate context where job seekers from around the world can scan the globe for positions of interest making for exciting new research avenues.

In closing, this chapter examined several key limitations to this study and each limitation is an invitation for future research for the EFL in Thailand context, EFL teaching in general, and beyond. In addition, new avenues of research were presented. First, issues regarding participant selection were addressed. Second, the limitations
relating to the scope of the study, the demographic composition of the teachers, and the inevitable time constraints of the study were discussed. Third, the convergence of VOCS and OAS processes found in the EFL context is a further area of study. Fourth, structured and detailed examinations of the web content of the EFL-related virtual communities in Thailand (and beyond) can offer a more holistic understanding of the virtual communities. Fifth, this study concentrated on EFL teachers in Thailand, but the perspective of other relevant EFL-related organizations in Thailand is also important and necessary to better understand the overall OAS process and how it intersects with the organizational hiring and socializing practices. Sixth, persuasive elements that work to convince an individual to become an EFL teacher in Thailand were common, but less is known about the ways in which career dissuasion occurs in the communities. Seventh, this study raised issues about examinations of the OAS processes within the world of the contingency workforce as well as other liminal or in-between workforce members. Finally, areas of future research in corporate contexts can explore the relationship between virtual communities and traditional corporate contexts.

NOTE

I recognize the danger in using phrases such as Western which might imply an Occidentalism or a broad and homogenous generalization of the Western world, not unlike Orientalism. For this study, words or phrases such as this are illustrative rather than indicative of large groups of people who act, think, or behave in similar ways simply by virtue of where they live.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE FACULTY MEMBER INTERVIEWS

1. Name: __________________________________________

2. Email: __________________________________________

3. Historical job search and post-hire information
   a. Please explain why you decided to take the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program and become an ESL teacher.
   b. This set of questions examines the discovery and use of websites during the period of time you sought information about Thailand or EFL teaching prior to taking your current position or leaving your home country for Thailand.
      i. Please list the websites you visited prior to leaving for Thailand and describe why you used the website(s).
      ii. Describe the information you sought from the website(s) prior to accepting a job and/or arriving in Thailand? In other words, describe the information you hoped to find by visiting the website(s)? Please explain.
      iii. How did the information you found affect you in terms of where to work in the country or what types of EFL jobs to take? Please explain.
   c. The following questions will be used to understand your experiences with the institution you first went to work for in Thailand.
      i. Once you arrived at your first EFL teaching position, what type of training or introductory information did the organization provide for you? Please explain.
      ii. Once you began work at this organization, describe how the information found on the website(s) related to your experiences at your new position and/or the country itself? For example, the accuracy of organizational information or aspects of day-to-day life in the country. Please explain.
d. The next set of questions examines your usage of the website(s) now, at your current position. If this position is the same one as in question set “C”, please go to the “Recommendations” section (number 4).

i. Please name the EFL- or Thailand-based website(s) that you often visit since you took your current position and describe why you used these websites.

ii. How would you relate your experience with these new websites with the previous ones you spoke about earlier? Please explain.

iii. Once you arrived at your current position, describe how the information found on these website(s) related to your experiences at your new position and/or the country itself? For example, the accuracy of organizational information or aspects of day-to-day life in the country. Please explain.

4. Recommendations
   a. Have you recommended any or all of the websites you visit to others? Which ones did you recommend and why did you select these? Please explain.

5. Demographic Information (ALL INFORMATION IS OPTIONAL)
   a. How old are you? ______ years
   b. Sex (Indicate with an “X”): Female:_____ Male:_____
   c. Ethnicity (Indicate with an “X”):
      Asian: _____ African: _____
      European: _____ Arabic: _____
      Hispanic: _____ Other: ______________
   d. What is your home country? ______________
   e. Is this your first EFL job? Yes: ______ (If Yes, Please Go to Question E) (Indicate with an “X”)
      No: ______
   f. How long have you been at your current position? ____months _____years
   g. How long have you been an EFL teacher? ____months _____years
   h. Where are you currently teaching? (Indicate with an “X”)

222
i. Bangkok: _______

ii. Outside of Bangkok: _______

    Location: ________________

iii. How many other countries have you taught in? _______

    Please list them:________________________________________

6. Is there another EFL teacher that you would recommend I contact to take part in this survey? All information will be kept confidential.

    Name: ________________________________

    Email: ________________________________
APPENDIX B: LETTER TO VIRTUAL COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT

Hello!

I am a third year doctoral student in the School of Communication Studies at Ohio University. I have visited your website a number of times over the last few months as I prepared my dissertation proposal.

The topic of my dissertation is an exploration as to how virtual communities are used as socialization tools by individuals entering new organizations. I am using English teachers in Thai universities, colleges, language schools, and high schools as my contextual example.

I have been familiar with your website for a number of years as I taught Management and Marketing courses at Yonok College (1999-2000) and Bangkok University (2000-2004). Although I have not taught English in the region, I have friends and colleagues who have. The interesting career path which many of them have taken has led me to my research area.

I would like to correspond with the teachers on your forums. As part of the discussion, provide an opportunity for them to participate in an interview about their experiences.

Several goals have surfaced with respect to my dissertation. The most important one for the teachers is that I hope to better understand the lives of English teachers in Thailand and the organizations they work for, in terms of motivations, frustrations, and socialization needs. Using the results of my study, I hope to foster better relationships and more useful socialization tools for educational institutions to use with their faculty members.

I look forward to discussion with you on these and other topics.

Continued Success,

Michael E. Pfahl

School of Communication Studies
Scripps College of Communication
Ohio University
Athens, Ohio 45701 U.S.A.
APPENDIX C: LETTER FOR FORUM AREAS

I am a third year doctoral student in Organizational Communication and Rhetoric (Ohio University) and I am currently working on my dissertation research.

The research I am doing right now focuses on English teachers in Thai universities, colleges, language schools, high schools, etc… and how they use websites to socialize and prepare themselves for life in Thailand, working in Thai organizations, and/or teaching EFL courses there.

I lived in Thailand for five years and taught Management and Marketing courses at Yonok College and Bangkok University. Although I did not teach English except for a handful of conversation classes for overtime pay, I have friends and colleagues who have. The interesting career path which many of them have taken has led me to my research area.

As part of my research, I would like to invite interested EFL teachers who are teaching/have taught in Thailand to participate in an interview via instant messaging or email. The interviews will mainly focus on your experiences prior to arriving in Thailand. As I am in the United States, all interviews will be scheduled around your time in order to avoid difficulties with teaching schedules or work rules.

All personal information (e.g., names, screen names, emails, etc.) will be kept confidential.

I have already interviewed a number of faculty members and I hope to learn more about your experiences. Please PM or email me if you are interested in participating or have questions about the research.

Continued success,

Michael
Hello everyone! I would like to take a moment and update all of you who participated in my study about EFL teachers, virtual communities, and Thailand.

First, I would like to thank everyone who provided assistance either through interviews, referrals, questions, information, websites, or all of the above. Your assistance was invaluable to my work and I hope to do more research on EFL teachers in Thailand in the future.

Second, I would like to specifically thank the management of this site for allowing me to post and offering guidance and suggestions to me.

Third, I recently reached my goal in terms of interviews and the information gathering part of the dissertation work is over. I have been writing for several months, but the bulk of the writing starts now.

Despite being finished (for now) with this project, I would still like to hear about interesting ideas and encounters that anyone has had with virtual communities as you searched for information about being/becoming an EFL teacher and/or moving to Thailand.

Once again, thanks for all of the help! 😊

If anyone is working on their own research, and I can help, please do not hesitate to contact me and I will do my best. Also, if I can provide any information on living in Thailand, please let me know as well.

Michael
APPENDIX E: NEW MEMBER POST A (14 JULY 2007)

From: Ajarnforum.net

NulloModo
New Member

Join Date: Jul 2007
Posts: 9
virtual communityash: 500
Rep Power: 0

Can I make it in Thailand?

I have read the stickies (from which, honestly, I was hoping for a bit more information), and I have a few questions that hopefully some of you with some experience in the LOS will be able to answer.

I am 26, and I have a teaching degree from the University of Delaware. I have taught for three years in the US, but in the process I have become a bit disillusioned by the US public education system.

I am always up for some adventure, and I have studied abroad before (albeit it was only in the UK, so I had the benefit of speaking the language) and have visited Canada (again, pretty easy because there was no language or cultural barrier). I have looked into the JET program for teaching English in Japan, but I am a bit turned off by the fact that most applicants end up being stationed in the boonies, and I have always lived near major cities (grew up living half an hour from Philadelphia, an hour from Baltimore, and a couple of hours from NYC, and I don't want to give that up). Also, the cost of living in Japan vs. Thailand is prohibitive.

BKK sounds like a wonderful place to be. I don't have too many ties here in the US, just my parents and sisters who are happy if I call every couple of months, but Thailand sounds like a great place to have some fun in life, do some good, and enjoy myself all the while.

I live in Southwest Florida (gulf coast, Ft. Myers) at the moment, so I am used to the rain, heat, lightening fires, and all the rest, is there any reason I shouldn't look for a job in Thailand?

2nd July 2007, 02:23
Unwell
sinneslöshen
Join Date: Nov 2004
Re: Can I make it in Thailand?

nope. you sound ready for it!

Quote:

Originally Posted by NulloModo

Thailand sounds like a great place to have some fun in life, do some good, and enjoy myself all the while.

it is!

good luck and enjoy the ride...

"looked like ten thousand people, standing on the burial ground..."

Re: Can I make it in Thailand?

Quote:

Originally Posted by NulloModo
　I have become a bit disillusioned by the US public education system. this makes me believe you will not last very long in Thailand. However, it's always better to have tried and failed than never to have tried at all... Go for it, I say... and prove me wrong in my assumption

Bloody Hell! It can't be that difficult!
Re: Can I make it in Thailand?

I was staying in Ft. Myers (for 6 months) before I relocated to S. Korea...How's the Brick
Bar??.....anyways welcome aboard...

Don't make your decision toooo difficult.....try it out...if things don't pan out then...you can always move back.

And we have come full circle again.

PM me for details.

---

Re: Can I make it in Thailand?

Wow, disillusioned at 26.

Wait 'til you see this place.

Actually, if you don't take it too seriously and aren't in it for the money, teaching here (and more importantly living in Thailand) is about a gillion times better than living in the States now.

Don't tell anyone though.
There is no reason you shouldn't look for a job that is in Thailand, but I would suggest you look for it before you get to Thailand. For most, the advice is the opposite, but if you are a qualified teacher with three years teaching experience (in public schools?) you might well be a good candidate for one of the better international schools, which tend to recruit from outside of Thailand.

If you are not able to find one of these recruitment sources, or really want to get to Thailand quickly, you will have no problem finding a job in Thailand, and especially Bangkok. The only problem is the job will, most likely, be at a lower paying school. Of course, that is relative to the better international schools, and you would still expect to have a salary that is very good for Thailand.

Quote:
Originally Posted by NulloModo

I have become a bit disillusioned by the US public education system. Come to Thailand!!! now!!....................... and you'll be cured of that problem immediately 😊

Quote:
Originally Posted by NulloModo

BKK sounds like a wonderful place to be. Compared to what 😐

Quote:
Originally Posted by NulloModo

is there any reason I shouldn't look for a job in Thailand?

You haven't been reading this forum much have you?? 😌 😐
No but seriously, it's a great place here, do come and have a break from your grind. Thailand with all it's shortcommings is still a great place to be.

Sometimes my mind wanders, sometimes it leaves completely.

2nd July 2007, 10:06    #8
josh_ingu
Regular User

Join Date: Apr 2005
Posts: 690
virtual communityash: 500
Rep Power: 28

Re: Can I make it in Thailand?

Quote:
Originally Posted by NulloModo
I am 26, and I have a teaching degree from the University of Delaware. I have taught for three years in the US, but in the process I have become a bit disillusioned by the US public education system.

Looks like you will fit right in.
-j-

On safari in Europe. F*ck its civilized here.....

4th July 2007, 21:28    #9
NulloModo
New Member

Join Date: Jul 2007
Posts: 9
virtual communityash: 500
Rep Power: 0

Re: Can I make it in Thailand?

Thanks for the advice. I think I might have been a bit unclear with my disillusioned comment.

What I meant was that as the wealthiest nation in the world, the US should have the best education system in the world. However, there has been a constant downward trend in most public schools. There is a lot of talk about accountability, but it always just amounts to more paperwork, more passing the buck, and teaching to fit tests that will show there is improvement occuring, even if there is none. I didn't mean to imply that I expect Thailand's sytem to be a paradigm of educational excellence. I just meant that the
current trend in the US system seems akin to putting on blinders and telling ourselves we are doing everything we can, when in reality we are just ignoring the social problems that are at the root of many of our schools decline.

5th July 2007, 05:08 #10

jimbo
Senior Member
Join Date: Jun 2005
Location: on the astral plane
Posts: 9,934
virtual communityash: 500
Rep Power: 145

*********** Re: Can I make it in Thailand?

^ So anyways....how's Dwyers then?锕

And we have come full circle again.

PM me for details.

5th July 2007, 05:28 #11

buddahas
I Love Oishi
Join Date: Jan 2007
Location: Toronto
Posts: 568
virtual communityash: 500
Rep Power: 16

***********

Re: Can I make it in Thailand?

Shaq has a reality show right now about overweight kids. There was a segment where he goes to some school and tries to convince the director to add physical education to school curriculum. You should see the fuc_ face director explain why that isn't really possible.

I think some of you are not being fair to the OP.

5th July 2007, 11:29 #12

NulloModo
New Member
Join Date: Jul 2007
Posts: 9
virtual communityash: 500
Re: Can I make it in Thailand?

Quote:
Originally Posted by jimbo

^ So anyways....how's Dwyers then?
Hehe, sorry, I missed your question about the Brick Bar earlier, I have never been. Actually, I have never been to Dwyer's either. If I am doing the bar thing I usually go to Stevie Tomatoes.

5th July 2007, 17:34    #13
jimbo
Senior Member
Join Date: Jun 2005
Location: on the astral plane
Posts: 9,934
virtual communityash: 500
Rep Power: 145

Re: Can I make it in Thailand?
Ahhh Stevies,...right. Nice atmosphere.

You're not missing much at Dwyers...buncha' pretentious rich fuks sipping wine (for the most part).

8 ball lounge.....now there's a Ft. My 'hole' in the wall classic!

And we have come full circle again.

PM me for details.

9th July 2007, 14:49    #14
D-Man.
Established User
Join Date: Dec 2006
Posts: 103
virtual communityash: 500
Rep Power: 7

Re: Can I make it in Thailand?

Quote:
is there any reason I shouldn't look for a job in Thailand?
Absolutely none mate. Having a teaching based Degree is a perfect set up. I know a maths teacher - BA in Maths, who begun doing his masters by weekends 2 years ago, he's just about to finish and is thinking of going on to do his Doctorate with a branch of a US Uni here. Takes another 3 years I think.
Anyway, come here to work/enjoy yourself and in 5 years time you could be going home a Doctor!!
You're 26, right, well you've got the opportunity of a life time man.

9th July 2007, 14:58    #15
jou_moer
Greetings
Join Date: Jul 2007
Location: Not sure
Posts: 23
virtual communityash: 500
Rep Power: 0
Re: Can I make it in Thailand?
I have been told that having Thailand on your resume is considered to be good for one's long-term career path when you go back home.

haltest
Regular User
Join Date: Nov 2004
Posts: 991
virtual communityash: 500
Rep Power: 28
Re: Can I make it in Thailand?
Quote:
I have been told that having Thailand on your resume is considered to be good for one's long-term career path when you go back home.

It all depends on where you work. If you work for a well known institution you should be ok, but if you work at Brother Sompart's enrich the owners at the expense of the students Christian school then it might not be so good on your CV...

Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?

9th July 2007, 16:43    #17
Asper
Senior Member
Join Date: Jan 2005
Location: Ayutthaya
Posts: 1,702
virtual communityash: 500
Re: Can I make it in Thailand?

Quote:
Originally Posted by NulloModo
There is a lot of talk about accountability, but it always just amounts to more paperwork, more passing the buck, and teaching to fit tests that will show there is improvement occurring, even if there is none.
Sounds just like Thailand. Spend some time reading the posts in the Staffroom forum before making up your mind.

But if you are a qualified teacher in the USA, you will be more qualified than 95% of the farangs teaching here.

__________________

Smiling uses fewer muscles than frowning.
But maintaining a completely neutral expression uses the fewest muscles of all.

9th July 2007, 17:44    #18
greenleaf
Permanent Resident
Join Date: Mar 2007
Location: Rangsit
Posts: 764
virtual communityash: 500
Rep Power: 40
Re: Can I make it in Thailand?

Quote:
Originally Posted by NulloModo
a couple of hours from NYC,

Don't you know that if you made it in New York, you'll make it ... anywhere, its up to you new York, Neeewwww Yorrkkkk!

__________________

I don't know why, but I feel older every day...

Today, 03:37    #19
NulloModo
New Member
Join Date: Jul 2007
Posts: 9
virtual communityash: 500
Rep Power: 0
Re: Can I make it in Thailand?

Quote:
Originally Posted by greenleaf
Don't you know that if you made it in New York, you'll make it ... anywhere, its up to you new York, Neeewwww Yorrkkk!

Heh, never said I lived in NYC, just visited often. I have some friends who live there, but all in all, not the place for me. Unless I hit the lotto (which would be pretty damn hard since I never play) I wouldn't move somewhere with one of the highest costs of living in the world.
From: Ajarnforum.net

5th July 2007, 05:58 #1
guy
New Member

Join Date: Oct 2006
Posts: 11
virtual communityash: 500
Rep Power: 0

Hello to everyone,

I'll be coming your way next week to teach in Thailand after 4 years in Korea. Anyhow could anybody let me know where to find a cheap place to stay over for a night till I find some type of housing. Also, where are the good spots to hangout and what type of schools are the better ones for Bangkok, less shady! Please give me any info you can on teaching, housing, cheap places to go etc. All info is greatly appreciated and anyone who volunteers to take me out and show me around is getting a free drunk!!!!!!!!!!!!

P.S. I haven't found employment so you know...will wait till in country face to face...that way less chance of getting screwed over...no rush!

Thanks,

Simon

I hope this is where I'm suppose to post...if not sorry..first time

5th July 2007, 06:01 #2
buddahas
I Love Oishi
Join Date: Jan 2007
Location: Toronto
Posts: 583
virtual communityash: 500
Rep Power: 16

Re: coming to thailand from korea
Why would I want a free drunk? There is more than enough drunks on this forum.

5th July 2007, 07:41 #3
Re: coming to thailand from korea
want to trade jobs?

5th July 2007, 07:48    #4
guy
New Member
Join Date: Oct 2006
Posts: 11
virtual communityash: 500
Rep Power: 0

Re: coming to thailand from korea
friendly bunch...can't wait

5th July 2007, 07:50    #5
stfranalum
2nd cutest poster
Join Date: Feb 2005
Location: 'cross the klong
Posts: 1,763
virtual communityash: 500
Rep Power: 54

Re: coming to thailand from korea
a paradise compared to korea, albiet a thinner wallet.

youre gonna have a blast dude 😊😊

welcome to the forum

Founder & CEO: The Dancing White Monkey Alliance

"Get to work cracker. Dance."

5th July 2007, 08:49    #6
jimbo
Senior Member
Join Date: Jun 2005
Location: on the astral plane
For your "school" questions...you may want to share some info. re: your qualis. and somebody might help out.

Cool Places to hang out in Bangers?? Shit. take your pick. 😆

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Quote:
Originally Posted by guy
anyone who volunteers to take me out and show me around is getting a free drunk!!!!!!!!!!!

Be careful ...you might get greeted at the airport by 25 poor, hungry TEFLers. 😏

And we have come full circle again.
PM me for details.

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Welcome to the move. I moved over from Seoul about a year ago and have not looked back since.

as far as places to hang out they are plentiful.

but what do you like doing?
If you are a barcrawler the prices are a lot cheaper that Itaewon. and the shows make the hill look tame.

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also I should warn you many schools here dont give free housing but the housing here is still pretty cheap.
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sorry warn you not war you
Today, 17:36
russellsimpson
Senior Member
Join Date: Oct 2005
Location: Muskogee, Oklahoma, USA
My location
Posts: 3,055
virtual communityash: 500
Rep Power: 45

Re: coming to thailand from korea
Good luck with the move.

Unless you get very lucky or have superb qualifications you ain't going to make anything even comparable to Seoul. But after four years perhaps you have a good little nestegg.

Why don't you just grab a cheap place in Khao San till you find something else? Way cheaper than Itaewaon.

Good luck but be warned that the glitter is going to where off regardless of where you end up in Thailand.

Compared to the ease of visa's, etc. in Korea, Thailand is a fucking nightmare of piecemeal regulations that change daily.

And also there are folks here who can give the scummiest hogwan operators a good run for their money.

Choose your location, check out the employer. Do the homework.

__________________

If you're being run out of town, get in front of the crowd and make it look like a parade.

Today, 17:59
jonny danger
Senior Member
Join Date: Nov 2004
Posts: 8,643
virtual communityash: 500
Rep Power: 138

Re: coming to thailand from korea

Quote:
Originally Posted by watdog
want to trade jobs?
Oh sure, wogdog does Korea. Would you prefer a hogwan with kimshi stink or perhaps LG businessmen with kimshi stank?

Big change Guy. I too came here from Korea. Thais are happy people, Koreans are not. I don't know BKK well enough to recommend living space but there are some cheap guest houses on Soi 1 across from the MBK Centre. There are shuttle buss' at the airport for cheap and they pass there. Avoid taxis unless you're rich or in the mood for a bum shaggin. There are jobs at this period but fewer than they'll be a couple of months.