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# "Catching Time":
# Pathways to Engagement in the Elementary Classroom through the Visual Arts

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Art Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

July 2000

## ABSTRACT

"Catching Time":
Pathways to Engagement in the Elementary Classroom through the Visual Arts

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Concordia University, 2000

Boredom and apathy are readily observable in many contemporary classrooms. In order to combat this prevalent condition, elementary students between the ages of eight and eleven years old in two different classes at Coronation Elementary School in Montreal, Canada, were offered a series of activities that provided them with opportunities to become active researchers of their own experience. In these efforts the camera played an integral role in enabling the children to bring their ideas, concerns and real world experience into the classroom in thoughtful and personal ways.

Conclusions drawn from this qualitative study support the view that by providing children with learning environments in which deep personal *connections* are fostered (through care, dialogue and pleasure in learning), they may be empowered to employ the technical or artistic skills they are taught to create texts that are representations of their individual and collective identities. Experienced together, this pedagogy of *connection,* along with explorations of *identity* through the visual arts, served to build a bridge between the children's experiences outside the school and their lives in the elementary classroom, which in turn brought them to increased engagement in their learning.

## DEDICATIONS

To my sons Elliott and Isaac, who bring me great joy each day

To my husband Marlowe, who encourages me to realize my dreams

To my three great teachers Len Passarello, Maxine Schacker and David Cowan, who inspired me to teach by their example

## AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many friends, relatives and colleagues contributed to this dissertation and I am grateful to them all.

First, my utmost thanks go to all of the children from Coronation Elementary School who took part in this long-term project. Their enthusiasm, creativity, spirit, and intelligence inspired and educated me. As well, I would like to thank Lynette Thomas and Beverly Townsend for allowing me to become part of their school-community, and for their trust in me. Without their guidance, insight and support this project would never have come to be. I would also like to thank the Art Education students from Concordia University who participated in Phase II of this study. Their desire to experience teaching first hand, their willingness to step out of the university and into the community, and their outstanding efforts throughout the project meant a great deal to me and to the children with whom they worked.

My dissertation committee, Dr. Cathy Mullen, Dr. David Pariser, and Dr. Robert Parker, provided insightful guidance and support during the writing of this document. I owe them all a debt of gratitude. In particular I would like to thank my thesis advisor Dr. Cathy Mullen for her wise, thoughtful and prompt feedback over the time I worked on writing up this dissertation. Dr. Mullen's generous and affirming nature helped me to stay focused and to develop my skills as a writer. I will be forever thankful to her for her meaningful contribution to my career as an art educator and scholar.

I am also extremely grateful to Anick St. Louis who worked closely with me in the field, collecting the videotape document that was so very important to the outcome of this dissertation. Her sensitivity to the scene, and her ability to move unobtrusively amongst the children and teachers enabled us to collect visual data that is both insightful and extremely beautiful. In addition, her willingness to spend countless hours in the production of the documentary video included with this dissertation enabled me to accomplish my goal of creating a document that weaves together multiple forms of data to tell this story. Thank you Anick!

There are three more very important individuals without whose encouragement, I do not think that I could ever have finished this dissertation. The first of these is my dearest friend and colleague Constant Albertson. Constant tirelessly listened to me talk for hours about this dissertation in person, via email and over the telephone. Over the past couple of years she provided tremendous editorial guidance and moral support. Her friendship, her feedback, and most of all her patience and great sense of humor were invaluable to me! I am forever in her debt.

Finally there are two family members who deserve much recognition for their support of this project and of my academic career. First, my heart goes out to my mother, Thelma Davidson for her unwavering belief in my ability to complete my doctorate. She has always taken great joy in my accomplishments and offered a kind and sympathetic ear when I was feeling discouraged or overwhelmed. I appreciate all her intellectual and emotional support.

In conclusion, my loving appreciation goes to my husband Marlowe Bork who patiently put up with me as I made my way through the

endless hours of course work and study en route to completing this dissertation. Thank you Marlowe for the countless times you read and reread drafts of my dissertation, and listened to my ideas without falling asleep or looking too bored! Thank you for your caring and calming nature, and for your interest and pride in my work, and most of all thanks to you for your faith in my ability to complete this difficult challenge.

All of these individuals share in this accomplishment because it could not have happened without their guidance, love and support.

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## "Catching Time"

Introduction

I begin this dissertation by recalling something that happened as I came to the end of the first phase of my work at Coronation Elementary School in urban Montréal. Over the six months I had taught the children of Room 24, a small class of special needs students, we had explored painting and drawing, had taken hundreds of photographs and printed many of them in my darkroom. Just as importantly we had spent hours reflecting on the images they produced - talking and writing about them. Now it was time to celebrate that work, to show it to the students, teachers, family and friends who make up the Coronation School community. As part of the ceremonial closure of this period of discovery for all of us, once again the children to put their thoughts into words and added them to the images they had chosen to exhibit. To provide a focus for their writing, I invited them to tell me what they thought about the time we had spent together.

Given that for most of these students, writing is a chore if not a truly painful experience, their classroom teacher helped them to compose a few standard beginnings to sentences that they could use to get started and then go on to complete with their own words. Together the children and their teacher negotiated phrases that would get them going: "I like photography because...", or, "if you could see through my eyes I'd show you...". This process was familiar to them, as throughout the time we worked together creating images and commenting on them, we had always preceded the act of writing with a lot of conversation. This talk helped give form to their ideas, and encouraged and

comforted these children whose failure with the written word had been a major stumbling block in their lives at school. Armed with simple beginnings to their sentences the children talked and then wrote with far less fear and anxiety.

Initially their words described the reasons why they enjoyed photography: "because we get to print our own photos in the darkroom", "...because the darkroom is dark". They went on to explain why they had created some of their images, "If you could see through my eyes... I'd show you a picture of my mom, because she gives me good lunches". Then Bryan, a quiet boy who had a difficult time focusing his energy and attention, composed one of the most eloquent statements of all. Described by his teachers as a "dreamer" who "drifts off whenever he can", Bryan's sentences begin with the phrases, "I don't know" or "I can't". However, in this case, when he added his words to the beginning of the narrative that the class had constructed, it read: "I like photography because we get to take our own pictures and we get to catch time". At the moment Bryan wrote these words, and then proudly read them aloud, I was struck by the beautiful metaphor he had created for the act of photography. I likened it to the phrase coined by the great French photographer, Henri Cartier-Bresson, as he struggled to describe that instant when all the elements in front of the camera lens come together in perfect harmony to create what he called "the decisive moment". Now, a nine-year-old boy, a dreamer in a dead-end classroom, had usurped the power and meaning of Bresson's words in my mind. With this phrase Bryan had truly and simply summed up what photography has always meant for me, a way to catch time, to hold on to instances that quickly pass out of our experience and to freeze those moments for future consideration, for mental travel or memories held.

I have borrowed Bryan's words for the title to this dissertation, as much to honor his insight as to set up a place to begin to write about what I learned

through my work with the children and teachers at Coronation Elementary School in Montréal between 1996 and 1998. As I began to consider how I might go about sharing my questions, observations, and ultimately my understandings, of my work at Coronation School, with other researchers and teachers in art education, Bryan's metaphor kept moving to the front of my thoughts. Eventually I came to realize that the notion of "catching time" was fundamental to the process we had gone through and laid open an avenue toward understanding through all the activities I designed and implemented for the children with whom I worked.

"Catching time" for me and, I think, for Bryan, initially referred to the act of taking a picture, that instant when the shutter clicks open and shut, capturing artifacts of experience that make it possible to revisit those moments. At Coronation, all the children were invited to "catch time" through cameras that were lent to them, cameras they carried out into the community. In their homes, their neighborhoods, the schoolyard, and in their special spaces, these urban children selected moments in their lives to "catch", and then share with peers, teachers and family members.

As I continued to reflect on Bryan's metaphor, it gave form and meaning to all that we did together, as "catching time" is descriptive of the unhurried, personal relationships I negotiated with the children. Released from their fragmented daily routines, I was able to work with each group of children once a week for an entire school day. This new time frame afforded us the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the activities we were pursuing in a much more in-depth way than would have been possible given their routinely cramped schedules. It allowed time for the children to produce and share their work, discuss it and write about it. Just as importantly this less-fractured rhythm was instrumental in encouraging very personal connections to develop among all

the participants – the children, their teachers and myself. We shared our sleepy mornings, our lunch time meals, our successes, and those times when things just were not going well. Here again, "catching time" is descriptive of this research project in which many individual moments shared grew into a very powerful, mutual learning experience. For this, I am grateful to the principal and the teachers involved who were open, inquiring and trusting enough to let me catch this precious time with their students.

## Background to the study: The problem

In my role as an art teacher in a variety of settings I have always been disturbed when I see classrooms populated by bored, distracted, sleepy children plodding listlessly through their lessons. Outside the school, in the playgrounds, on city streets and in the homes of these same children, signs of life are bursting out all around; yet in their classrooms many of them appear as sleepwalkers enduring a lengthy nap. The reasons for this visible disengagement from the enjoyment of learning are numerous and complex, and not the focus of this particular study. However, the reality that much school curricula lulls students into a "sleepy silence" through what Ira Shor (1993) has termed a process of "endullment" (p.23), is integral to my interest in developing approaches to classroom practice which work to engage children in learning through their active participation in the visual arts.

In my efforts to work toward positive solutions to problems of student disengagement from learning, a number of questions surfaced and became central to this study:

1. What role can the visual arts play in addressing student disengagement from learning and more generally from school life?

2. How can we employ the visual arts in working to build bridges between children's experiences outside the classroom and their day-to-day life in the school?
3. What tools do the visual arts offer that can help students to become active researchers of their own experience? How will the children make use of these tools?
4. What can we as educators learn by looking carefully and listening intensely to our students' "talk"?

To begin to address some of these questions I looked to an extensive body of literature that has grown up alongside our mass education systems. This literature is comprised of a multi-voiced discourse devoted to deepening our understanding of how children learn, how teachers teach, and how schools do their jobs. Throughout this century, individual voices entering this complex conversation have grown into a choir that at times sings the praises and, sadly, the failures of many public schools to provide high quality learning experiences to the majority of children who enter their doors.

Voices that have made up this choir of concern, have emerged from fields of cognitive and cultural psychology (Bruner, 1998,1990,1966; Gardner, 1991,1983; Piaget, 1976, 1954; Vygotsky, 1962,1978), educational philosophy (Dewey, 1938,1916, 1902; Freire, 1970, 1973,1978), the arts (Eisner, 1985,1991; Hubbard, 1990; Ewald, 1994,1976), the classroom (Ashton-Warner, 1963; Duckworth, 1987; Noddings, 1992; Fried, 1992; Meier, 1990; Silberman, 1970), medicine (Coles, 1992, 1976; Williams, 1954) and schools of higher education or "academe" (hooks, 1994; Giroux, 1994; Shor, 1992, 1987). This very small sampling of individuals who are concerned with educational improvement in many forms, have over the years put their unique skills, interests, experience and understandings of teaching and learning to work on the puzzle of how to best educate our young people. These scholars, teachers,

artists, doctors, philosophers and educational researchers have all acknowledged that schools are rather artificial environments whose methods stand far outside the experience of everyday life.

These authors suggest a number of different ways that we could, or perhaps should move towards what has variously been termed "liberatory education practice" (Freire, 1970), "empowering pedagogy" (Shor, 1994), "engaged pedagogy" (hooks, 1994), "organic teaching" (Aston-Warner, 1963), "experiential learning" (Dewey, 1938; Piaget, 1954), or "education for understanding" (Gardner, 1991). The names these individuals give their particular take on developing productive classroom practice may differ, however, upon a close examination of their research and writing, it became evident to me that they are all advocating approaches to active learning that encourage students to become critical thinkers, communicators and citizens. From their individual vantage points they all agree that we should encourage children to "speak" and insist that children be given the opportunity to share their ideas, perspectives and concerns with their peers and their teachers in intelligent and inquiring ways. Ideally, these elements should come together in the classroom to create learning environments that fosters students' natural or "inborn"(Piaget, 1954) inclination to question, and encourage their curiosity and will to "know". These authors suggest teaching strategies in which creative and meaningful participation is central, thus offering those of us interested in improving student engagement in the learning process a place to enter into this discussion, and ultimately a foundation on which to build a structure for change.

My experience as an art educator in school and community-based settings has provided me with many occasions to observe that when children are given the tools, the support and the structure to experience learning through active engagement with their peers, teachers and/or community members,

amazing things can be accomplished. This is, in part because children and their teachers are so very desperate and eager for learning opportunities that move them away from the dullness of workbooks and Xeroxed exercise sheets. These varied experiences in the classroom, in concert with the ideals of active educational practice as advocated by many educational theorists, critics and teachers, encouraged me to design a study which addresses the problem of student disengagement from learning. Through this study it was my goal to shed light on how the visual arts, and photography in particular, might work in concert with writing and dialogue, to engage even the most disconnected learners by building a bridge between students experience outside the school and their lives within the classroom.

In this study elementary students between the ages of eight and eleven years old in two different classes, were offered a series of activities that provided them with opportunities to develop skills that would help them record and comment on the world around them. In these efforts the camera played an integral role in enabling the children to bring their ideas, concerns and real world experience into the classroom in thoughtful and personal ways.

## Overview of the Study

This thesis focuses on my work with students and their teachers at Coronation Elementary School in Montréal between 1996 and1998. Coronation School (K-6) is located in an urban setting in one of Montréal's most ethnically diverse, multi-lingual neighborhoods. In March of 1996, I entered the school as a photographer, teacher and researcher. My ideas and intentions were informed and inspired by the work of photographer Wendy Ewald, (1985,1996); photo-journalist Jim Hubbard, (1991); child psychiatrist Dr. Robert Coles, (1992, 1976); and teacher Sylvia Ashton-Warner, (1963), individuals who have

made explicit the value of asking children to speak through images and words. From the outset, I was interested in exploring how the camera could be used to help students to share their experiences outside the classroom with their peers, teachers and their community.

Phase I of the Study

In the first phase of the project I worked with the children of "Room 24", a small special education class of eight students, their classroom teacher, and their child care worker. After meeting with the principal and their classroom teachers in February 1996, we decided that I would focus on the integration of photography with language arts, to see if we could facilitate the improvement of students' communication skills, and increase their interest and enthusiasm towards school in general. For this first group of students I learned that their disconnection from school was to a large measure due to their difficulty with language, reading and writing, as well as their emotional and behavioral problems. I began work with the children and their teachers in March 1996 and we continued to work together through the end of June 1996.

Initially, I worked with the children in their classroom. However, as the study progressed I arranged for them to travel to my photographic studio for bi-weekly sessions. For a number of reasons, which I will discuss in more detail in Chapters Three and Four, I believed that this movement out of the school and into the community would help to facilitate several of the goals I had set out to accomplish. As it turned out, this outreach component proved to be a very important aspect of the study and one that I would incorporate into subsequent work with a second group of children from Coronation School. In addition, on the weeks the students of Room 24 did not come to my studio, I visited them at their school so that we could spend time quietly reflecting, writing and

discussing the work they had produced while at the studio. Our time together proved to be very productive, and by June of that year the students were ready to present their artwork through an exhibition we organized to coincide with their end-of-year celebrations in June. Each child exhibited a selection of his or her photographs and written comments. The work was received enthusiastically by their teachers, families and friends. The positive results of this initial phase of work at Coronation provided me with evidence of the potential of using the camera to help build a bridge between the students lives outside the school and their learning experiences in the classroom. These preliminary findings informed both my practice, as well as the choice of art activities I presented to the group of students with whom I worked in Phase II of the study.

Phase II of the Study

Building on the results of the first phase of my work at Coronation, and with similar goals in mind, in October 1997 I initiated a yearlong visual art project with Ms. Lynette Thomas and her class of twenty-one Grade Four/Five students. This second phase of the study once again centered on employing photography and writing, but also included drawing, painting, bookmaking, and collage, to engage students in their learning through active participation. In contrast to my initial work with the children of Room 24, this phase of the study took place with a "regular" class of twenty-one students and included components that spanned an entire school year. Although the experience I gained developing and implementing the art activities for the children of Room 24 informed this second phase of the study, working with a much larger group of mixed-level, Grade Four/Five students presented some new questions. I wondered: How could I build the kind of connection and personal contact I had

developed with the small group of children in Room 24? How would the approach I had taken in the first phase of the study translate into a classroom setting with more than double the number of children? How would children whose learning styles range from very high achieving independent learners, to students who need much individual attention and guidance, respond to this way of working? How could I incorporate an outreach component and develop a rhythm that encouraged reflective activity and allowed us to, in Bryan's words, "catch time"?

To address some of these issues I linked the children in Ms. Thomas's class with a small group of fifteen undergraduate Art Education students enrolled in a methods course entitled Multi-Media in Art Education that I was teaching in Faculty of Fine Arts at Concordia University in Montréal during the same academic year in which this study took place, 1997-1998. This undergraduate Art Education course provides an introduction to the media of still photography, sound, video and animation as potential tools for classroom practice. In order to maintain the outreach component of this project, something that I found was integral to my success with the children of Room 24, I arranged for Ms. Thomas to bring her students to the Fine Arts Building of Concordia University every Friday in the month of November 1997. The undergraduate Art Education students enrolled in that course assisted me as I worked with the children, by acting as mentors for them throughout the workshops held at the University. This added another component to the second phase of the study, as the student art teachers from Concordia University were also encouraged to become active participants in their own learning through their direct contact with the Coronation Elementary School students. In addition, these workshops gave them the opportunity to implement a series of activities that employed the multimedia skills they were acquiring through this course.

Following the four outreach workshop sessions at the university, I continued bi-weekly meetings with the children at Coronation Elementary School. During these sessions I worked in small groups with the children, discussing the role photography and the visual image played in their lives and considering the personal imagery they had produced throughout the fall semester. The children composed written texts to accompany their images, in much the same way I had worked with the special needs students from Room 24 the previous winter. In April of 1998, I invited the Art Education students from the Multi-Media course to help organize and mount an exhibition of all the work the children had produced throughout the study, to which the school, community, parents, friends, representatives from the local media and school board members were invited. This exhibition took place at Coronation Elementary School in April of 1998. My work with the children continued until early June 1998. To close the project, many of the children prepared final statements that were videotaped after the close of the exhibition.

Photography as Pedagogy: Why the Camera?

To a greater extent than most other media, photography is accessible and carries with it the democratic power to enfranchise and represent the experience of everyday life (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994). Photography's accessibility and connection to the world outside the classroom, through advertising, sports, popular culture and the family album, make it an extremely relevant medium to enable children to begin to explore their worlds. From a very young age children in North America are exposed to, and participate in, the construction of photographic imagery. If not in the role of the photographer, they have all been photographed on numerous occasions. Baby pictures, family portraits, school photographs, and graduation images record

each year of life, following children as they make their way to adulthood. Never before have so many individuals had the means and the inclination to record and collect a visual history of their lives.

Just as importantly, the photographic process allows children to make complex images with relatively little experience and/or instruction. The photographic image is easily combined with other media, such as drawing and collage, and is often experienced in connection with stories and other forms of written text. My love of photography as a means of documenting and contemplating the world, in conjunction with my experience in the art room where I have seen the immediate interest students display when they work in a photographic medium, impelled me to employ the camera as an integral tool in all of my work with the students from Coronation Elementary School.

## Two Subjects for Analysis

Looking for a way to discuss the outcomes of this study posed several challenges. Having worked with thirty children and their teachers for over two years provided a wealth of diverse data, (video and audio tape recordings, interview transcripts, field notes, the children's artwork and writing), and many potential stories to tell. The process of deciding how to organize this material, to select what was to be included and what was to be left out presented a great editorial challenge. After living with the data, for some time, it became clear that there were two important subjects for analysis in this study. The first of these is the process or pedagogical construct that I have named *connection,* which required a reflective analysis of my own teaching practice, and a consideration of the children's response to that approach to teaching and learning. In the context of this analysis, *connection* describes and recognizes the personal

relationships or bonds that were developed between the children from Coronation Elementary School and the teachers with whom they worked throughout this study. It is my feeling that these personal connections ultimately helped to move the children towards a deeper investment in their learning, and it is in this segment of the analysis that I bring to light the various ways that connection was fostered in this particular learning situation.

The second subject for analysis in this study focuses on the ways in which important aspects of *identity* were communicated through the children's images and words. In the context of this study *identity* is conceptualized as a process that develops in a "matrix of...social and institutional relationships and practices" (Davidson, 1996, p.5). Therefore, this analysis focuses on how the children made use of the various media at their disposal to express these social and institutional relationships and practices in school. In this setting they are often confronted with norms that may constrain, or disregard a number of the forces that come into play as they craft their individual and collective ways of being in the world, understanding the world, and interacting with the world.

By studying the data through these two lenses, it became clear to me that by providing the children with a learning environment in which deep *connection* was fostered, they were empowered to take their newly acquired technical and artistic skills and use them to explore and express aspects of their *identity* in individuals ways. Experienced together, *connection* and *identity,* served to build a bridge between the children's experiences outside the school and their lives in the classroom, which in turn brought them to increased engagement in their learning.

In the context of this research project, engagement is best defined in terms of the French adjective, engagé. The term engagé literally means "actively committed" which I feel best describes the kind of absorbed concentration and involvement in their learning that the children from Coronation Elementary School and their teachers worked toward in both phases of this study. This kind of engagement requires that each child invest deeply in the learning process and works to encourage them to share "their wonderful ideas" (Duckworth, 1987, p.1) with us.

## The Teacher as Researcher: A Reflective Analysis

Analyzing what I have "come to know" (Eisner, 1991, p.47) about my teaching practice through my work with the children and their teachers at Coronation has been a complex process. After close to twenty years in various classroom settings, my teaching practice has become extremely intuitive and quite difficult to stand back from and analyze. Understandably, part of my concern in undertaking this analysis has been that,

> ...when we try to synthesize what has inspired us, to generalize from...individual stories [of teaching and learning] and draw them into theory or technique, the images [may not] survive, like certain wildflowers that won't bloom if you try to transplant them. (Fried, 1996, p.15).

In this quotation from the Passionate Teacher, Fried (1996) has put into words part of my concern in turning what I feel and know about my work with the children at Coronation Elementary School into a form that others can share and connect with. To address these concerns and to attempt to retain much of the living quality of the data, I have worked to listen very carefully to the "talk" - the

children's and my own - and through this reflection I have identified several key components of my teaching practice and considered how they functioned to *connect* the children to the learning experience presented through this study.

Through a "constant comparative" analysis (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) of the data, it became apparent that the notion of *connection* is integral to explicating and understanding my teaching practice, and functions as an overarching concept under which several other important sub-themes operate. Through an exploration of this process, I endeavored to elucidate the pedagogical construct that enabled the children to engage in ways that opened up the lines of communication, and gave them the confidence and the permission to bring their real life experience into the classroom.

In addition, through this consideration of my practice I have "discovered myself" within a body of research and literature that has grown up around and inside our educational institutions. Upon reflection I have determined that my work at Coronation is a case of theory-in-practice. Just as the research act in this study is intimately tied to my teaching practice, so too my teaching practice is bound up with the ideals of teaching and learning as outlined by educational theorists and teachers: Paulo Friere, bell hooks, Ira Shor, Nell Noddings, Jerome Bruner, John Dewey, Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Robert Coles, Eleanor Duckworth, Vivian Paley, Howard Gardner, and others who describe a variety of forms of "organic teaching" (Ashton-Warner, 1963), which I take to mean teaching that is a living, growing, collaborative, nurturing and engaging enterprise.

When I began to listen carefully to the voices of these educational theorists and teachers, what I discovered was that they suggest plans-for-action which share a core of fundamental ideals. These fundamental ideas are:

- that students should actively participate in the development of their classroom/school/community life.
- that there should be shared authority between teachers and students of all ages.
- that teachers should help students to learn how to seek new knowledge and inquire independently into any subject of interest to them.
- that teachers and schools should value students' experience and understanding of the world and work to employ that knowledge as the basis for new learning and discussion.
- that teachers should employ dialogue, not simple "teacher-talk" (a one-way monologue), or undirected chatter, but rather talk that builds integral links between the children's experience outside the classroom and what happens inside the school.

It is important to note that, although I have identified this literature as extremely significant to my development as an art teacher, and to this study in particular, it was never my intention to set out to implement these educational theories and their fundamental goals in a conscious way. As Lewin (1951) suggests "...there is nothing so practical as a good theory." (p. 78). Conversely, I would like to add that there is nothing as theoretical as informed, reflective practice. It is only upon deep reflection, analysis, and interpretation of my teaching that I have discovered my "roots" and can see how these theoretical ideals have collaborated with my own life experience and interests to shape my actions in the classroom. Through this process I have "come to know" (Eisner, 1991), then to understand how I was able to build strong connections to the

children at Coronation School, which I believe were fundamental to the process of engaging them in this learning experience.

In order to achieve *connection*, I identified three essential components, or sub-themes, they are:

1) Care
2) Dialogue (which refers to thoughtful, directed talking)
3) Pleasure in Learning, or "Fun" (as the children describe it)

These three components, verbalized by the children, their teachers, the principal of Coronation and the Art Education students at different points in the study, were fundamental in moving the children towards personal connection. Their connection helped to build commitment, and ultimately their engagement in the learning opportunities presented. This made it possible for the children to join their new skills in art and photography to both verbal and written narrative, thus giving them a stronger voice with which to articulate their ideas and share those aspects of their lives which they felt were important to present and discuss. In Chapter Four I explore how these themes played out in both phases of the study and in relation to relevant literature.

Image and Text: Explorations of Identity through the Visual Arts

The images and texts that the children produced function to illuminate integral aspects of their individual and/or collective *identity*, and it is those expressions of identity that comprise the second subject for analysis in this study. Like *connection*, the theme of *identity* functions as an umbrella concept under which several other important sub-themes operate. This segment of the analysis is focused on the more tangible or material outcomes of the study - the children's photographs, artwork, books, writing and their oral commentaries.

When I began to organize and categorize the data through a process of "content analysis" (Altheide, 1987) I realized that the children accomplished many different things through their varied use of the techniques made available to them. Some of the children tried on different personas, recreating themselves as the *Spice Girls* or a *WWF Wrestler*, as a "King" who has the power to have "people bow down before him", or as a scholar pondering the future of Canada. Some children revisited a dramatic experience in their life, as in Meshan's ride on the roller coaster at La Ronde (an amusement park in downtown Montréal). Others presented their personal spaces through the photographic images they made in the community and through their choice of subject matter for their murals and portraits. They also created imaginary places -- dreamscape gardens, outer space, and vast video arcades -- worlds where they have been, and worlds they dream of going. They celebrated the people that are important to them, as well as their cherished material possessions, by recording or revealing them in image and text, and including them in their journals or hand-made books. They expressed parts of themselves that they wanted others to recognize and accept. They pondered their futures and considered how they wished to be perceived.

In the end I identified three major categories or sub-themes that are present across the work of both groups of students. They are:

1. My World: Self and Family
2. Popular Culture and the Media.
3. The Material Word: Play Spaces and Playthings

The concept of *identity* serves to unite these three themes which, taken together, contribute to our understanding of how the children perceive, interpret and learn from the world around them. These complex forces act on the

children, and the children interact with them. They shape their personal and communal values, and contribute to their understanding of the world in which they live. In Chapter Five I consider how these themes played out in both phases of the study and in relationship to relevant literature.

## Significance of Study

In The Enlightened Eye, Elliot Eisner, (1991) considers the importance of qualitative inquiry which describes and analyzes student engagement in the learning process. He states:

> Students who are bored by what they study, unenthusiastic, and reluctant to act without reward are students we might well worry about. Hence, attention to the quality and form of student engagement is a non-trivial dimension of schooling and one that can justifiably command our attention (p.181).

This study seeks to contribute to our understanding of how we might go about working to combat the boredom and apathy we can observe in so many of our classrooms. Through detailed description and analysis of my interactions with the children from Coronation Elementary School, as well as their photographs, art work and writing, it is my intention to illuminate the "quality and form" of these students' engagement in learning. This thesis will also present some successful strategies for the creation and implementation of elementary visual art curricula that works to combat the "endullment" of students and also helps to narrow the gap between student's experiences outside the school and their life in the classroom.

It is important to note that the outcomes of this study are not intended to be generalizable - that is to be applicable to all classrooms. Rather they are intended to enhance our understanding of how the visual arts, and more

specifically photography, can address student disengagement from learning and school life. It is my hope that the children whom readers meet in these pages will serve as an inspiration, and will challenge them to look for productive solutions to children's continued disconnection from the learning experiences provided in many schools.

Overview of Chapters

In **Chapter One** I propose that the visual arts, more specifically photography, can work along side ideals and techniques drawn from a broad range of educational research and theory in conjunction with real life practice, to develop teaching strategies that enhance student engagement in their learning. I have provided a general background to the problems of apathy and disengagement I have observed in schools, and which compelled me to initiate this study at Coronation Elementary School between 1996-98. I briefly introduced the rational for using the camera as an integral tool in this process. Finally, I outlined the two areas of analysis that I will look at in more depth later in this thesis. The first of these, is the process or pedagogical construct which I have named *connection*, which required a reflective analysis of my own teaching practice and the children's response to that approach. The second area of analysis is focused on the more material outcomes of the children's efforts throughout this study, which I have determined are an exploration and reflection of various aspects of the children's *identities*.

In **Chapter Two** I outline my research methodology, explore my approach to the study, lay out the data collection process, as well as how I organized, interpreted and analyzed that material. In **Chapter Three** I provide a detailed description the study. I describe the school community, the children, the process I went through to design, organize and implement the activities that

the children took part in through both phases of the study. Through this detailed narrative I will set the stage for the analysis to come. In **Chapter Four** I provide a detailed analysis of my own teaching practice and how that practice impacted the children who took part in this study. I explore the various ways I built a pedagogy of *connection* through, 1) Care, 2) Dialogue and 3) Pleasure in Learning. In **Chapter Five** I engage with the more material outcomes of the study, specifically the children's artwork and writing, that explore and express various aspects of their individual and collective identities. This analysis is divided into three parts: 1) My World: Self and Family 2) Popular Culture and the Media, 3) Material World: Play Spaces and Playthings. Finally, in **Chapter Six** I sum up how *connection* and *identity* worked to build pathways to engagement for both groups of children who took part in this study. I also consider how my findings in this study might inform teaching and learning in other contexts, and offer suggestions for future study.

## CHAPTER 2

## Methodology and Data Collection

Introduction

My research at Coronation Elementary School explores the role of the visual arts in relation to student engagement, over a long period of time (1996-1998), in a real-life setting in which all of the participants were part of the research process. Educational criticism, "an arts-based approach to qualitative inquiry" (Eisner & Flinders, 1994, p.341), which has as its main goals, in-depth observation, description, and interpretation of classroom practice provided a methodological foundation on which to base this study.

The framework provided by educational criticism as outlined by Eisner, (1991), aligned well with my personal goals as a teacher and researcher. This methodology supported my belief that in order for educational research to be useful or relevant, new understandings must be arrived at through multiple sources of data drawn from practice. Data analysis techniques employed in educational criticism "seek to create compelling and richly textured accounts of classroom practice... and enhance the perceptions and understandings of the qualities that constitute an educational performance or product" (Eisner & Flinders, 1994, p.355).

In keeping with this approach to qualitative research in education, it has been my goal to "tell a story" that illuminates major themes or categories that emerged through my analysis of the various data collected in both phases of this study. These themes came to light through the processes of "constant comparative analysis" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 1993), and "qualitative content analysis" (Altheide, 1987; Holsti, 1969). In both cases I moved back and forth through the data, working to build conceptual links between, and among the

properties and categories I identified as integral to building pathways to engaged learning. In addition, I worked to tie those themes to relevant literature from the field, thereby placing this study into a context of prior research and writing.

In The Enlightened Eye, Eisner (1991) points out that in order to reveal the strengths or weaknesses of an educational institution, process or product, we need to be able to see what occurs in it and "we need to be able to tell others what we have seen in ways that are vivid and insightful" (p.22). Throughout my fieldwork Coronation Elementary School and Concordia University, I employed a variety of documentary tools and record-keeping techniques that helped me to collect data that would enable me to create the richly detailed narrative account found in Chapter Three. This narrative describes the specifics of the educational process and product (Eisner, 1991) under investigation in this thesis. That narrative is followed by two analysis chapters (Chapters Four and Five) in which I work to identify, and then to interpret the qualities and outcomes of my work with the children and their teachers in both phases of the study at Coronation Elementary School between 1996-1998.

> Qualitative studies typically employ multiple forms of evidence, and they persuade by reason....[by] seeing things in a way that satisfies, or is useful for the purposes we embrace....We are persuaded by its "weight," by the coherence of the case, the cogency of the interpretation... In qualitative research there is no statistical test of significance to determine if results "count"; in the end, what counts is a matter of judgment (Eisner, 1991, p.39).

From the outset, the notion of producing a thesis that includes many voices was central to all of my data collection procedure, thus the data takes many forms and is drawn from multiple sources which include the following:

- the art work and written texts produced by the children
- the audio taped discussions and more formal interview sessions I had with the children in both groups between 1996 - 1998.
- audio taped interviews with Ms. Lynette Thomas (teacher in phase two of the study) and Principal Beverly Townsend.
- response papers written by the undergraduate Art Education students from Concordia University enrolled in Multimedia in Art Education
- extensive field notes written between 1996-1998
- a video-tape document produced throughout phase two of the study (1997-1998) the project which includes both documentary footage as well as informal and formal interviews with all of the participants.

The shear amount of data collected through this two year research study required a great deal of organization and editing in order to yield significant interpretations, which in turn led to meaningful conclusions. Once again, I turn to Eisner's (1991) comments on how one can go about selecting a focus and building a meaningful narrative through qualitative inquiry. He points out that,

> No narrative that seeks to portray life experience can be identical to the experience itself; editing, emphasizing, and neglecting through selection are all ineluctably at play. Hence we seek not a mirror but a tale, a revelation, or a portrayal of what we think is important to say about what we have come to know" (p.190).

With this in mind it was my aim to shape the various data into a coherent whole that would provide a window onto the experience I shared with the children from Coronation School and their teachers. Through rich description, both written and visual, as well as in-depth analysis and interpretation of the data, I

endeavored to make explicit what I have "come to know" (Eisner, 1991) about designing and implementing visual arts curricula that works to build pathways to engagement in the elementary classroom.

Analyzing the Data

Once I began to organize the data, it became clear to me that in addition to the "story" there were two objects for analysis in this study. In Chapter Four, I assume the role of reflective practitioner (Schön, !983), as I focus on the pedagogical process or teaching practice I employed in my efforts to "connect" the children to this learning experience. To accomplish this analysis I had to step back and enter into a conversation between myself as "teacher" and myself as "researcher". This was a challenging process. When one is invested or immersed in the act of teaching, it can be very difficult to step outside oneself and look rather analytically at that practice.

To help me to understand my own process and approach to teaching, I carefully examined my actions and the children's response to those actions. I asked myself these questions:

- What elements of my teaching practice helped to me to connect with this group of children?
- How did my pedagogical techniques impact the children's desire to engage in the learning at hand?
- Could I identify specific attributes of my teaching approach that were significant and consistent throughout the study?
- How did my practice link to relevant literature from the field of education?

By attending carefully to the data, I was able to answer these questions, and I recognized that it was through a process that I named *connection*, that the children were moved toward increased engagement in their learning. This overarching theme is comprised of three interrelated sub-themes that surfaced again and again through my interactions with the children from Coronation. The sub-themes of: 1) Care, 2) Dialogue and 3) Pleasure in Learning, are explored in detail and linked to related literature in Chapter Four.

In Chapter Five, I reflect on the more material outcomes of my work with the children from Coronation School – their self-portraits, their murals, their photographs, and the written texts and oral responses that accompany this imagery. I approached this data through a process of "qualitative content analysis" (Altheide, 1987; Holsti, 1969), which is essentially a systematic procedure for describing the content of communications (Merriam, 1998). Content analysis has traditionally been employed by historians and literary critics, and modern content analysis has most often been applied to communications media and has had a strong quantitative focus (Merriam, 1998). However, quantification need not be a component of content analysis (Merriem, 1998; Altheide, 1987). Altheide (1987) describes how qualitative analysis differs from conventional quantitative content analysis.

> ...content analysis is used to document and understand the communication of meaning, as well as to verify theoretical relationships. Its distinctive characteristic is the reflexive and highly interactive nature of the investigator, concepts, data collection and analysis...The investigator is continually central... The aim is to be systematic and analytic, but not rigid: (p.68)

Through this process of "qualitative content analysis" (Altheide, 1987), I set out to identify patterns or themes that ran through the children's artwork and texts in both phases of the study. A number of questions surfaced as I categorized and organized this data, they are as follows:

1. What subject matter did the children focus on as they used the camera to interact with, and record their worlds?

2. How did they make use of the variety of visual media and techniques that they were introduced to?

3. What do these images and texts reveal about the children's emerging identities and value systems?

4. How do the written and/or oral texts that accompany the visual images alter, enrich or extend meaning?

Through this analysis it became clear to me that the children made use of the various media at their disposal to explore and represent specific aspects of their individual or collective identities. They accomplished these expressions and explorations of identity by representing three major areas or influences in their lives. I have named these three sub-themes as follows: 1) My World: Self, Family and Friends 2) Popular Culture and the Media 3) The Material Word: Play Spaces and Playthings. In Chapter Five I take a careful look at how these explorations via the visual arts, writing and oral response, collaborated with a pedagogy of connection to create pathways to engagement in learning for these elementary school students.

Considering internal validity: Triangulation, peer review & long-term study

"Since qualitative research is based upon different assumptions and a different world view than traditional research, most writers argue for employing different criteria in assessing qualitative research" (Merriam, 1998, 218). In the context of my work at Coronation Elementary School, I employed a number of different strategies that work to strengthen the internal validity of this qualitative study. Specifically, I used a variety of methods of "triangulation" (Denzin, 1970; Mathison 1988; Merriam, 1998) to work toward a "holistic understanding" of the situation, and to construct "plausible explanations about the phenomena being studied" (Mathison, 1988, p.17).

Triangulation functions in a variety of ways to improve both the reliability of a study, as well as its internal validity, "especially when one employs multiple methods of data collection and analysis" (Merriam, 1998, 207). In this study triangulation was accomplished by collecting a variety of data, and through the multiple methods that I employed to confirm the emerging findings. Throughout the study I conducted regular member checks (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During these checks, I would present segments of the data, along with tentative interpretations to Ms. Lynette Thomas, Principal Townsend, to a few of the most interested Art Education students, and to some extent, to the children themselves. By obtaining regular feedback, I was able to ask these participants to assist me in determining the plausibility of my understandings and interpretations.

Furthermore, in addition to bringing these findings to the participants/informants in this study, I would on a regular basis, consult colleagues by asking them to comment on the findings as they emerged. Specifically, Constant Albertson, Kimberly Cosier, and Anick St. Louis, figured

prominently in this process of peer evaluation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; LeCompte, Millroy and Preissle, 1992; Merriam, 1998). All three of these colleagues are artists, teachers and/or researchers, and their insights helped to guide me, especially while I was immersed in the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Finally, the long-term nature of this study allowed me to check and re-check my findings through repeated involvement with the subjects, many opportunities to visit the research site to both participate and observe, and through my regular, and multiple viewing of the video recordings made in the field. These repeated opportunities to revisit the research site, to consider and reconsider my research questions, my personal assumptions and biases, enabled me to construct an analysis, build interpretations and develop conclusions that have a strong core of internal validity.

**Detailed outline of the data**

Video Recordings

I begin the outline of my data collection techniques with visual documentation for a number of reasons. As a documentary photographer, I am to a large extent a visual communicator. Therefore it was in part my goal to have the visual documentation, in this case the video recordings, and the interpretive text in this thesis work together as complementary components in "telling the story".

From the outset, it was my intention to use the video footage I collected in the field, as part of the raw data for analysis and interpretation. In addition, I hoped to use if for the production of a short, documentary video that would accompany the written thesis. As Eisner (1991) points out:

> Photographs and video have enormous potential to help us see a scene and can provide the raw material for interpretation and analysis. Their general absence from education research publications and from national conferences devoted to research and evaluation in education is slowly--very slowly changing. The neglect of such potentially powerful resources is due to habit, custom, old norms, and limited views of the nature of knowledge. As these views expand, it will become increasingly acceptable to conduct a dissertation study ...in which the core of the work is a film or video tape, accompanied by an interpretive text (p.188).

I find this rather visionary approach to the use of video in the research process to be extremely exciting. It describes in part the role that video has played in my own fieldwork, and continued to play as I made sense of the data. Viewing these video recordings helped me to identify the pedagogical practices that I employed and they were instrumental in assisting me with the creation of the categories I used to analyze the process that worked to connect the children to the learning experience.

Video Documentation

It was not until the second phase of the study, which began in September 1997, that I began to employ the video camera as an aid to observation (Collier & Collier, 1986). Therefore the video recordings begin in October 1997 and record Ms. Lynette Thomas and her Grade Four/Five class as we worked together, both at Coronation Elementary School and in the Fine Arts Building at Concordia University. In order to produce this video document, I employed video artist Anick St. Louis. Anick attended the four workshop sessions held at Concordia University (November 7,14,21,28, 1997), producing a total of eight hours of Hi-

Eight format video recordings of the children, the Art Education students and myself, as we worked together in these four workshops sessions.

> The camera, however automatic, is a tool that is highly sensitive to the attitudes of its operator. It documents mechanically but does not by its mechanics necessarily limit the sensitivity of the human observer. The memory of film can replace the notebook, can ensure complete quotation under stressful circumstances (Collier & Collier, 1986, p.9)

However helpful the camera can be in a fieldwork situation, it does have its limitations. As Collier and Collier (1986) suggest, "seeing the stranger as he "really" is, in ethnography as in all human relations, too often becomes a casualty of our personal values and incomplete observation" (p.10). Therefore it was important that all the video taping took place in a climate of trust and collaboration. I did not want the children or the Art Education students to feel as though they were under a microscope. To remedy this I went to great lengths to integrate Anick St. Louis into the group.

It was my feeling that in order for Anick to collect meaningful visual data, she needed to become a full participant in this study. This meant that Anick's involvement began long before she ever turned on her video camera. Therefore, Anick attended several preliminary meetings that I had with the children from Coronation and the Art Education students, before she began recording. Her participation in these sessions helped her to become an "insider" which made it possible for her to collect video footage that was "true" to the experience at hand.

I invited Anick to interact with all the participants and there are many occasions where she speaks with the children about their work from behind her video camera. Because the children got to know Anick over a long period of time,

they were far more forthcoming and comfortable on the video than they would have been if she had been a stranger who dropped in to record our sessions. Anick's presence and participation are well recognized throughout the process, which served to put all the participants at ease.

In addition, I met with Anick on a regular basis throughout the study, so that we could discuss how she would go about recording the workshop sessions and the follow-up interviews. Anick is well versed in this sort of collaborative videography, and her skill at moving through the group and putting people at ease helped us to collect video footage that provided useful and insightful data as well as artful and beautiful images of all the participants. In many ways, our efforts with the video camera mirrored the children's use of the still cameras as recording devices in their own communities. We were all working to become active researchers of our own experience, which led us to increased understanding in a variety of contexts.

In addition to the video footage that Anick created at the workshop sessions, I brought a Hi-Eight video camera to each session that I held with the children at Coronation School between December 1997 and March 1998. During these sessions, I recorded six hours of videotape of the children while we were engaged in small group discussions and follow-up art activities that helped them to prepare their imagery for exhibition. At the end of the study, in June 1998, Anick St. Louis and I came back together in order to interview Ms. Lynette Thomas and a few of the children who had made special requests to be recorded "one last time". These final video recordings add another two hours of footage to the data.

It is important to note that although this process of video taping began solely as a data collection technique, over time its purpose broadened. It

became another means the children had at their disposal of interacting with visual media in order to have their ideas and concerns recorded and reviewed. I address the shifting and complex role of the video camera within this study in my conclusion (Chapter Six), as I believe it has implications for curriculum development, as well as for innovations in teaching and research methodology.

Direct Observation in the role of participant-observer

Throughout the project, I took the role of reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983). As coordinator of the project, I was in the middle of things, however as the researcher I would regularly step back to:

a) analyze how the children were responding to curricula which was more open-ended and emergent than what they were used to.

b) consider what alterations needed to be implemented in order to make things progress more smoothly and successfully.

c) assess the practice of the Art Education students in their role of mentors and guides for the children throughout the workshops at Concordia University.

d) assess the needs of the Coronation students and teacher.

e) consider my practice in the multiple roles of: facilitator, mentor to the Art Education students from Concordia University, teacher of the Coronation students, and researcher.

f) consider insights drawn from my informal conversations with Lynette and the children throughout the process.

These observations took the form of written notes that I recorded weekly as the project proceeded. In addition, the weekly video tape recordings provided

an extraordinary means of "note-taking" and enabled me to review the project in an ongoing way. Anick St. Louis made all the video recordings available for viewing throughout the project, which allowed me to review the workshops in progress, and helped me to consider and analyze my own teaching practice.

Interviews

Listening to what people have to say about their experience of this project provides an extremely important layer of insight into how this approach to art education could be significant and productive in enhancing student engagement in the learning process. "Conducting a good interview is in some ways, like participating in a good conversation; listening intently and asking questions that focus on concrete examples and feelings rather than on abstract speculations...are likely to provide genuinely meaningful information (Eisner, 1991, p.184). It was my feeling as I entered into these interviews that there would be less chance of directing or leading the informants, if the questions were permitted to grow out of the specifics of the conversations with individuals involved.

Therefore, even the more structured interviews were very fluid, natural conversations. Of course there was specific information that I wanted to learn; however, I would not force the point. Instead, I let the informants, especially in the case of my interviews with the children, lead the direction of the interview sessions. The interview data includes the following:

a) Children from Coronation Elementary School

Throughout the workshops at Concordia University the children were encouraged to respond to spontaneous questions and talk about their work in

progress. Their comments were video taped throughout the project. After we completed the workshop component of the project, I conducted a series of unstructured interviews with all the children. These informal work/interview sessions took place at Coronation Elementary School in February and March 1998. The class was divided into four groups throughout the project and in total I met with each of the four workshop groups on two occasions for approximately one hour at a time. During these sessions open dialogue was encouraged. The children were free to discuss subjects ranging from their ideas about the role of the teacher, to their feelings about how photography, art, popular media impacted their lives. These discussions were recorded on High-Eight videotape to ensure good quality audio recording, and to make the interviews compatible with the video-tape recordings of the workshops.

b) The classroom teacher from Coronation School – Ms. Lynette Thomas

Lynette Thomas was interviewed informally several times between September 1997 and June of 1998. She participated in all the workshops that were held at Concordia, often producing her own art work, talking with the students about their participation, and following-up on her own by asking the children to make journal entries about their experience of the project. Lynette provided regular feedback through our face-to-face meetings and telephone conversations. In addition, Lynette participated in one formal video taped interview that took place at Coronation Elementary School in June 1998. This interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, and provided an opportunity for Lynette to synthesize her views about the project and this approach to curriculum development and classroom practice. She felt it was very important to consider

the broader impact this project had on her students throughout their school year and perhaps in their future.

More than any other participant, Lynette was instrumental in making this collaboration possible. Lynette took part in much of the planning, organizing, scheduling, and content decisions that helped to shape the approach to teaching and learning that we implemented. During the final interview with Lynette that took place on June 19, 1998, we discussed the following issues:

- her reasons for taking part in the study.
- her feelings about how the experience effected her students.
- her observations of changes in her student's interest and enthusiasm toward school in general, and how these changes made themselves apparent.
- how her participation in this collaboration effected her own teaching practice.

In keeping with the format of the balance of the video data collected, Lynette was recorded on High-Eight videotape.

c) Coronation Elementary School Principal, Beverly Townsend

Principal Townsend agreed to be interviewed about this project; however it was not until April 1999, almost one year after the study was complete, that we found time to meet. In addition to this formal interview, Principal Townsend, provided informal feedback over the two years I worked with her students. She would regularly visit me as I worked with the children at Coronation and on many occasions we would talk before I began working with the children, and at the end of the school day. As well, I spoke with Principal Townsend by telephone on many occassions to organize the specifics of my work at Coronation, to put together meetings between myself and the teachers involved in the study, and to

prepare for the two art exhibitions and celebrations we held at Coronation School in June of 1996 and June of 1998.

During the formal interview that took place on Wednesday April 24, 1999 at Coronation Elementary School and lasted approximately one hour, I asked Principal Townsend to provide her perspective on the study and its impact on both groups of students I had worked with between 1996-1998. Her familiarity with the students in her school and the local community made her a wonderfully insightful informant.

Artifacts and Documents

An "important source of information about schools and classrooms are the records and artifacts that frequently reveal what people will not or cannot say" (Eisner, 1991, p.184). Within this thesis there are four sets of artifacts that have been included as data:

a) The artwork and writing created by the children of Room 24 in the first phase of the study that took place from January – June of 1996. These include the preliminary Polaroid images taken the first few days we worked together in March 1996, the mixed-media self-portraits, several reproductions taken from their journals pages and their final photographs that they selected and printed for the exhibition in June 1996.

b) The artwork that the children in Lynette Thomas' Grade Four/Five class produced through their participation in the workshops at Concordia University in November 1997, as well as the extension of that imagery through drawing, writing, discussion and mounting for exhibition that took place at Coronation School between December 1997 and March 1998.

To ensure that I would be able to keep a record of all this material, I made 35 mm color transparencies of all these artifacts. These slides record the students' black and white photographs, their drawings, collages, hand-made books, and murals, as well as their mixed-media self-portraits that incorporate painting, photography and writing. In total there were 96 images that were used to develop the themes that are explored in Chapter Five. In preparation for the insertion of these images into the text of the dissertation, digital scans were made of selected images. Approximately 50 images were scanned at 300 dpi, (dots per inch) to create "jpeg" and "tiff" files that are compatible for insertion into a Word 98 document.

c) As one of the requirements for the Multi-media in Education course, each Art Education student from Concordia University student had to write a five-page response paper commenting on their work with the children from Coronation School. Of the fifteen students who wrote these papers, approximately half (eight) agreed to contribute their writing as data towards this thesis. These papers provided another perspective on the experience and assisted me with both phases of the analysis.

d) The final series of artifacts I employed in this dissertation, were the cards and letters I received from the children both at the end of the study, and over the past year since the study ended. Between June 1998 and June 1999 I received five letters from students in Ms. Lynette Thomas' class. These letters provide a perspective on the possible long-term impact of this approach to visual art learning.

These varied forms of data came together to provide a comprehensive look at the "quality and form" of these students engagement with the activities they were presented.

## CHAPTER THREE

## The Coronation School Community, the Children and the Study

In 1995 I began a relationship with the wonderful community of students, teachers, and parents at Coronation Elementary School located in Montreal's Côte-des-Neiges district. Côte-des-Neiges is one of Montréal's most ethnically diverse neighborhoods, home to both new immigrants and families who have been in the city for twenty or thirty years. At first glance, especially in the dull gray light of a Montréal winter, one might be tempted to label this a rather bleak neighborhood, devoid of both beauty and color. Low rise apartment complexes and strip malls sit alongside brick and stone duplexes. However, when one gets onto the city streets that make up this community, its richness and charm become abundantly clear in the faces of the individuals who live there. In Côte-des-Neiges, Kosher delicatessens sit next to Jamaican pattie shops and Vietnamese grocery stores. The color and diversity of this community are evident in people's dress, in their hairstyles, in the sounds of French, and English, and several other languages, in the smells emanating from the various shops, and through the warmth and friendliness of individuals one encounters on the street. This is a real neighborhood, with the sounds and smells, and the mess and dirt of living visible all around. In the heart of all this activity stands Coronation Elementary School.

My introduction to Coronation Elementary School (which I will refer to as Coronation) came through my involvement in the Art Education Program at Concordia University, beginning in 1995. As a doctoral student and teaching assistant in this program, I had the opportunity to contribute my many years of

experience as a classroom teacher to students who were pursuing their Teacher Certification in Art Education. While supervising student teachers at Coronation, I had many occasions to speak with Beverly Townsend, the principal of the school. I found Principal Townsend to be an enthusiastic advocate of the children at Coronation; not the sort of principal who stays cloistered in her office, safely tucked away from the life of the school. On the contrary on most days, you can find Principal Townsend walking briskly up and down the halls of the school, stopping to speak with students, most of whom she knows by name, talking and laughing with parents, intervening in conflicts and taking great pleasure in her students' accomplishments. The children respond to her with a mixture of affection, fear and respect. She is an imposing figure, someone who exudes expectation: expectation that you will behave, that you will be successful, and that you will become the best person you can be.

During my visits to Coronation in 1995-1996, the school was located in a small, friendly building that had been designed for elementary-aged children. As part of what was then called, The Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal (PSBGM), the school had been housed in this space for a number of years. It was a location where the children, parents and teachers felt quite comfortable. However, in June 1997 the school-community was required to move when, as Principal Townsend put it, "the Ministry of Education expropriated our building". In part, this move was due to the changing structure of the school system on the Island of Montréal, as exemplified by the shift from religious school boards, (Protestant and Catholic), to linguistic boards (English and French), as well as, the ongoing conflict between the English and French political machines in Quebec. In the fall of 1997, classes at Coronation resumed

in their new home, a large, three-story, yellow brick building on a very busy street. This school had originally been built to house high school students, which made it a rather daunting scale for many of the small children who entered its doors that September. Fortunately my work with the children of Room 24 had ended before they had to make this move.

Coronation Elementary School serves students from Kindergarten through Grade Six. Most of the students are of West Indian, (Jamaica, Trinidad, Haiti, Dominican Republic) or East Indian (India, Pakistan, Tamil) heritage. As well, Asian and Caucasian children, make up approximately 10% of the school population. The Ministry of Education has designated Coronation as one of approximately one hundred inner-city schools that have a substantial population of students "in need". These designated schools are ranked by "degree of poverty", and "degree of need". According to Principal Townsend, Coronation ranks as number twenty-five on the list. In an interview, Principal Townsend, described the families at Coronation as frequently, "very low income. In many cases what you have are parents who are working two jobs and I know some of the children have parents that work shifts. One parent drops them off and one parent picks them up. It's very hard. That's a big problem".

With this special-needs designation, Coronation School receives additional funding that can be put to use helping teachers to develop projects for the classroom that will support students learning and development. The school already has several programs in place: two pre-kindergarten classes, a daycare that offers services to children from 2:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. each day, a lunch program, as well as an initiative called "paired reading", where senior

students read to the younger children in the school. The funding provided through this program required that the school look closely at all their Grade One to Three students, and select the most needy children on which to focus efforts that will help to prevent them from repeating these grades. Principal Townsend's commitment to building a real community at Coronation compels her to spend a considerable amount of time and energy in support of these programs. She also advises and guides parent organizations within the school, such as the "Home and School Organization", which runs the daycare and which, prior to the move to linguistic boards, had been instrumental in organizing and providing the lunch program.

The teachers at Coronation, averaging approximately forty years of age, are of various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. They are mainly women, although there are a few male teachers on staff, (physical education and two classroom teachers). The school prides itself on its openness and its diversity, insisting on high standards of behavior for all of its students, and most of the teachers make sure that this philosophy is carried out in their classrooms.

Coronation School houses one of the largest and most well respected Steel Drum Band programs in the city. Teachers, parents and the school children themselves view participation in this band as a great honor and accomplishment. This is one of the most highly visible programs that Coronation offers, as students travel throughout the city and to outlying towns to perform Steel Drum concerts to all kinds of audiences. Several of the students who participated in my study were part of this program. In addition, the school makes a great effort to support Black heritage and culture, as well as the cultural traditions of students with other ethnic and religious backgrounds. The

collection of books in the library is indicative of the school's inclusive approach. The teachers and administrators at Coronation make a great effort to bring the cultural traditions of all students into the learning environment. This is accomplished in part through an emphasis on special events like Black History Month, Martin Luther King Day, as well as through the integration of holidays like Chinese New Year, Hanukah, and Kwanza into the fabric of school life,

In addition to offering Concordia University Art Education students a field experience site to develop their teaching skills, Coronation Elementary School welcomes students from several other colleges and universities in Montreal (i.e. McGill University, Dawson College, Université de Montréal, Université du Québec a Montréal) to complete various kinds of internships. These students are enrolled in social work, nursing, counseling, and nutrition, as well as in teacher training for a number of subject areas. These university-school partnerships bring a steady stream of transient visitors into Coronation classrooms. As a result, the school community - especially the teachers - sometimes feel that "they have a revolving door" or are "under microscopes" with individuals coming in to study the "site" for a number of diverse purposes. Understandably, the result is that they can at times be reluctant to welcome outsiders. Initially, I too was one of these outsiders. Eventually, however, I became a trusted member of the school community. My commitment to a long-term relationship with this school and my concern that the children and teachers benefit in tangible ways from my work at Coronation helped me to gain their trust.

In January 1996, at the end of a semester of supervising student art teachers in their field experience, I was invited by the director of the Art Teacher Certificate program, Dr. Lorrie Blair, to design and implement a visual art project

that would take place at Coronation Elementary School. Dr. Blair and I hoped that my work with the children at Coronation might produce images and texts that would enhance our Art Education students' understandings of the school-community they would soon enter when they began their student teaching internships at Coronation and other schools across the Island of Montréal. We had found that there was a substantial gap between the cultures and experiences of many of the student teachers, and the children they were working with during their field experiences. At times, this resulted in misunderstands and assumptions about the children and their communities.

I was a good candidate to organize and facilitate this project for a number of reasons. First, I had already worked at Coronation and at other urban schools with diverse populations. In addition, my extensive background in documentary photography, and my desire to research how the camera could be used as a pedagogical tool in an elementary context, gave me a particular and uncommon art medium to use as the subject-matter focus for the project.

As it turned out, what had initially been conceived as a short-term visual arts project, evolved into a complex research study that spanned two years and involved thirty children in two classes and their teachers. This expansion of my work at Coronation occurred for several reasons. Most obviously, the Coronation school children are in an age range that interested me and with whom I wanted to work. In addition, I had already gained access, which can often be a problem when one wants to do fieldwork in a school setting – especially with young children. The principal and teachers knew me, as did many of the children. This familiarity built trust and openness, and allowed me to develop the study with the support and encouragement of not only the school

community, but the parents as well. Nonetheless, I was pleased with Principal Townsend's willingness to open the doors of her school to yet another researcher. When we talked about the steady stream of student teachers, school board officials and researchers of one sort or another who came into Coronation, she made her motives clear when she said, "I believe the more opportunities I can provide for my students the better equipped they will be to live successfully in the world outside the school". Furthermore, Coronation has no visual art teacher on staff; so they were particularly open to having visual arts specialists come in from the community. The offer of an extended art program, to be provided by an experienced visual art specialist, was something that Principal Townsend felt, "could only benefit our students". In contrast to many of the researchers that came into Coronation school, I made it clear that I would not be "studying" her students, but rather they would be active participants in all that we did. In other words, they were not to be passive subjects of a study that did not offer them discernible benefits.

Setting up the study

In order to get things underway, I had a number of meetings with Principal Townsend to discuss the structure and the goals of the art project I was to initiate. During these meetings I introduced the idea of employing the camera as a tool to help students to speak about their world and their experiences. I brought along Jim Hubbard's (1992) book, Shooting Back and Wendy Ewald's (1986) Portraits and Dreams, as examples of the powerful work that children can do with photography. Principal Townsend responded positively to the proposal and suggested I work with the students of "Room 24".

She went on to describe the students in this class as "a small but difficult group". She added that, "I have a special place in my heart for these trouble-makers" and emphasized that " these kids have stories to tell and they never get any special programming and really need it." "So, are you up to the challenge?" she asked. Initially I had not considered implementing this study with a special needs class however, the idea of working with a small group of children was very appealing. I agreed to meet with the children and their teachers, and to let her know what I thought.

After speaking informally with several teachers and office staff at Coronation, I learned that the students of Room 24 were notorious within the school community for being aggressive, emotional, and difficult. The office manager informed me that there "was hardly a day when the seats in the office, [seats reserved for students who have been a problem in class], weren't occupied by at least one member of this class". This small group of students comprised Coronation's only "special education" class offering remedial help to students with a wide range of behavioral and learning difficulties. It was considered a "dead-end" class by the children and by several teachers, who had little patience for these difficult students. Room 24 was where you would end up when attempts at integrating you into the regular classroom had failed. During some of my subsequent interviews with Principal Townsend, she made it clear that her preference would be to "disband" this class and "see how the kids faired in regular classrooms". She went on to explain,

> ... the teachers don't want them. They don't want the difficult ones. I was a special education teacher, ten years in a special education school, so I know what segregation does...this is the second class that I'm trying to disband. Sometimes I'm not a popular person around here.

These conversations painted a picture of a group of disengaged and troubled children in a situation that was not positive for them. I felt that my goals of engaging children through active participation in the visual arts might be a good fit for this group, and could prove a valuable experience for all of us.

After these meetings with Principal Townsend and the office staff, I met with the classroom teacher and child-care worker from Room 24. Although both seemed to be concerned about the children, the classroom teacher was rather negative about her students' ability to succeed in the project I was proposing. She informed me that, "all of her students have an aversion to reading and writing, and to school in general", and that they "would most likely be a handful". She demanded obedience from the children, and it seemed as though she got it most of the time.

In contrast, the child-care worker was far more positive and echoed Principal Townsend's belief in the great and largely untapped potential of these children. From what I observed that day, the child-care worker assigned to Room 24 had an easy way with the children. She is a strong personality, honest and natural and the students respect her. However, I was struck by how gently but, firmly she spoke to them and how she carefully touched their shoulders, conveying what seemed to be her concern and support for them. In response, they stood close to her - their gestures proof of their affection and trust in her. Her way of working with the children, and their positive response, provided many important insights as to how I should approach my interactions with them. I explained to both the teacher and child-care worker that I planned to teach the children photography. I went on to tell them that Principal Townsend and I thought that their students' participation in these activities might be helpful in

building their engagement in learning. With this additional information they both agreed to work with me and invited me back to meet with the children the following week.

The children of Room 24: Meeting the group

The group of eight boys and one girl who comprised this special education class were all of West Indian heritage, between the ages of eight and ten. Initially, I was introduced to the children as a visitor and I was given a chance to observe -- to watch, and listen to what was going on. During this two-hour visit I wandered freely around the classroom, talking informally with students about what they were doing. They were immediately charming and inquisitive. Conversely, their classroom environment was sterile and dull with very few images, books, or resources of any kind. Large windows lit old wooden desks, illuminating the years of roughly carved graffiti and childhood iconography embedded in them. Each desk now had the name of the student who resided there taped to the front of it.

While I was there the children spent much of their time slumped over those desks. Their heads were down in a state of drowsy agitation, the way small children get when they need to go to sleep but insist on staying awake. The classroom looked out on the cement and grass play area behind the school. The room had a sink with some messy paints sitting on it. There were a few sad plants and an early model Apple computer located behind the teacher's large wooden desk at the front of the room. The children were seated with their backs to the large, blue-framed windows. Their desks faced one of the two black boards in the room. On those chalk boards were words to learn and

schedules for the day. What I observed that morning in January was that keeping things "under control" seemed to be the major goal of the classroom teacher. The children spent most of their time confined to their desks, filling out work sheets; they were given very little time and/or opportunity to pursue more experiential or multi-disciplinary approaches to learning.

Still, their spirit managed to surface, and it was clear that they were very warm, bright, and could become interested if they were compelled. They were all welcoming and open to some degree, and took great delight in interacting with me as they sized me up and tried to figure out why I was there. There had been other visitors to this classroom, school psychologists, social workers and counselors who came to assess behaviors and to measure capabilities. The children were experienced with this sort of scrutiny, and I could feel their concern, as well as their cautious enthusiasm and desire to connect. I immediately felt affection for this group of children, and I had the sense that all of us might benefit from working together.

I visited Room 24 one week later, and this time I was able to spend about an hour talking with the children. After only a few minutes with the students it became clear that they were keenly aware of their "special" place within the school. Several of them felt that being a part of this class was a humiliating and punitive measure. They hoped to, in their words, "get out" into a regular classroom as soon as possible; however, they had little confidence in their ability to succeed in school in general, and even less confidence in their ability to read and write. For now, they were resigned to their situation, enduring the experience and trying to win points whenever they could. Yet, even the "carrot" of life in a "regular" classroom could not guarantee their good behavior;

frequent emotional, sometimes violent, outbursts were a regular occurrence in Room 24.

I learned that many of these outbursts came as challenges to the authority of teachers. However, after spending time with the students in their classroom, I thought it might be possible that occasionally these eruptions were a way of making something happen that would help to break the routine, the dullness of the work they were doing - something that would add drama to their day. Whatever the impetus, these incidents had very negative repercussions for the children involved, landing them in the office where they would sit for the day or perhaps for a number of days, sinking further into a pattern of apathy and disengagement from learning and generally from school-life. In addition, these regular outbursts kept them from attending field trips and many special activities that other children in the school took part in.

My short conversation with the children revealed much about their interests and concerns. I learned that like so many other young men and women, they found their role models in the larger-than-life personalities of the basketball courts and *MuchMusic* (a Canadian television network devoted exclusively to popular music). Several of the children indicated how much they loved to play basketball and how they hoped to be "pro" basketball players when they grew up. A few of the boys played on the school's basketball team, and did quite well. Another two were members of the Steel Drum Band, which was obviously a great source of pride and joy to both of them. Their classmates held them in great esteem because of their ability to "play the pans". I was fortunate to have several minutes alone with the children, and they were very open about their unhappiness and boredom with the work they had to do.

When I asked them if they would like to share any of their work with me, only two of the children volunteered. Frances, the only girl in the class, was quick to pull out her work. Frances was eleven years old and developmentally delayed. Being the only girl in the group and because her potential to re-enter the "regular" classroom was quite limited, Frances was out of place in this class. Nevertheless, her spirit and enthusiasm made her a willing participant in all that we did. Frances has a severe speech impediment and great difficulty speaking clearly. I found I had to listen very carefully to her, as she talked quickly and would become agitated if she thought I had not understood her. She showed me some of her writing; a rough and scribbled page on which she had composed a short passage about a dog named Chocolate. Frances was extremely attached to Chocolate, and very excited to tell me all about him. I would come to know this dog very well, as he was to be one of her most photographed subjects.

Another student who shared his work that day was Boris. He gathered some of his messy papers from the inside of his desk and gave them to me to read. Boris was obviously the leader of this group. An intense child with dark eyes and a beautiful smile. Boris was also one of the two Steel Drum musicians in the class. Much taller and bigger than his classmates, he commanded respect and he got it. One of the questions I had asked the children that day, was, "If you could wish for anything, what would you wish for?". Boris told me, "I would wish that I was a basketball player and that I could read and write properly". On the messy sheets that Boris pulled out of that old desk I observed some of the most elegant, neatly written words I had seen from a child his age. Boris was nine years old, and had a reputation throughout the school for having

a violent temper and for threatening other students. Boris showed me his spelling list and I observed that almost all the words were correct, and written extremely carefully and neatly. He was proud of his work. While I was looking over the carefully written words, he snatched the papers out of my hands and quickly shoved them back into his desk. Perhaps he felt he had revealed too much about himself, too quickly.

The only other child who spoke this day was Jahleeki. Jahleeki was a very amiable sort of child, friendly and outgoing. He and Boris are good friends and Jahleeki is also a leader within the group. He was articulate and curious, and when I told the children that I would be returning to teach them photography, he lit up. He began asking all sorts of questions, and this inspired the others to become more eager participants in our discussion, especially when they realized that they would "get to use cameras to take pictures". The children were full of questions about the results of such an endeavor. Jahleeki asked: "Will I get famous? Can we sell our work? Will we make money?" Even though he posed these questions, I had the sense Jahleeki already knew their answers. I remember wondering if what he was really doing, was letting me know what he already understood about photography and the role of the photographer. Like most of their peers, these children have grown up on a steady diet of television, Nintendo, movies, sports and popular music. They are what I call, "media babies", and if you ask them about their hopes and dreams, they usually respond with aspirations of fame and fortune. They see advertising, sports, fashion and Hollywood glamour photography as representations of the world of money and power - a world to which they say they want to belong. In many cases, their style of dress, physical attitudes and

ideas about the world beyond their experience are partly shaped and influenced by their exposure to these popular cultural forms.

Jahleeki asked these questions, but his gestures and expression indicated that he knew that fame was not likely to be one of the outcomes of our work together. However within the school-community, we would discover that the camera and the resulting images did create quite a sensation -- perhaps providing a small portion of that "fame and success" Jahleeki and the others craved.

After this second visit ended, and the children were dismissed, I stayed to talk with the classroom teacher. I felt these brief encounters with the students had provided me with a much clearer idea about who the children were, and I felt more comfortable suggesting how we should proceed. I decided that I would like to return the following week to share some images with the children, spend time discussing them and then provide the children with cameras and film for them to keep for the duration of our work together. The teacher was concerned that the responsibility for caring for these cameras might prove to be too much for some of the children in the group. Once I assured her that they were "very durable and inexpensive cameras", and that I was "willing to risk damage or loss", she felt more comfortable with the idea. We ended our meeting by coming up with a tentative project schedule: I was to work with the children once a week, for either a morning or an afternoon, initially in their classroom.

My first class with Boris, Jahleeki, Bryan, Frances, O'Brian, Jeff, Miguel, and Jason

I returned for my first teaching session at Coronation approximately one week later. I came equipped with a slide projector, and images by a number of different photographers, as well as several photography books, including pictures produced by children who had worked with Jim Hubbard and Wendy Ewald. I thought it would be important to show them some photographs that had been produced by children close to their age. Although Shooting Back is a view of homeless life in Washington D.C., many of the images included in the book are a celebration of the everyday activities of urban children at play, with family members and friends. I thought that the children might relate to these images.

When I arrived that afternoon in March, I found the children languishing at their desks: heads down, floppy bodies, sleepy and distracted. A sunless winter light filled the pale blue room, and the radiators were providing too much heat. Still, when the children saw me and realized that my presence signaled a change in their routine, they began to wake up. Like bears emerging from their winter hibernation, they slowly sat upright and began moving around the room, yawning and stretching. Jahleeki, always the first to engage, immediately offered me assistance with the equipment I was carrying. He and some of the others helped as I set up the slide projector and pinned the crisp white sheet I had brought along to use as a screen to the back of a large wooden bookcase. The institutional, cinder-block walls would not accept the thumb tacks so we made do with the bookcase. During this set-up the quieter boys in the group, (Miguel, Jeff, O'Brian, and Jason), were somewhat more animated than they

had been the last time we met. Perhaps the projector and the "screen" signaled a pleasurable activity--viewing something interesting.

Once I was ready, we all sat down and began talking, sharing images and stories. Initially I wanted to hear what they had to say about photography and the photographic image, what pictures meant to them, and how they viewed the role of the photographer. Before I met with the children, I made about twenty slides of photographs from various genres. We looked at journalistic, fashion, advertising, fine art, and portrait photography. We also examined examples of family photos that I had gathered from my own family albums and from some of my friends. These included baby photographs, photographs from weddings, parties, family dinners, as well as school photographs. We ended our discussion of the photographs by viewing reproductions of the images produced by children through Hubbard's and Ewald's work in Washington D.C., Appalachia, India and Mexico.

I began by asking the children informally to "read" the photographs that seemed to interest them the most. As we went through the images it became clear that these children, who have so much trouble reading words, are extremely articulate and detailed readers of visual texts. They noticed even the smallest elements in the photographs, derived stories about the individuals portrayed based on visual clues in the images, recognized historical periods, and understood much about the fabricated nature or elements of fantasy in some of the images. Even the quietest children began to talk, and seemed intrigued and enthusiastic about our discussion of the pictures I shared that day. I found their spirited response and their intelligent discussion of the pictures to be both inspiring and telling. Sharing my love of photography with a group of

students who respond positively is always an exhilarating experience. More importantly, it indicated to me that photography, a medium I had previously used mainly to work with secondary school students, had been a good choice for these younger children as well.

At the end of this session, I let the children use an old-style black and white Polaroid camera to make a few images. It was a damp and windy afternoon, so I was concerned that there was not enough light in their classroom to create these Polaroid images. Thinking that the photographs might work better in natural light, we decided to head outside to the front entrance of the school, where there would be ample light and we would still have some shelter from the wind.

Organizing our move to the front door of the school gave me a first-hand look at the way that children were treated in the everyday things they had to do. The children got their coats and hats from the hooks in the hallway outside their classroom. They were then "ordered", not asked (the distinction made clear by the teachers tone of voice), to line up at the door. As it was nearing the end of their school day, the children were both excited and tired. The process of lining up took somewhat longer than it should have. There was some pushing and shoving, vying for the first spot in line, the spot closest to me. The classroom teacher had very little patience for their behavior, even though they had done such a good job during our lesson on photography. They had been attentive and forthcoming, with intelligent and imaginative answers.

At this point in the study, I was still an outsider and a guest, and I did not want to usurp the authority of the classroom teacher, so I stood back and watched and listened carefully. What I heard were threats, "you won't be able to

work with Miriam next week", "you'll have to stay behind if you're not perfectly quiet", "you'll miss out". For children who had obviously "missed out" on so much already, I questioned these disciplinary techniques. I felt upset that my work with them was so quickly being used in what I felt was a system of bribery--a system used all to frequently in both schools and homes as a means of control.

Eventually, we did get out the classroom door and onto the front steps of the school. However, by this time the children's fatigue and, for some, the embarrassment of being reprimanded by their teacher in front of a guest, was evident in their body language, and in their inability to look me in the eye or focus on the camera and on my instructions. Eventually, I assisted Miguel, the smallest and youngest child in the group, to take the first picture with the Polaroid camera. We set the timer and when it buzzed I asked Boris to pull the image apart so that we could view the photograph. The children huddled around, eager to see the picture. They were surprised and perhaps a little disappointed that it was a black and white image, but once I reminded them of the images we had studied in the classroom, they quickly got used to the idea. This is the first image I have of these children.

When Miguel took this photograph, the teacher was reprimanding Boris and Bryan for what she felt was their disrespectful attitude. I wondered if Miguel had intentionally captured this moment? This photograph of the boys pressed up against the wall of the school looking so disheartened and disengaged was particularly disturbing to me because their stance seemed all too familiar to them. They assumed it with the ease of dancers who had practiced the same

steps over and over again. Fortunately, this photograph stands in stark contrast with the images to come.

**Figure 1. Polaroid image Boris and Bryan at Coronation**

After the children got the feel for using the Polaroid camera, I gave them each a chance to have an initial experience taking a picture. The Polaroid process allowed us to see the images within minutes of their exposure and gave the children a brief introduction to the image-making process.

After this first class with the children, I spent a lot of time considering how I wanted to continue my work with them. I had concerns about my ability to connect with them within the confines of their classroom, as I felt that their teacher might inhibit our rapport for a number of reasons. She was a very young and inexperienced teacher with little training or preparation for working with such a broad range of children with varying needs and abilities. I sensed that she was tired and frustrated and that she had ended up teaching the children of Room 24, not because she had the desire or qualifications, but because she had the least seniority in the school. In my conversations with Principal Townsend, she had made it clear that many of the teachers did not

want to work with these "troubled" children. In addition, I know from my own teaching experience that it can be very hard to relinquish control over your classroom, to share authority, and to stand back. This ability comes with confidence and practical experience. Although I had entered this study with the hopes that I could have an active collaboration with the classroom teacher, it became clear that this would be difficult to achieve. As it turned out, we both had to deal with the ups and downs of our working relationship as the project progressed.

This early phase of the study was extremely exploratory. I did not have a set program laid out for the children. The approach I took throughout my work with these students was very fluid, as I tried to respond to their needs, interests and learning styles. It was an organic process, with each lesson and/or activity growing out of the previous one. As I got to know the children, I began to identify the activities that worked well, and the ones that did not. Although I had previously done a substantial amount of teaching of photography, it had been primarily with high school students enrolled in an art course, or with adults studying in a community-based setting. These older students, many of whom were putting portfolios together for entrance into college or university programs, had very different needs and goals in mind. I was now curious to see how eight to ten-year-old children, with a variety of learning difficulties, would respond to a visual art curriculum that used photography to give them the opportunity to become choice-makers.

Putting the program together

My preliminary visits with the children of Room 24 provided me with a good sense of who they were and how I should go about working with them.

What I decided might work best was to offer the children a series of short activities, rather than one extended project where they might lose focus and become disengaged. Another important component I would build into the program was to include regular breaks, which would give the children time to move around, go outdoors, talk freely about whatever interested them, share their stories, play a game or have a snack. I felt these opportunities to "breathe out", as described by Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963), could help to increase the children's connection to the project by encouraging personal bonds to develop between us. With these guidelines in mind, I began to organize and plan the specifics of how I would introduce the children to photography, and then go on to relate the resulting images to a series of writing activities.

At the end of my second session with the children of Room 24, I had begun to feel that it might be a good idea to have some of our meetings at a location outside the school. Therefore, I made an appointment to see Principal Townsend in order to propose a change of venue. Given the group's infamy within the school community and the rigid daily routines of their classroom setting, I believed it would be difficult for me to "start again" with the children if we did all our work at Coronation School. The children were used to a routine in which they spent much of their day in very controlled situations, sitting at their desks, answering simple questions, and copying words into notebooks. In addition, I had already observed that it was difficult for their teacher to relinquish control when I was working in her classroom. Taken together, I felt these factors might present obstacles to a rhythm conducive to the kind of teaching I wanted to implement through this study.

In order to remedy the situation, I suggested to Principal Townsend that the students leave the school and come to work in my photography studio on Plateau Mount Royal. I felt that a new start in an unfamiliar environment might allow the students the freedom to begin again, and would give me the opportunity to set my own rules, and to create a renewed classroom atmosphere. I believed that this change from their day-to-day routine could also help them to become active participants in this project. In addition by working at my studio, we would have access to a darkroom and a physical space that was more conducive to creative activity. It was a large, open room with windows that provided ample natural light.

When I proposed this change of venue to Principal Townsend, she agreed that, "it would be a very good idea to get them out of the school for a little while". She also thought that it would be a positive experience for the children to travel by Metro (subway system in Montréal). Providing them with the chance to interact in a public environment was another challenge that Principal Townsend was pleased the study could offer. With her approval, I introduced the idea to the classroom teacher and childcare worker. Surprisingly, they were both quite positive about the change of location. I think that I was beginning to gain their trust and respect. The classroom teacher commented that I was "coming through for the children" and she seemed almost as pleased as her students about leaving her classroom for a time. Perhaps with this change of locale, she would be able to give herself permission to let me do the teaching. With the approval of the principal, teachers and the children' parents, we drew up a tentative schedule whereby the group would travel to my studio approximately once every week or two from March to the

middle of June, 1996. They would arrive by 9:30 a.m. and stay for the entire school day, heading back to Coronation at 1:40 p.m. to meet parents or to catch the school bus home.

The Activities

On March 29, 1996, I returned to Coronation to work with the children for a third time. This would be our last session at the school for a few weeks as we were scheduled to begin meeting at my studio in early April. This time, when I arrived I received an enthusiastic greeting and hugs from some of the children. For the most part they are extremely demonstrative children, both in their joy and affection, and in their unhappiness and disengagement. Their emotions are always at the surface, and as a result their behavior is often seen as inappropriate for children of their age. Once the commotion that my arrival had caused subsided, I handed out a hard cover spiral bound sketch- book to each child. These books were to be used as a journal/photo album to collect all the work they would create. I made a conscious choice to purchase sketch- books with strong covers and high quality paper that would stand up to some wear and tear and would be a "special" item for them. The children were pleased with the books and seemed eager to make them their own.

The first activity we did together was to personalize the covers of these journals. We used simple collage techniques, cutting images from the magazines I had brought with me. We also used the text from articles and newspapers to locate and cut out individual letters of each of their names in order to make labels for their journals. Some of the children needed a lot of encouragement and assistance with this activity, mainly because they had difficulty identifying the letters of their name from the pages of magazine and

newspaper print we were using. With guidance and support they were all able to form their names by cutting the individual letters from the texts, and gluing them down on the covers of their journals. The magazines had lots of images of nature, and the children enjoyed looking through them and talking about the various animals they recognized and the sounds they made. They had no difficulty choosing the images they wanted to accompany their names and quickly cut them out and added them to their covers.

**Figure 2. Jason's journal cover**

Once they had finished their book covers, I asked the children to attach the Polaroid photographs they had made during our last session onto the first pages of their journals. We used photo-corners instead of glue that may have

damaged their pictures. Furthermore, these photo corners made reference to the old photo albums the children had talked about seeing at their grandparents' homes, adding a familiar quality to the look of their photo-journals. After the photos were placed on the page, I encouraged the children to write a title. Some children managed to write the date, while others lost interest in the activity and would not write at all. Their disinterest signaled a good time to take a break.

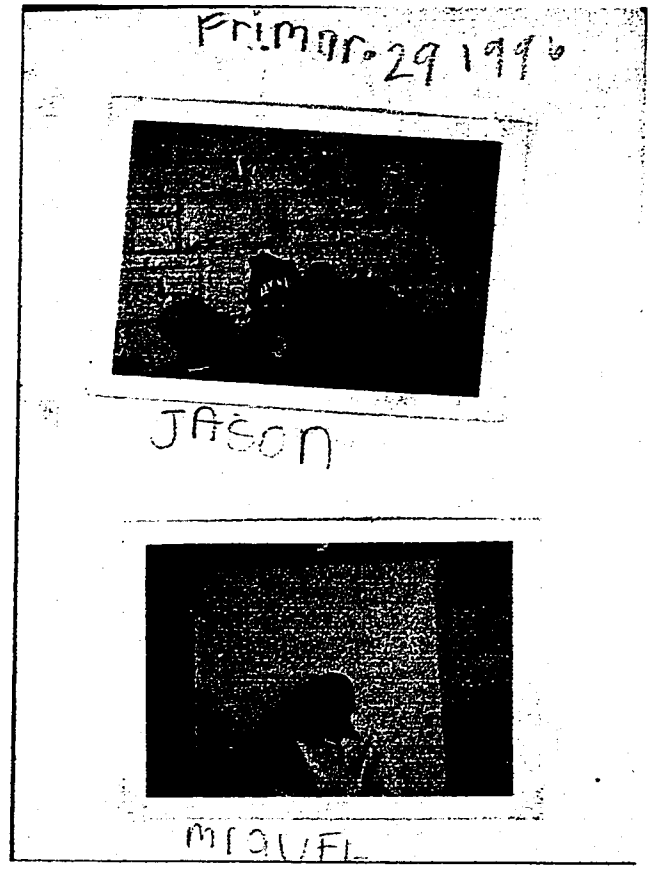



**Figure 3. Front page of Miguel's Journal with Polaroid images**

This collage activity gave me additional time to get to know the children, especially the quieter ones who were not apt to come forward or to speak out in the group. I was able to move around the classroom and sit with individual children, helping them to create their cover designs and their name labels. I had

the chance to talk with Miguel, O'Brian, Jason and Jeff for the first time that day. They were shy boys, and they needed time to warm up to me. This activity gave them some time to get to know me better, which worked to build our connection. In preparation for our break, the children helped me to clear off a couple of their desks, which were littered with magazine cuttings and sections of newspaper.

Coronation offers a program that provides milk to children free of charge. A few minutes before we stopped to take our break, an older student had come by to deliver individual cartons of milk – one for each child in the class. Perhaps this was part of the reason the children had become distracted. I had brought along a tin of oatmeal cookies that I had baked for them, which the children thought "went very well with the milk". They asked me several times, if I had made the cookies myself. When I told them I had, they were surprised and appreciative. This sort of nurturing gesture became an integral component in all of my work with all the children at Coronation. I thought that the familiar, and familial, offering of food would be a clear demonstration of my concern for them. While they had obviously enjoyed the oatmeal cookies, during our conversation at the break, they requested that I bring "chocolate chip" next time. Jeff, speaking for the group on this important matter added solemnly, "oatmeal cookies are good, but chocolate chip are our favorite". Everyone was in agreement with his assessment of the situation. They enjoyed the break and I sensed that they were relaxing and beginning to reveal more of themselves.

During this break the children asked questions about their upcoming trip to my studio. They were curious and excited – looking forward to leaving the school and travelling by subway. They asked, "Do you live at the studio?", and "What does the studio look like?". Miguel wondered, "How will we know where

to go?" Although they were pleased with the idea of an excursion out of the school, I sensed that several of them were worried about the impending journey to an unknown environment. I answered all their questions and tried to alleviate any anxiety they had about the trip. After the break ended they seemed ready to do a little more work that day, and we spent the remainder of our time together learning about the cameras that I would be loaning them.

Once all the children had cameras in their hands, it became difficult to gather them together or to hold their attention. They were very excited and impatient to get started. After several attempts I did get them to pay attention to my instructions about how to hold and aim their cameras, and how to take their pictures. Together, we opened up their empty cameras, looked inside, maneuvered all the components, and really got to know how they worked. I, then, explained that they had to look very carefully and slowly through the view- finder to compose their images. We talked about scanning the frame, looking from one side to the other, and we practiced these skills together. In these conversations, I likened the viewfinder to the square screen of the television, a frame they were extremely familiar with. They appreciated this analogy, and seemed to be clearer about what I meant when I talked about framing. We also discussed point-of-view and looked at some pictures that illustrated the various ways photographers saw the world.

It was obvious watching the children with the cameras that they were very familiar with taking pictures. They had seen adults doing it and they knew the ritual. It seemed that they were also aware of the authority you could command when you stepped behind the camera and they were anxious to do just that. Finally, I spent a few minutes talking with each child, while I loaded

their cameras with a 36-exposure roll of 400 ASA (ASA refers to the speed of the film and its sensitivity to light) black and white film. As I put the film into the cameras, I went over all of the operations once more, making absolutely sure that they understood how to turn the camera on and off, how to use the flash, how to take the picture, and how to advance the film.

More than a few pictures were taken in their classroom during the first minutes that they had the cameras in their possession. They were so eager to begin that Jahleeki and Boris asked if they could go to the main office to photograph the secretary "and maybe Mrs. Townsend". With the classroom teacher's approval they walked down the hall to the office and took a few pictures. They returned triumphant. The satisfaction on their faces spoke volumes about the immediate pleasure they derived from those first moments behind the camera. They were anxious to tell us all about their experience of taking these first images. They recounted, in great detail, how they took the photographs, and how surprised everyone was that they were doing so.

To end this third session I gathered all the children together and we had a short discussion that centered on what they wanted to photograph. Frances indicated that she would "take lots of pictures of Chocolate", her favorite dog, who had already made an appearance in the story she had shared with me earlier. Bryan wanted to "take pictures of his family". Boris said, "I'm going to catch people in our playground". The children asked over and over again, "Can we take pictures of anything we want to?" This was of particular importance to Jahleeki, who must have asked the question ten times. He was very concerned that he would bring in pictures of the "wrong stuff". I assured Jahleeki, and the rest of the group, that they were in charge of deciding what to photograph and

how to do it. Jahleeki seemed very pleased with the creative freedom this offered him. I reminded them all to go slowly and to look carefully at what they were photographing; to spend time composing the picture, finding the light source, and to make sure they asked the permission if they wanted to photograph people. I wished them all good luck with their picture taking and told them how much I was looking forward to seeing the results. With that the school day came to an end and I said good-bye to the group.

Visiting the studio

On the morning that the children of Room 24 were to make their first visit to the studio, I met up with the group in their classroom in order to escort them on their journey to 24 Mount Royal Avenue. It was a brisk April morning, sunny but very cold, and I met the children in their classroom at 8:20 a.m. Bundled from head to toe against the bitter cold, cameras in tow, we made our way to the Plamondon metro station and boarded a train that took us on a twenty-minute ride to Mt. Royal Station. There we could either catch a connecting bus or walk directly to the studio, which was about five blocks away. On this morning, the icy cold weather prompted us to catch the bus, and within a few minutes of our arrival at Mt. Royal Station, we were riding the creaky metal elevator up to my studio on the tenth floor. The entire travel experience was exciting for the children. Some of them took photos of people on the subway, asking them very politely for their permission. Others just peered out the window into the dark subway tunnels. For the most part, the children were well behaved. Our main concern was keeping them away from the subway tracks, safely back against the walls of the station while we waited for the arriving train.

There were "oohs" and "ahs" when we entered the studio, which surprised me because it was a modest space; bright white walls, a floor painted battleship gray, and a bank of large windows that looked out on the city. The building had been a clothing factory in the 1930'and 40's when the neighborhood was home to "the rag trade" in Montreal, but it had been many years since it had seen a sewing machine. It now houses individual artists' studios and offices. The view out the large old windows is spectacular, and the children were immediately drawn to it. They gazed out those windows for the longest time, looking for landmarks, and asking questions about what they were seeing. It seemed as though inviting the children into the studio, was in a sense like inviting them into my home. I had chosen to share this private space with them, and I can recall observing the pleasure and happiness this invitation brought.

Once they had taken off all their winter gear and settled in, I showed them the darkroom. I explained that when they had finished their film they would learn how to print their own photographs using the equipment they saw there. On the previous evening, I had organized the studio to make it conducive to the work we were going to do. I put away a lot of photography equipment, heavy objects and ladders that could present a danger. I set up two large tables with benches and chairs. We used these surfaces to work on, and at lunch they doubled as our kitchen tables. Because the children would be at the studio all day, I decided that I would make them lunch each time they visited.

From my positive experience of bringing the children a homemade snack, I thought preparing a meal for them would send a clear message that they were cherished guests; that I valued them and cared enough to share what

I had with them. These points were rarely discussed, but I had the sense they were helping to build a strong connection between the children and myself - that these small caring acts were very relevant in engaging this group of students. Even though I had told their families that I would be providing lunch for the children, a few parents still sent them with food. Still, each child usually shared some part of the meal with us. They would eat their homemade lunch and following that, partake of the sandwiches, vegetables, fruit, juice and cookies I provided. They were always hungry!

Preparing lunch for eight children and three adults took a good amount of time and organization. Then there was the problem of delivery, as the refrigerator at the studio was far too small to hold all the food required to feed this group. To solve this problem I enlisted the help of my husband, who would bring the food to the studio each week that the children were visiting. His arrival became an event that the children looked forward to each week. They greeted him with great warmth and would help him to lay out the food and drinks onto our long "dining" table. I observed that the children approached these tasks with great seriousness and care – setting the table as though we were a large family sitting down to a Sunday meal. The children were very careful to make sure each person had a place at the table and that the food was evenly shared. They would always implore my husband to join us for lunch. He usually stayed long enough to have them show him their most recent photographs and they seemed to greatly enjoy his attention and interest in them. I saw these interactions as another form of connection building. By giving the children the opportunity to get to know my family, just as I had met their parents and siblings, it was my feeling that we were moved to a more level playing field of power and

shared authority. I knew a lot about them, and they were getting to know a lot about me, too.

## Beginning with themselves

*The self is a text, it has to be deciphered...The self is a project, something to be built.* (D.H. Lawrence (1925) Art and Morality in Calendar of Modern Letters.)

The first project we worked on together at the studio involved the creation of large mural-sized paintings that were then used as backdrops for a series of photographic self-portraits. I wondered how the children would choose to pose themselves and what they would say about the completed images. To introduce the children to this activity, I showed them several examples of portraits. We studied both paintings and photographs. I was particularly interested in showing them a number of Victorian studio portraits that included elaborately painted backdrops of interior and exterior scenes. These were the images that inspired this activity. While we viewed these images we talked about gesture, pose, expression and the environment around subjects in the pictures. We contemplated what the background and objects included in the photographs told us about the individuals being portrayed.

After discussing a number of these portraits and self-portraits, I sensed that the children needed a change of pace. They were beginning to fidget and daydream and they had run out of interesting things to say about the images. After several weeks of working with the children I began to recognize the signs of their waning interest and I would usually try to respond by changing the rhythm of our activities. If we were sitting, looking and talking, I would have us shift into a more active mode, where they were required to move about or to

create something. When I began to hear my own voice, more than any of the others, I would take it as a signal to change tracks. In this instance I put away the balance of the images I had planned on discussing and I had the children get up and do some stretching and movement in the large empty studio floor.

During our lunch break I had pinned a backdrop cloth to the wall of the studio. After they had moved around a little, I gave them a Polaroid SX-70 camera loaded with color film. I suggested they use the camera to photograph each other as they posed in front of the yellow crushed-velvet cloth backdrop. I asked them to try to convey a mood, an interesting facial expression or gesture as they posed. The children took turns photographing, and then being photographed. As we waited for their Polaroid photographs to appear I noticed that the children were captivated as they watched the images develop color and contrast. Some of the children dissolved with laughter at seeing themselves or their friends performing for the camera.

The impact of using the children's imagery to engage them in their learning became apparent even in these very simple introductory picture-taking activities. Although the children were interested in looking at images by "distant others", when they were responding to photographs they had created, I observed that their involvement was far more intense and prolonged.

Preparing their backdrops

After the children had finished the Polaroid portraits, I gave each child a set of inexpensive brightly colored oil pastels and scrap paper so that they could map out their backdrop plans. Some of the children spent a great deal of

**Figure 4. Bryan and Jeff posing for initial SX-70 Polaroid images in the studio**

time working on these plans, others only put down a few lines of color and were quite impatient to begin painting. Once they had some idea worked out I gave out the large pieces of Strathmore roll paper that I had precut the evening before. Each piece measured approximately four feet by five feet. I then distributed trays of tempera paint and brushes of various sizes. The large pieces of mural paper were either laid out on the floor or pinned to the wall of the studio. While the children worked, I reminded them that their paintings were going to be used as backdrops for a series of self-portraits and that they should try to make use of as much of the space on the paper as they could.

The children loved the experience of painting. They very rarely had the chance to paint at school, and working on such a large scale was unheard of.

The resulting backdrop paintings ranged from abstract expressions of color, movement and texture, to symbolic representations like that of the Canadian flag. The children were pleased with the results of their work and anxious to begin to use the camera to document themselves with their paintings. All of the backdrop paintings were completed in the morning session, between 9:30 a.m. and 11:30 p.m., and we ate lunch while the paintings dried.

After lunch, we hung one painting at a time in a brightly-lit location on one wall of the studio. I taped off an area on the floor in front of the wall in order to create a stage-like space upon which the students would pose. Practically, this taped area gave the children parameters for shooting the photographs. In other words, they knew that if they moved outside the taped areas they would no longer be within the frame. We used a 35mm camera on a tripod, loaded with high-speed (1600 ASA) color film. A long cable release was available for the students to click the shutter when they felt they had the pose just right. I set up the camera on the tripod, and made sure the light meter reading was correct. Then I stood back and let the children take over.

While the self-portraits were being taken, all the children in the group sat around and offered suggestions, gave their approval or disapproval, and even pressed the cable release if requested to do so by the individual being photographed. They shot about five or six frames each. As I watched the children participate in this activity, I saw a side of them that I had not seen in their classroom. Here they were performers: they knew how to pose and were confident and comfortable on that small stage in front of their paintings, and in front of the camera lens. Their success in this activity indicated to me the great limitations inherent in our methods of measuring students' skills and abilities.

For the most part their strengths in both the visual and performing arts were either overlooked or undervalued. It occurred to me that these strengths should be fostered and encouraged in-and-of themselves, and perhaps as a bridge to other learning.

Once the children had all taken a turn on "the stage" we ended our first session at the studio and the children prepared for their trip home. We agreed to meet back at Coronation next Friday to look at the self-portraits. In addition, I reminded the children to finish taking all their black and white pictures before our next meeting, as I planned to develop the first rolls of film before we saw each other again. With these plans in place, the children of Room 24 left the studio at 1:30 p.m. after a productive and outburst-free day.

Continuing Our Work at Coronation

Once the self-portrait images were developed, I returned to Coronation to work with the children. We were fortunate to have the use of a classroom very close to Room 24 where I could meet with two or three children at a time for approximately thirty to forty minutes at a time. The first thing I did with each of the small groups I saw that day, was to show them their self-portrait images. For the most part the children were very pleased and surprised by the quality of the images. They loved the dignified and "grown up" way they looked. At this point, I wanted to see what would happen if I tried to use their images to encourage the children to write. I began by talking with them about their pictures. I asked them to select one or two images that they liked the most and tell me why. The next step was to help the students to write some sort of caption that would accompany the one self-portrait they thought was the strongest and

most successful. These written statements grew out of our talk about the images. I asked the children to try to describe their pose, gesture, facial expression and placement within the frame.

At times it was difficult to read their feelings as they could be guarded, distracted, and withdrawn. However, I found if I kept working to focus their attention on the photographs, they would usually reconnect. I was patient with the children, as I strove to recognize, then to adapt to the rhythm and pace of their work. I learned very quickly that these children would begin what Ira Shor (1992) calls a "performance strike" (p.20), if they began to feel frustrated, anxious or confused. These strikes took place on a regular basis in their classroom and I wanted to discourage them in our work together. This is not to say that I had lowered expectations of the children. On the contrary, I believed from the outset that they were capable of a great deal more than they usually produced, and I made my faith in their abilities clear to them. What I was attempting to do, was to have the children guide me - help me to understand how best to engage them in the learning activities I was presenting and the tasks we were trying to accomplish.

Turning words into writing

It was in this segment of our work together that I began using a tape recorder in our discussions. I asked the children if they would like to talk into the microphone to record, then listen to their voices. They were all very positive about using the microphone, (perhaps another reference to popular culture?). Once we had finished talking about on of their photographs, I would play back the recording of our conversation so that the children could hear themselves

discussing their work. Together we would choose individual words, sentences, or phrases that they thought would add richness and meaning to their self-portraits. The tape-recorder proved to be an excellent tool in helping to encourage the children to talk, and then to write. They enjoyed speaking into the microphone and were pleased and surprised to hear their voices played back. I thought at the time that perhaps the performance-related nature of this process helped to engage the children. It seemed as though they were more confident and inspired when they "had the floor".

We used these recordings to help us to construct sentences in a slow process of considering how the words were spelled, and how they would function within the sentence or phrase they wanted to include with their image. We played relevant passages over and over until they found the words they liked. Once they had selected a sentence, I would help them to write it in their journals. Together we looked up words in the dictionary and wrote them out on the chalkboard. Writing even a brief sentence could take as much as forty minutes to accomplish, but what was encouraging was that they stayed with me through the process.

I sensed that the various modes of communication I employed - visual, verbal, aural - were working together to help the children to put their thoughts into words, and then to write those words out on paper. Both the images and the words written to accompany them were put into their journals. I used this process of moving from the images, to conversation, then to writing throughout the study. It was a method that was getting positive results with this group of children, and I sensed that it could be a valuable technique in other teaching contexts.

The self-portrait component of this study helped to introduce the children to the camera. The powerful images they produced provided a glimpse into the potential of things to come. This initial activity engaged the children and afforded them the time and space to explore a variety of modes of communication in their efforts to create complex self-representations. They were able to draw, paint, and consider the communicative value of color. More importantly, the process offered them an opportunity to make use of their visual and dramatic skills to perform or represent themselves in ways that conveyed aspects of their personalities that were often hidden.

"Their eyes meeting the world..." (Coles, 1992, p.1)

By now it was mid-April and most of the children had shot two rolls of film. Unfortunately, when I developed this first batch of film I was disappointed and rather concerned to discover that some of their pictures were damaged in a way that indicated that the cameras had been opened up with the film inside. I had told the children on several occasions that film is very sensitive to light and they must not open up the cameras. Initially, this point proved to be one of the most difficult concepts for the children to grasp – until they saw the sad results of film that had been exposed to light. I wondered if their confusion might have resulted from my use of the Polaroid camera to introduce them to photography. The instant process may have encouraged them to think that their cameras would produce a finished print minutes after shooting the image. In any case, a number of the first rolls of black and white that film the children shot were damaged and when I met with them again, we discussed this problem.

For children who are extremely familiar with failure and often reluctant to try again, I was concerned about this initial technical set back. However, even though they were understandably disappointed, they had so enjoyed the act of picture taking that they were more than willing to try again. After discussing possible solutions we solved the problem of open cameras by using duct-tape to seal the film inside. This insured that the cameras would be kept closed. The black tape we used provided an extremely low-tech solution; however, it reassured the children that no one, not even the "younger brothers or sisters", who took much of the blame for the exposed film, would open their cameras. We never had an incident of damaged film again.

Even though there were a few children who had lost several frames to opened cameras, when I viewed the numerous images that had survived, I was extremely pleased with the results. The children had taken their cameras into the community, the school, and into their homes. They had documented their toys, families, bedrooms, neighborhoods, and play spaces. They had spent their free time during recess, after school and on their lunch hour photographing friends, teachers and their life in the schoolyard.

The contact sheets that I printed from their negatives provided each child with a small record of all of the photographs they had made. We used them to help the children select the images that they wanted to enlarge. Some of the children cut out every one of the small images recorded on their contact sheets. They then placed them in their journals where they were used as catalysts for writing activities. With their negatives and contact sheets complete, the children were children ready to begin work in the darkroom.

Their second visit to the studio

To introduce the children to the photographic darkroom process that they would have to learn in order to make prints from their black and white negatives, we began by working outside the darkroom, making Sunprints. Placing opaque objects on photographic paper and exposing the paper to sunlight creates Sunprints. When exposed to light, the paper changes from white to violet. When one sees a deep violet tone, the paper is put into a tray of chemical, which permanently fixes the shadow print onto the photo paper. After about thirty seconds in the chemical called *Fix*, the photographic paper is ready to be placed into a tray of water which removes any excess chemical from its surface. This simple activity allowed the children to see how photographic paper is sensitive to light and it introduced them to basic darkroom procedures. I chose to begin with this activity because I could do it with the entire group and it could take place in the large work-space outside the darkroom.

On that same morning we followed the Sunprint activity with their first experience in the darkroom, where they created *Photograms*. Photograms are similar to Sunprints, but they use the light from the enlarger (the devise used to make photographic prints) rather then sunlight. They are created by placing objects on the light sensitive paper and exposing them to the light of an enlarger in the darkroom. The photo paper is then taken through the three-chemical developing sequence. This is the same sequence we use to make traditional photographic enlargements from negatives. The resulting images are black and white, whereas Sunprints are usually beige and white. These introductory activities provided the children with another photography-related

process to explore, and served to introduce them to a number of the darkroom skills they would need to master.

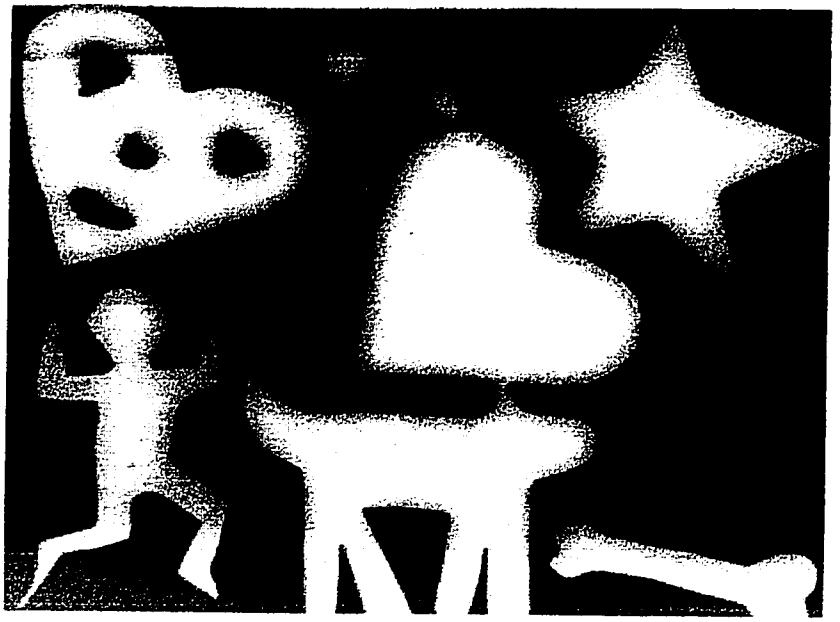


**Figure 5. Example of Photogram**

The children loved these initial experiences in the darkroom, and they were extremely well behaved. Their classroom teacher had been concerned about their ability to pay attention and respect the equipment in the darkroom however, they laid any concerns we might have had to rest with their enthusiastic interest in the process. They asked all kinds of questions and were particularly intrigued by the darkroom safelight, which created a dark red glow in the small room. They enjoyed being in the quiet, cool room, watching the photographs come to life. Photography is a mysterious and magical process. Discovering how it is done is like uncovering the truth behind the magician's trick.

Astonished by the magic unfolding in the darkroom, the children quickly learned the steps involved in the photographic process. Most of them chose to print, and to write about images that they intended to give as gifts to family members and friends. All of their contact sheets, as well as some selected images, were collected and written about on an ongoing basis. Their journals became personal diaries composed of photographic images, drawings and words. To make this part of the teaching process go more smoothly, I worked with the children in the darkroom in groups of two or three. Outside the darkroom, their teacher and child-care worker helped the rest of the students to organize their images, and select the photographs that they wanted to enlarge.

A few months into the project the classroom teacher and I had come to an understanding and were beginning to find it easier to work together. I think, in part, this had to do with how well the children were responding to the activities, and how successful they had been in using their cameras to create very compelling and high quality photographs. Their behavior was very good. They were succeeding with all the activities presented and, most importantly, they were visibly engaged in the process. The listless gestures of apathy disappeared when they were taking pictures or working in the darkroom. When they added words to their photographs there was a marked shift in their interest and desire to write. In addition, the size and layout of my darkroom required that I work with the children in small groups and, as a result, both the child-care worker and the classroom teacher began to play a more integral role in the process. They saw that the children were responding positively to this approach, and this encouraged them to follow my lead.

By the end of April, we had developed a rhythm that was working. The students visited the studio for two weeks in a row during which time they would work in the darkroom printing their images, and outside the darkroom discussing their pictures and organizing their journals. Following their visits to the studio, I would meet with them at Coronation. During these sessions we would focus on developing their written responses to the imagery they had created at the studio. The children continued to take pictures through May 1996. By the end of the study they had each used three or four rolls of film, of which one roll was color film.

Over the few months we had worked together, the children had on several occasions requested color film. I had been reluctant to give the children color film because I felt that the darkroom processes were integral to the project. However, their relentless requests finally wore me down and I approached Royal Photo, a camera store and lab located in downtown Montreal, to see if they would provide film and processing free of charge. After some negotiation we arrived at a compromise where I would buy the film and they would develop it free of charge.

The children used the color film in much the same way that they had used the black and white, with the exception of O'Brian. O'Brian was one of the most reluctant writers in this group. Shy and pensive, he would often refuse to write at all. If he would not write I would encourage him to draw, as he is a gifted draftsman. He would use his images - mainly of cars - to make very detailed drawings (see Figure 12, p. 182). All this changed when O'Brian's color photographs returned from the lab. It seemed as though he finally had an image that he thought measured up to the advertising images of cars he knew by

heart. O'Brian now had something he wanted to write about and he was pleased (see Figure 57, p. 255). His "hot" image of the red car was a turning point for O'Brian. He was encouraged to write more about all of the images he had already created, and those yet to come.

Sentences to stories

From the outset, the photographs the children produced were remarkably well composed and technically strong. What began to happen over the months we worked together, was that the writing accompanying the pictures became longer and more complex. Initially most of the children were doing little more than labeling their pictures, usually using one or two words at a time (see Figure 6. P. 86). As we progressed through the activities they began to build more intricate sentences. Eventually they started writing short descriptive passages about the images. They were looking carefully at all the elements in the photos and were doing a much better job of describing the images, first verbally and then through writing.

The teachers and Principal Townsend were very pleased with the positive results of the project. Principal Townsend informed me on more than one occasion that she had noticed, "a marked improvement in the general behavior of the kids". As the students of Room 24 became more and more involved in the project, and as they began to be recognized around the school as the "kids with the cameras", their interactions with their peers and their teachers improved. Perhaps in the role of photographer, they were provided with a new way to "be" within the school. As they gained experience and confidence, they approached teachers, coaches, bandleaders, parents and

students, asking for permission to take their pictures. I observed that these individuals were often surprised by their mature, polite approach – something we had practiced together many times as we considered the etiquette and ethics of taking pictures of people. Their parents were proud of their accomplishments, and they cherished the images their children had produced. But most importantly, their parents and teachers were pleased with the children's improved behavior, and their increased interest and enthusiasm for school.

By mid-June 1996, the children had produced dozens of wonderful images and texts. We celebrated their accomplishments with an exhibition that took place in conjunction with the End of the Year concert and celebrations. Each child in the class selected two black and white images and one of their self-portraits to display. I mounted the work, and the children signed their names in gold pen under each of their images. They were proud and they deserved to be. At the exhibition the children received much praise for their work - praise that they were visibly uncomfortable with as they were far more experienced at being in the spotlight for negative reasons. This was a positive change for the students, their teachers, and their parents.

The results of my work with the children of Room 24 provided me with evidence that the camera could be used as a powerful pedagogical tool in efforts to help children to bring their real life experience into the classroom. The teaching strategies I employed and the activities I presented were successful in engaging the children of Room 24, who were some of the most disaffected students at Coronation Elementary School. Through the camera I encouraged the children to "catch", then to consider their worlds. Each of the photographs


**Figure 6. A page from Jeff's journal. He cut out and labeled each image from one of his contact sheets.**

they created served to build a bridge from their lives at home, on city streets, and in the schoolyard, to their activities in the school and at the studio. By adding words to those photographs – words that may not have come without the

talk and nurturing structure that surrounded them - the children helped us to "look at them looking" (Coles, 1996, pg.4), which can work to build empathy and understanding. Going through this first phase of the study allowed me to observe how the activities and approaches I implemented played out. The knowledge I gained through this process helped me to formulate my questions and design the framework for the second phase of the study that began in September 1997.

## Chapter Three – Part Two

Phase Two: Carrying Forward

Upon concluding my work with the children of Room 24, I had learned a great deal about how the camera, in conjunction with talking and writing, could work to improve children's engagement in learning by helping them to record and comment on the world around them. I sensed the children's production of the photographs, and the dialogue that grew out of them, had been instrumental in helping them to engage in the writing activities we pursued. Through their images and writing the children revealed many aspects of their personal lives, and told us of their ties to the school and community in which they live. In addition, the teaching style that I had employed served to build personal ties between us and, along with the visual art learning that took place worked to generate a renewed sense of accomplishment among this group of children.

In Part Two of this chapter, I will continue with the story of how I took what I learned through my work with the children in Room 24, and applied it to the second part of the study. In Phase Two I worked with Lynette Thomas and her twenty-one Grade Four and Five students.

## More Questions

After saying good-bye to the children of Room 24, I watched them wave to me from the dirty windows of the bus they had boarded for their last journey from my studio to Coronation School. As the bus pulled away, a great sadness overtook me. In part my sadness stemmed from the realization that I would not be working closely with this group of children again, and I knew that I would miss them very much. I think that all teachers feel a great sense of loss whenever they watch a group of students leave their classroom for the last time. Some of the students in Room 24 were leaving Coronation for secondary school or specialized life-skill programs. A few had made it out of Room 24 and into the "regular" classroom - a dream come true for these students. And there were those who were left behind to welcome the new recruits to Room 24.

My sadness at this last session with the children was compounded by he sense that there were still so many questions left unanswered. Of course I realize that as a teacher it is impossible to find answers to all of my questions about teaching and learning; each year new students, new courses, new content, new teaching environments present unique challenges that require a great deal of reflection and evaluation. Still, on that hot June afternoon in 1996 I felt that my work at Coronation was not complete. So when I arrived home that

day I wrote a letter to Principal Townsend in which I proposed to work with a second group of her students in the future.

In the letter that I composed that day, I thanked Principal Townsend for inviting me into her school and for allowing me to connect with the children of Room 24. I went on to explain that I hoped my relationship with Coronation would continue, as I wanted to return to the school to work with another group of students. I explained that I was interested in working with a group of children in a "regular" classroom. From my experience as a teacher in a variety of settings it seems to me that there are very few "regular" classrooms or "regular" students. However, within the present school structure what "regular" really means is that class sizes are bigger, and the children in them fall into a more "average" category with respect to their learning styles and behavior.

Through this letter I clarified for Principal Townsend and for myself that I was interested in seeing how the approach I had taken with the children of Room 24 would play out with a much larger group, in the context of a more conventional classroom situation. How might the techniques I had employed with the children of Room 24 affect a different group of children's desire to engage in their learning? What would these children do with the image, the talk, and the writing process? How would they extend the image to enhance their learning? With the resources available, how could I offer a larger group of children a similarly intense and personal learning experience? These were the sorts of questions I set out to answer in this second phase of the study at Coronation School. To close this letter to Principal Townsend, I indicated that I hoped to collaborate with a teacher who might be interested in an integral and positive working relationship with me.

As it turned out, almost a year would pass before I would return to Coronation School. Nevertheless, during the interim time, I made regular visits to Coronation in my role as a supervisor of student teachers These visits kept me in touch with Principal Townsend and the school community.

In June 1997 I met with Principal Townsend, who still had the letter I had written to her almost a year before. We spoke at length about my desire to work with a teacher who would be interested in my research questions and willing to take part in the project in a fundamental way. Ideally this teacher would be willing to commit to ongoing involvement and would not be threatened by my active participation in the classroom. At this meeting, Principal Townsend suggested Lynette Thomas and her Grade Four/Five class as potential participants.

Meeting the classroom teacher - Lynette Thomas

At the end of June of 1997, Coronation was winding up the school year and making plans to move into the new building for the opening of classes in September. With this move to a new location came some turnover of teaching staff: Lynette Thomas was one of the new teachers to come onboard for the 1997-98 school year.

Lynette was not new to the teaching profession. Before her arrival at Coronation she had been a secondary school science teacher for over twenty years. In the summer of 1997, Lynette was reassigned to the elementary system where there was a greater demand for teachers in the English sector. When Principal Townsend heard that Lynette was being reassigned, she encouraged her to join the staff at Coronation. They had worked together in the

past and it had been a very positive relationship. When Principal Townsend got word Lynette would definitely be moving to Coronation, she thought that she would be interested in the kind of collaboration I had in mind. With her recommendation, I contacted Lynette Thomas and made an appointment to see her.

Lynette and I spoke on the phone a few times in June and set up a time to meet in early September 1997 to discuss the study and to see if she would be interested in participating. We met in her classroom at Coronation, where I discussed the project I had in mind, and outlined my work with the children of Room 24. I brought along slides of the photographs and writing that had been produced by the children and we viewed them together. After our meeting, Lynette spoke with Principal Townsend, who relayed her feelings about the project and the positive impact it had on the students of Room 24. With this additional background information Lynette agreed to take part. I was very pleased with Lynette's decision as I felt from the beginning that we had similar interests and approaches to working with children.

In order to work out the details of our collaboration, Lynette and I met several times in September and October to discuss how we would go about the project with her class of twenty-one students. She was very keen to provide her students with the art activities I could offer them. Lynette felt at a loss to provide them herself, and there were very few art resources or materials available Coronation. Most of the art education that took place there was facilitated by student teachers from Concordia's Art Education department. In spite of the fact that Lynette felt ill equipped to offer visual arts activities to her students, she had

a strong interest in the arts and in experiential learning. This made her eager to participate, and open to new ideas and approaches.

From my initial observations of Lynette's interactions with her students, I found her to be a teacher who listens very carefully. Her experience and understanding of each student in her class added a great deal to my awareness of their individual personalities, learning styles, life challenges and needs. These insights proved to be a great help throughout the project. In addition, her easygoing temperament and open attitude allowed me the freedom to put things in place as the project emerged over time. Lynette was not put off by the evolving structure of the study. We spent many hours together that year reflecting on how things were proceeding and determining where to go next.

Outreach: From Coronation Elementary School to Concordia University

One of my major concerns in beginning work with Lynette's students was the teacher - student ratio. I had already realized that part of the reason the first phase of the study had gone so well was that I worked with a very small group of children. To solve this problem in Phase Two of the study, I came up with a solution that would connect my teaching and graduate studies at Concordia University to my research activities at Coronation Elementary School.

In June of 1997, the Art Education Department at Concordia notified me that I would be teaching a course entitled Multi-Media in Art Education in the fall semester. This undergraduate Art Education course provides an introduction to the media of still photography, sound, video and animation as potential tools for classroom practice. Because of the course emphasis on the role of

photography in art education, I thought that it would be productive to link my research activities at Coronation with my teaching in this course.

With Principal Townsend's approval of my plan to return to Coronation in September 1997, I suggested that Lynette bring her class from Coronation to work with a group of Art Education students in the Fine Arts Building at the University. Principal Townsend agreed. She thought that this field experience would be "a wonderful way to introduce the children to a university environment". I felt that this collaboration would answer my concerns about how I could provide Lynette's students with the individual attention that I had offered to the children of Room 24. In addition, it would afford the children with an opportunity to leave their classroom to work in a community-based setting. In other words, these sessions at Concordia would provide the children with the outreach component that I believed was fundamental to the learning process I was examining.

By involving the Art Education students, I would be able to offer Lynette's students a learning experience in which they would receive individual attention and assistance. Just as importantly, Lynette felt that by bringing the children to Concordia we might "plant a seed" that could encourage her students to see a university education as some thing they could "strive for and obtain". It is Lynette's feeling that "many minority students are subtly, but clearly discouraged from seeing themselves in the university community". She wanted to change this perception for her students; therefore she viewed this collaboration with the Art Education department at Concordia as a very positive aspect of the study.

Before the plans were set in motion, I realized it would be necessary to have the support of the undergraduate students enrolled in my course at Concordia. Their involvement and willingness to participate would be crucial to the success of this endeavor. After my meeting with Lynette in early September 1997, I proposed the partnership with Coronation School to them. I spent a good deal of time during our second class together describing the photography and writing activities I had implemented with the children of Room 24. I had them look over some of the work the children had produced, explaining the process I had gone through to develop and carry out the activities. The Art Education students responded very positively to the children's work and to the teaching process. They agreed to participate.

Through this alliance with Coronation School, all of the students in my class at Concordia would be provided with an opportunity to work with school-aged students in a supervised setting. In this context, they could put their newly acquired skills in photography and media education into practice.

## Some important Limitations for this Study

The Art Education students' involvement in this research project has provided a wealth of interesting and valuable data in a variety of forms. This data has the potential to provide insights into a number of important aspects teaching and learning in the visual arts that might include: a) methods of teacher training in the arts b) apprentice models of learning c) reflective practice in art education and university-school collaborations. Nevertheless, it is important to state that these topics are not the focus of this study and will remain in the background in this dissertation. It is my intention to return to the data for

these and other potential "stories" in the future. To attempt to address these issues in the context of this dissertation would certainly confuse and/or de-emphasize this exploration of how the camera in conjunction with talking and writing can be tools that help to build engagement in learning by narrowing the gap between children's lives outside school and their activities in the classroom.

Therefore, I shall not address in any detail or depth the role of the Art Education students within this study. Their participation will be examined only as an extension of the teaching methodology I implemented in order to help to connect, then to engage, the children from Lynette's class in their learning through active participation in the visual arts. I will not be describing in any great detail, the Concordia students' interactions with the children or what they gained through the experience. I will reserve this data for future analysis at which time I may do justice to the rich and illuminating nature of these stories.

I shall, however, provide a brief synopsis of the Art Education students' role in the study, the teaching approach I modeled for them, and the reaction of the children to their learning experiences at Concordia. I shall continue to describe, analyze and interpret the processes I employed as I worked to move this second group of children from their photographs to other modes of expression and reflection. In addition, I shall endeavor to understand the imagery, texts and commentary that the children produced as a result of this approach to visual art learning.

## The Framework

Reflecting on my experience at the end of the first phase of the study, I identified several essential attributes that I felt were integral to the approach to art teaching I was working to design, implement, analyze and understand. These features came together to construct the framework for our work with Lynette's students. The components that I moved from Phase One of the study to Phase Two are as follows:

1. The use of photography as a central media, and its connection to other modes of expression (drawing, collage, writing, talking, performance).

2. Giving the children the autonomy and the authority to photograph whatever they felt was important and interesting to them.

3. The inclusion of an outreach program where the children would leave their school to work with an individual or group in a community-based setting.

4. Tangible demonstrations of "care" would be built into the set up and implementation of the project.

5. Incorporating time for students to "breathe out" (Ashton-Warner, 1960, p.101) - time with teachers that fosters personal bonds with children.

6. Providing the students with extended periods of time to focus on the activities presented and to reflect on the outcomes of their efforts. For example, whole days spent in the workshops at Concordia.

7. Recognition of student achievement through exhibition and celebration.

After completing my fieldwork in Phase One of this study, I identified these seven components of my teaching approach. After identifying these six features I used them as a starting place for my work with Lynette's students. They

provided a foundation on which to build, as well as some degree of continuity and consistency between the two Phases in this study.

The selection of art activities for Phase Two of the study, were also based on my experience with the children of Room 24. I retained the activities that seemed to work best and tailored them to the circumstances of the second phase of the study. Dividing Lynette's class into four small groups of five or six students, enabled us to introduce each of the workshops in a relatively short amount of time. With Lynette's input, we developed a plan that would prove to be beneficial for all parties involved. To begin our work together, Lynette would bring her class to Concordia on four Fridays in November 1997, (7th, 14th, 21st, and 28th) where they would participate in a series of art workshops that centered on the photographic process. The children would spend an entire visit, arriving at 9:30a.m. and departing at 1:45p.m., working on one activity per week. Following the four weeks of Friday workshops held at Concordia University in November, I continued to visit Lynette's students back at Coronation School. During these bi-weekly sessions the children were given time to complete and extend the imagery they had produced while working with the Art Education students at Concordia. In addition, these sessions gave the children time to link their images to writing activities and dialogue, which often connected their work to a larger world of ideas and concerns.

Over the four weeks that the children visited the Fine Arts Building, they participated in the following four photography-related workshops:

**Activity 1:** Photographing and Printing from 35mm Black and white negatives

In preparation for this workshop, I lent each child an inexpensive, point-and-shoot 35mm camera loaded with a 36-exposure roll of black and white film.

Each child was given approximately two weeks to shoot their pictures. Then the film was collected and developed by the Art Education students and myself. When the children arrived at the Fine Arts Building for the first visit, the first half of the class, were given a contact sheet of their images and the film they had shot. In preparation for the printing segment of the workshop, they were asked to select two or three images that they would like to enlarge. The Art Education students then worked with each child in their group to teach them how to print the images they selected.

**Activity 2:** Sunprints and Photograms

This workshop gave the children experience using the photographic process to create imagery without the use of a camera. These processes helped to familiarize the children with the methods and materials used in traditional photographic printing and offered them alternative ways to express themselves in a photo-related medium.

**Activity 3:** Self-portraits

In this workshop students were provided with large pieces of mural paper and tempera paint. They were asked to create backdrops to be used in individual or collective photographic self- portraits. Some Art Education students helped their groups to work together to create a collaborative mural, while others encouraged the children to work independently, making backdrops for individual self-portraits.

**Activity 4:** Handmade books

In this workshop the children produced a variety of handmade books. Some groups created large albums or journals, while other groups made portfolios in which they could store all the images they during the workshops. Others attempted to make simple flip books that incorporated Polaroid images of the children.

Preparing the children for the workshops at Concordia

Prior to beginning the workshops in the Fine Art Building at Concordia University in November, I made two visits to Lynette's classroom. The first of these visits took place in early October. On this day, Lynette took time out of her hectic schedule to introduce me to her students and to explain the upcoming photography workshops. When I arrived at Lynette's classroom, I could hear laughter and bright voices through the old wooden door. There was a window in that door but it had been covered with black construction paper, perhaps to provide privacy or to minimize distractions due to the classroom's close approximation to the main office, which is a heavily trafficked area.

I knocked on the classroom door and suddenly, there was a silence in the room. Almost immediately, the door flew open and a small girl, with an extremely wide smile greeted me. Jencika had been asked to welcome me and she quickly offered me assistance with the load of equipment, books and materials I was carrying. Another boy leapt from his desk at the back of the room to offer his help as well. The excitement in the room was palpable and with it the noise level began to rise.

As I surveyed the rather cramped classroom what I saw were exuberant, curious faces. These children were not slouching at their desks, looking bored and alienated. On the contrary, they seemed more like spring-loaded Jack-in-the-boxes, ready to leap up at any moment. Even before Lynette introduced me, I had recognized many of them and they seemed to know me too. Some of them had seen me around the school and had seen the exhibition of photographs by their friends in Room 24. This familiarity seemed to make my acceptance into their classroom-life proceed very smoothly.

The class was made up of ten boys and eleven girls between eight and ten years old. The racial/ethnic make-up of the group was reflective of the school population, and of the neighborhood around the school. There were thirteen children of West Indian heritage, six children of East Indian background, and two Caucasian students, one of whom was Jewish. Most of the children live within walking distance of the school.

Lynette and I had already discussed the "personality" of her class on several occasions before I met them. These informal conversations provided me with a good sense of the character of the group. "They tire me out", Lynette said affectionately. She found teaching children in a split-grade group to be very demanding, especially in her first year in an elementary setting. Having to cover two sets of curricula was difficult, however what she found to be more of a challenge was the gap in age between the youngest and oldest children in the class. The youngest children in the class had needs and interests that were different from their older, pre-adolescent classmates. Nevertheless, there was a noticeably different atmosphere in Lynette's classroom than I had experienced in Room 24. Most obviously the children in this class were far more energetic and they seemed more interested in school.

As a group these children did not display the visible scars that so many special needs students develop and exhibit as a result of their repeated failure at school. Although Lynette did not tolerate bad behavior or rudeness of any kind, she was extremely tolerant of their humor, their enthusiasm, and at times their silliness. Rather than enforcing strict and oppressive rules, she encouraged all her students to speak up, discuss issues and express their concerns. I sensed that Lynette really enjoyed the children, and their

spontaneous and natural behavior indicated to me that they knew they were well liked.

The constant activity in the hallway outside Lynette's classroom make it necessary for her to keep the classroom door closed most of the time. This is unfortunate because her room has no windows, except for a few narrow openings near the ceiling that draw a small amount of natural light from the library next door. As a result, the room has a confining feeling. The absence of real windows necessitates that all the florescent lights be kept on, which gave Lynette "regular headaches". Like most of the classrooms in Coronation's new home, it is clean and safe, but it has very few observable amenities or resources.

Nevertheless, Lynette was doing what she could with the space and equipment she had. She used her experience as a science teacher to set up classroom experiment stations in a few locations at the back of her room. The children were attempting to germinate seeds, grow plants, and they were in the process of setting up a physics experiment that centered on flight. Lynette was very keen on having the children explore NASA space programs and astronomy. She found that this subject intrigued the children and she used it as a way into a number of science activities.

The bookshelves in the classroom held a variety of musty readers and old textbooks, most of which Lynette told me that she did not use because they "were outdated and dull". She was beginning to collect current reading material for the children: magazines, newspapers and a few books. The children sat at individual desks in lop-sided rows. Lynette's desk was located at the front of the room and most of the time it was covered with student journals, attendance

forms, books from the library and other miscellaneous stuff. The children's desks were placed so close to her, that she could almost reach out and touch them from her chair behind her desk, a seat that I observed Lynette spending very little time occupying. The room was decorated with work the students had done in September. Lynette felt that it was very important to celebrate all of her students' accomplishments, therefore she made a special effort to organize and display their work in language arts, math, and social studies on a regular basis.

During this first session with the children, Lynette formally introduced me to the group. Lynette's demeanor was often formal, echoing the British-style education she had received as a young person in Trinidad. Once she had introduced me, the children began to call out, "You're the photography lady, aren't you?" "We saw Jahleeki's pictures last year, they were awesome", shouted Gabriel from the back of the room. I replied that I was sure their photographs would "be awesome too". Nikki, a very intelligent and serious girl politely put up her hand and said quietly, "I don't have a camera". I explained that I would be lending them cameras, and I took her question as a cue to pass samples around for them to examine. Nikki and several other children seemed quite relieved when they realized that they would not have to purchase a camera. They were worried that "not having a camera" would prevent their involvement in our project. I sensed that the requirement and expense of purchasing a camera might have kept many of these students from participating.

A group of older girls congregated at one side of the room. They were the pre-adolescents that Lynette had mentioned. I observed that they had already begun to adopt the dress and attitude of young women. Their disdain for the childish enthusiasm of their younger peers was clear in their gestures

and expressions. When I asked Sueann the obvious leader of the group what she thought about photography she answered, "It has to be better than the boring stuff we usually do". Lynette let this comment go and redirected the conversation by telling everyone in the room about Sueann's skill in drawing. This softened Sueann and she went on to explain that she "loved art" and was frustrated that they "never get to do any". It was a pleasure to see Lynette redirect Sueann's negative comment and transform it into dialogue.

Bringing photography into the classroom once again

After the introductions ended and I had answered all of their most pressing questions, I set up the slide projector at the back of the room. We spent about thirty minutes looking at slides of photographs and talking about their experience with, and understanding of, the photographic process. I learned that for many of these students photography was still quite a mysterious process reserved for adults and not an activity with which they had much direct experience. In spite of their lack of direct knowledge of the medium, like the children of Room 24, they loved looking at photographs and had a great deal to say about the pictures that we viewed that day.

To begin the slide presentation and discussion I projected the same series of slides I had used in the first phase of the study. In addition to these images, I ended our discussion by showing them the photographs that had been produced by children of Room 24. These pictures, more than any of the others I shared that day, stimulated conversation and got the children asking good questions about technique, framing, and composition. They loved the experience of seeing their school, their friends, and in some cases themselves,

projected larger-than-life onto the white sheet that served as our screen. They knew many of the people and the places that the students of Room 24 had captured on film, and they were impressed and inspired by their work. I thought at the time that their elation at seeing these photographs might be related to the sad truth that there are very few positive images of minorities in the media. Even though I had made sure my presentation included photographs of individuals from many diverse communities, I felt that these children were longing to see "themselves" and to be seen by others. The images produced by their schoolmates in Room 24 provided them with a very intimate view of their school, recorded and presented by "insiders". This meant a great deal to the children and to Lynette.

After this first visit with the children, Lynette and I met in order to divide the class into four groups of five or six children. We spent a good deal of time putting these workshop groups together. Lynette led the way through this process, as she knew the children much better than I did. When organizing the groups we took into consideration the personalities, behavior and learning styles of each child. We wanted to make sure all the children had a positive experience at Concordia. We worked to balance the groups and did our best to make sure that no one would feel left out. Once we had put the groups together we joined the children returning from lunch. We spent the first few minutes of the afternoon announcing the workshop teams. All of the children seemed pleased with their placements and were looking forward to beginning their work with the camera.

After we announced the workshop groups, I spent the remainder of the afternoon, a little more than an hour, talking with half of the group (eleven

students) about how to use the cameras they would be given that day. To make sure that they all knew how to use the cameras, I escorted this group of eleven children (two of the workshop groups) to the library, where I continued with their introduction to the camera and photography. I began by showing them a few more images. These photographs were selected to illustrate the various ways that light can be used in a photograph, methods of framing and composition, as well as the various ways one might create interest in a photograph by considering point-of-view and placement of the subject. After a brief conversation, I gave each student a camera that I had already loaded with film. I asked them to write their names on a piece of white masking tape which they were then to place on the back of the camera. I also had each student place black masking tape over the film door, to make sure it was kept closed as a precaution I had learned in Phase One of the study).

Their enthusiasm and excitement at receiving their camera was familiar; it echoed my experience with the children of Room 24. However, given the tight schedule we had planned, these students would have under two weeks to take all their photographs. At that time, I would return to collect the cameras in order to develop this first batch of film before they arrived at Concordia for the first workshop. The cameras would then be reloaded and prepared for the next group of students to use. The remaining ten students would receive their cameras at the end of our first workshop at Concordia on November 7. They too would have about ten days to shoot their photographs.

Overall this structure worked, although the children in Lynette's had far less time to shoot their pictures then did the children in Room 24. In addition, they were given only one roll of film per student. Therefore, when they had to

select the images they wanted to enlarge and print, they had far fewer from which to choose. This very condensed introduction to photography proved to be a limitation in this second part of the study, as the children in Lynette's class were not able to "try again". If I were to arrange a similar project in the future, I would try to build in enough time for the children to shoot at least two rolls of film, as the children of Room 24 had done.

There were several reasons for organizing the schedule the way we did. First of al, the Art Education students had indicated early on that they did not want to devote more than a month of their class time in the Multi-Media in Art Education course to their work with the children from Coronation. Although they were pleased to take part, they were also anxious to improve their own skills in photography and other media. As their instructor, I saw their point and I agreed to organize a series of four workshops that would take place over one month.

Secondly, in contrast to my work with the children of Room 24, obtaining permission for Lynette's class to be released from school for more than four full days would have presented some problems. Unlike the students of Room 24, who often had very few constructive and enriching activities planned for them, Lynette's students were very busy. In part, this was because they were more tightly bound to a required curriculum. But just as importantly, many of the children in this class, especially the older group of Grade Five students, were involved in all kinds of school-wide and extra-curricular activities. Students in Lynette's class sang in the school choir, played in the Steele Drum Band, were members of the basketball team, the track team and the public speaking program. There were students in this class who were part of the Paired Reading Program - reading to children from the Kindergarten and Grade One

classes. In addition many of Lynette's students were involved in preparing the Christmas pageant, a very elaborate and important event at Coronation. In preparation for the Christmas pageant, there were numerous rehearsals, choir and band practices, as well as lots of sets, props and costumes to be made. With the children participating in so many activities it was difficult enough to have them released from school for four full days.

Ideally I would have preferred that the Concordia workshops extend over a longer period of time, however, I felt we made up for the concentrated nature of the students' introduction to photography by providing them with numerous opportunities to extend their photographs in my later visits to Coronation. In those sessions, we spent a great deal of time discussing their work and a variety of topics generated from their photographs. It seemed as though this group of children, who had less difficulty with reading and writing, were particularly drawn to the dialogic activities that grew out of their reflection on their images, and the process and ideas that surrounded their production.

The Art Education students: Workshop mentors/active learners

There were fifteen undergraduate students, ranging in age from 22 to 45 years, enrolled in the Multi-Media in Art Education course that year. The class was made up of several Art Education majors who were working towards teacher certification, two students who were entering the Master of Art Therapy program and one student from the Communication Arts Department. There were also a number of Fine Art majors from a variety of studio disciplines enrolled. These students were interested in art education, but had not committed to pursuing teacher training. As is often the case in many education

programs, this class was comprised entirely of women. The only male student involved in this study was the Teaching Assistant/Technician for the course. He was a student in the Master of Art Education program. Because of his interest and experience in teaching photography, he was helpful during the workshop segment of the project.

In contrast to the children from Coronation School, there were no visible minority students in this class at Concordia. The group was comprised entirely of Caucasian students. I was somewhat concerned with this dichotomy. However, I knew that the students at Coronation were familiar with teachers from many ethnic and linguistic groups, and I found the children to be extremely accepting of cultural difference. Creating and maintaining an atmosphere of tolerance and respect for the individual, what ever their ethnic or religious background was very important to the fabric of life at Coronation School. I hoped that the Art Education students could live up to these high standards of acceptance and understanding. In terms of language, almost all of the Art Education students were fluent in both French and English, with the exception of three individuals. One of these students was French speaking and struggled with both verbal and written English. The other two were English speakers who had grown up outside Quebec and spoke very little French.

In order to obtain their commitment to the collaboration, I had already provided the Art Education students with a brief overview of my work with the children of Room 24. Furthermore, to be sure that they understood all the details of the process we went through together, I gave an hour-long presentation that included slides and reproductions of the children's imagery and texts from the first phase of the study. The Art Education students

responded enthusiastically to the children's photographs and writing which stimulated questions and discussion. The students who were working towards teacher certification were especially pleased to participate in this collaboration. They indicated to me that they felt they had absorbed a lot of theoretical knowledge about art and art education through their various courses, but they longed for more experience putting that knowledge into practice.

Preparing for the workshops at Concordia University

At 8:00 a.m. on November 7, 1997 the Concordia students assembled in the gray-blue concrete classroom in the Fine Arts Building. They arrived much earlier than usual that day in order to help me transform the messy studio space into an environment that would be inviting and comfortable for the twenty-one young visitors who were scheduled to arrive at 9:30 that morning. The Art Education students were visibly nervous and excited, and I found myself moving about the room like a head chef in a fine restaurant's kitchen - directing the sous-chefs, checking all the preparations, tasting the "soup", so to speak. I offered suggestions, answered questions, and encouraged everyone to move faster. My role during the workshops in this phase of the study, included setting up the organizational structure, and providing the technical support and teaching experience that would allow the undergraduate students to develop their own skills at preparing and facilitating the activities that had been laid out for the children.

With my guidance, the students-teachers had divided themselves into four teaching teams. Each teaching team was assigned one group of children with which to work for the entire set of four workshops. I felt this organization

would help the children to develop personal relationships with their workshop mentors and would foster the connection necessary to move the children towards increased engagement in their learning. Moreover, by staying with one group of children for the entire four-week period, the Concordia students would be able to familiarize themselves with the learning styles of each child in their group. They could then work to tailor the content and presentation of their lessons accordingly. As well, this structure demanded that each group of Art Education students prepare all four of the workshop activities, which I believed would help them to hone their technical and artistic skills in conjunction with their teaching strategies.

My role during the workshops

During the four workshops, I assisted the Art Education students in a variety of ways as they prepared for their work with the children. Sometimes this meant helping them to set up the physical environment and locate materials they needed; at other times, it involved focusing on the more difficult pedagogical issues as they surfaced. For example, on the first morning the children were scheduled to arrive, I had asked all the students to get to class at least one hour early, to set up and make sure everything was in order. There were two students who did not arrive on time and I was required to fill in for them, helping their distraught team members to get ready on time.

That same morning, I had to meet with a student who was assembling and hanging a display of images she had collected from a variety of popular magazines. She intended this collection to inspire the children, but when I looked over the selections she made, I felt it would be important to speak with

her about the display. In spite of the fact that she knew the racial make up of the students in Lynette's class, she had created a display that did not include even one image of a visible minority. It took some discussion and a few tears for her to make some important additions to her display.

On the morning of November 14th before the second workshop began, another group of students got into trouble because they had not taken into consideration the dark skin color of most of the children in their group. The Art Education students who were running the bookmaking workshop had planned to make Xerox copies of several Polaroid photographs the children had taken the previous week. These copies were to be used in the creation of simple flip-books. Because the Art Education students had neglected to do a test before the children arrived, they did not realize that the photocopier would read the children's dark skin tones as black. In all of the copies of the children's Polaroid images, each child's face appeared as little more than a dark smudge. In this situation and in others to come, I was required to step in and help the student teachers to solve their immediate dilemma. In this case we altered the lesson and had the children draw their characters rather than use the Xerox copies.

Many of the problems that emerged over those four weeks in November were directly related to the Art Education students' inexperience as teachers and/or their need to make quick decisions and last minute adjustments to their plans. In addition, several of them had little previous contact with learners from such diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. They were required to respond to spontaneous circumstances, as well as the diverse personalities, interests and learning styles of the children in each workshop group. There were numerous occasions where I intervened to redirect things; but more often than not, with a

brief conversation and a little encouragement, I observed that the Art Education students could solve most problems that came their way.

Greeting the children

Each Friday in November a small group of the Art Education students would venture down the icy hill towards the Lucien-Allier metro station, where they would meet up with the children as they disembarked from the crowded subway car. As the children made their way to the Fine Arts Building, the rest of us would finish up last minute preparations and await their arrival.

The children always reached our classroom engulfed in a cloud of excited chatter. Rustling jackets, squeaky boots and paper bags foretold their arrival. Once in the room, we began by helping them remove their coats and hats and put their lunches in a safe place. On their first visit, the workshop leaders had posted lists with their students' names on it and we instructed the children that they would "find their names written on a sign by their designated work area". Once they had located their names on a poster, we asked them to be seated at their workshop table. I waited for them to quiet down; at which time I welcomed them to Concordia and explained how things were organized here. I outlined a few rules, most importantly that they were not to wander out of the classroom unattended. I then introduced them to the Art Education students. It was in these moments when both groups of students came together that I felt my role as facilitator or bridge from one world to another. Both groups of students had connections to me, and I was to a large measure the reason they were together.

During my welcoming speech on the first of the four workshop sessions, I outlined the activities each group would do that day and in the upcoming weeks. I opened subsequent workshops by talking about how things had gone the week before and I expressed our hopes for how things would proceed that day. Usually, the children asked a number of questions that we took a few minutes to answer as one large group. Often these questions had to do with the practicalities of their visit with us. They were concerned about the location of the bathrooms, the time they had to leave and when they would break for lunch. Sometimes there were technical questions from the children. On a few occasions, I would give some advice on taking better photographs or making better prints. Generally this whole group assembly would last no more than ten or fifteen minutes.

Following these brief initial remarks, the Art Education students would take over and begin their individual group activities at their workshop station. During our weekly set-up period before the children arrived, we made sure that each workshop group had an area in the main classroom that belonged to them. Even if they were going to spend most of their time in one of the two darkrooms we had set up, we made sure they had a space that they identified as their own in our common area. I felt it was important to give the children a sense of place each week. If they were waiting to use the darkroom, were tired or just wanted to sit and talk, they always had a spot to go to that was set aside for their group where they could interact with students from other groups, Lynette or myself.

During each of the four workshops, I spent most of the time moving from group to group, assisting both the Art Education students and the children.

Sometimes I would simply sit with a child and discuss what they were working on. Other times, I would help them to accomplish something they were trying to do. I was always interacting with the children or the student teachers. Lynette had decided early on that she wanted to learn as much as possible, so she took part in each of the four activities presented. She also kept her eye on students she knew might have difficulty focusing and those who were known to wander both physically and mentally.

Lynette provided guidance for the Art Education students in a variety of ways. She discussed specific children with them, making very valuable suggestions as to how to solve discipline problems as they arose. In addition, her calm, clear and respectful tone with the children set the standard for the Art Education students' interactions with her students.

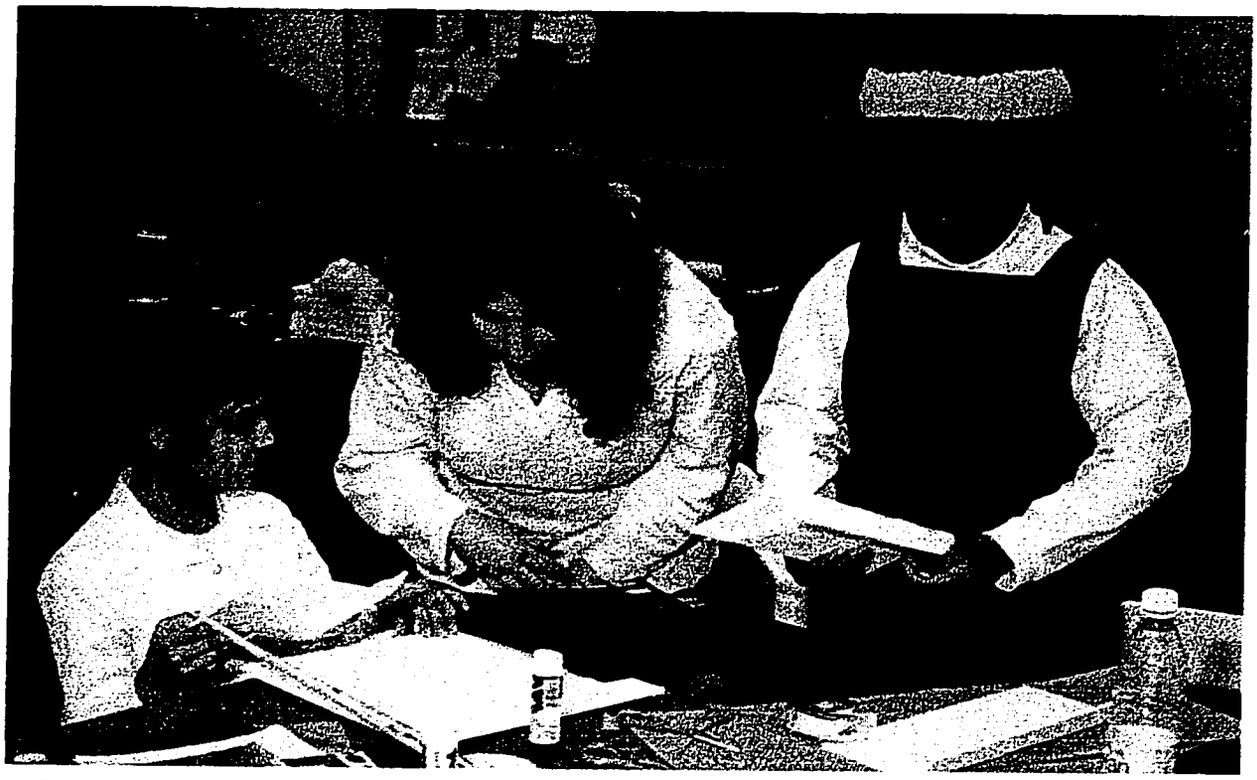


**Figure 7. From left to right - Bindiya, Evelyne and Hanai work together at Concordia University**

Expectations: Expressions of care

The Art Education students spent a great deal of time transforming their rather bleak classroom in the Fine Art Building into an inviting environment for the children. They purchased brightly colored plastic tablecloths from the local "Dollar Store" and laid out all the art materials with tremendous care. They also

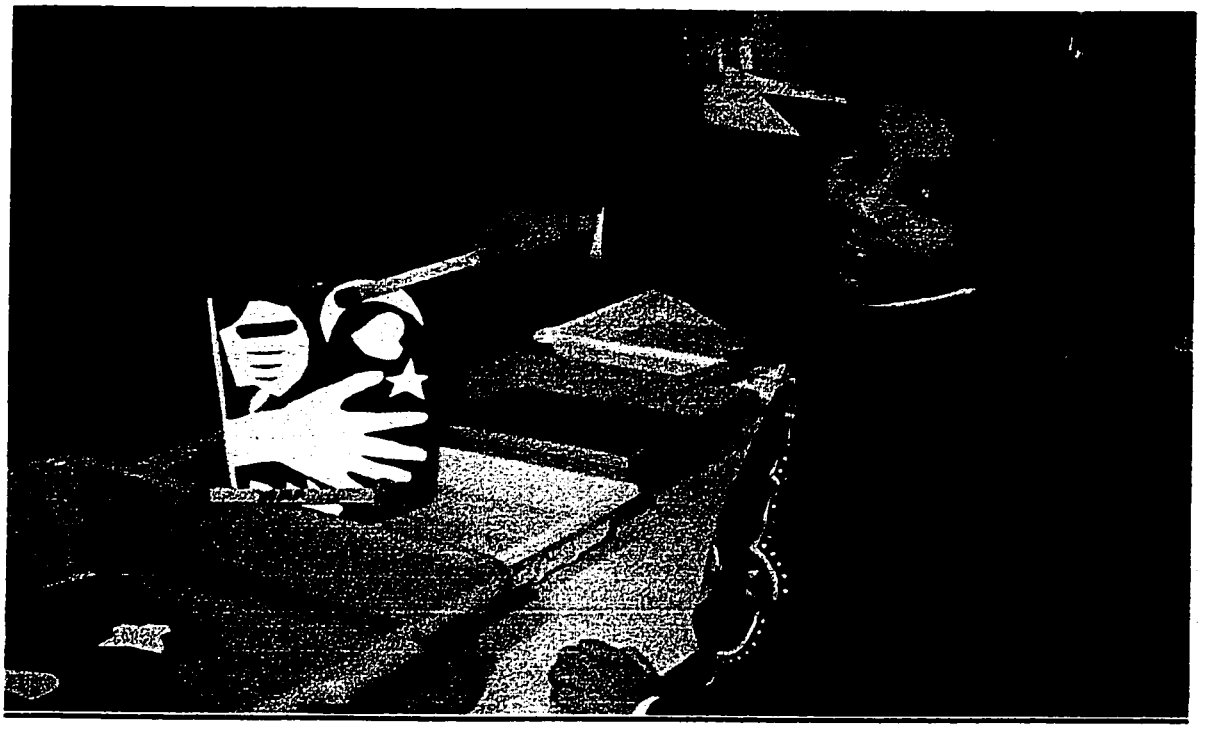


**Figure 8. Jencika developing her Photogram in the darkroom at the Fine Arts Building at Concordia University.**

spent time collecting interesting paper, fabrics, images, posters and books for the children to use. I believed that the concern they demonstrated each week as they worked to make the environment both special and inviting for the children would express in tangible ways their commitment to them. I felt strongly that these efforts were all about building rapport with the children,

developing relationships that might lead to connection, making increased engagement possible.

In addition to the care and effort I encouraged and expected in the physical set up, I also insisted that the Art Education students share a least part of their lunch break with the children. Initially, there were a few students who viewed this as an imposition. But as the workshops progressed and their commitment to the children grew, I perceived a shift in their perspective about this requirement. I observed that the Art Education students began to cherish this informal contact with the children. They were beginning to realize and articulate that this time helped to bond them together and build trust and respect between them.

Building rapport – Leading to connection

As the weeks progressed, I noticed small groups of Coronation students and their workshop leaders sitting together in the student-run café in the Fine Arts Building or in the make-shift lounge down the hall from our classroom. In these quiet spots, they shared a meal together - time for informal dialogue and storytelling, time to foster connection. Sometimes, after they had finished eating their lunches, the Art Education students would take the children outdoors for some fresh air or a walk to shoot some new photographs. Some of the Art Education students took them on tours of the studios, sharing their interest in ceramics, weaving, painting, etc. with the children in their group.

It was my feeling that these moments were as important to the children as were the visual art activities in which they participated. I liken these activities to some aspects of my work with the children in Room 24, where I wanted to set

up an environment in which the children would feel like they were welcomed and cherished guests in my "home". For the children from Lynette's class, the Art Education students were their guides into a new world. Over the four weeks that these two very different groups of students worked together, I observed that strong personal bonds were formed between all the participants. These observations were confirmed through conversations with the children back at Coronation, as well as the Art Education students' oral and written reflections of their experiences with Lynette's students.

The children as connection builders

Both the Art Education students and the children constructed the bonds between them. I observed that the children were very nurturing, empathetic and helpful. They seemed to sense the Art Education students' inexperience and took it as a cue not to take advantage, but rather to be supportive, patient, polite and helpful whenever they could. On many occasions, I saw the children become the teachers. They led the Art Education students to increased connection with them by being curious, open and forthcoming. Even though the Art Education students were often awkward and nervous, the children seemed to sense that they wanted to connect and that they had good intentions. On numerous occasions I noticed the children leading the way to opening lines of communication and building rapport.

One instance that stands out took place on the first day of the workshops when the Art Education students were very nervous. I am able to recount this story because these events were captured on video-tape, which I was able to view after the first workshop session had ended. What I saw when I viewed this

first tape was a group of adult students who were practically mute, seemingly frozen with fear as they faced the children for the first time.

The video camera recorded a silence in the room that seemed to go on forever. Finally, this painful quiet was broken by the soft voice of one of the girls in the group. Panumathy, a very grown-up and sensitive nine-year-old East Indian child, gently questioned her workshop leaders: "Do you go to school here?", she asked. "What do you study?" Gradually other children in the group chimed in with their own questions, "Do you like it here?" "Is Miriam your teacher too?" "Where do you live?" The Art Education students were compelled to answer, even briefly, which served to break down the initial barriers and helped to melt some of their icy fear away.

I was moved by the children's ability to sense their novice teachers' difficulty getting started, and impressed by their skill at remedying the situation by initiating connection through dialogue. Once the questions had begun, the student teachers triumphed over their stage fright and began to recall what they had planned to teach that day. They started to introduce the Sunprint and Photogram workshop they had prepared. By the time this same group was captured on video-tape later that day, the stress and fear that was palpable in the faces of the Art Education students, and extremely painful for me to watch, had dissolved into laughter, dialogue and productive activity.

An emotional parting

On November 28th, the workshops came to an end and the children had to say goodbye to the Art Education students. It was an emotional parting, perhaps more for the Concordia students who had grown very attached to the

children in their groups. In a closing speech I made in which I congratulated all the children on their efforts and on the outstanding results of their work, I also assured both groups that they would be seeing each other again. We would come together again to assemble their work for an exhibition to be held at Coronation in March 1998. When I had finished with my closing address to the group, Lynette prompted one of her students to take the floor. Hanai, an ambitious, head strong and articulate girl with a gift for public speaking stood up and offered her thanks on behalf of the entire group. She went on to invite all of us to the Coronation Christmas Pageant in December. "All of us will be performing and we'd love for all of you to come". The Art Education students were moved by the children's heartfelt thanks, their warm invitation to the pageant, and the endless hugs they gave out before they headed down that steep hill to the subway that would take them back to Coronation.

After the workshops: Video dialogues and writing

With the workshops behind us, I continued to meet with the children at Coronation at least once every two weeks from early December through March 1998. At the school, I would spend at least one hour and sometimes longer with each of the four workshop groups. During the first of these sessions, which took place in early December, I helped the children mount and write about the self-portraits or the group-portraits that they had created at Concordia.

In this second phase of the study, the video cameras replaced the tape recorder as the documentary tool I employed to encourage the children to speak. Lynette's students were far less reluctant to write than the children of Room 24 had been, and as a result, I spent a great deal of time with them just

talking about their images. During these discussions, I would often use a video camera to record our conversations. Sometimes I would simply place the camera in a static spot on the table where we were working, as I was only interested in recording sound. At other times, I used the video camera in a more integral way, conversing with the children from behind the camera.

Because the video camera had already been used by Anick to document segments of the workshop sessions that took place at Concordia, the children had become very comfortable and natural being recorded. Nevertheless, at the time, I sensed that the use of the video camera was having an effect on our conversations. In much the same way as the tape recorder had functioned in my work with the children from Room 24, the children in Lynette's class seemed to listen more carefully to one another when the camera was recording their conversations. As well, I felt that the use of the video camera to chronicle their ideas, questions and answers, conveyed my belief that their statements were valuable and worth recording. Consequently, the children took great pride in discussing their images and at times they asked to present other related material they had written in class.

Throughout this phase of the study, Lynette had encouraged the children in her class to reflect on their experiences at Concordia through journal writing during their regular class periods. Some of the children requested time to record these journal entries on video-tape. Lynette's inclusion of these reflective journal writing activities united her classroom practice with the Concordia workshops and other activities I continued to facilitate back at Coronation School. This continuity served to make the activities associated with

this study an integral and ongoing part of the children's school-year even in the more hectic and demanding context of life in their regular classroom.

At our work sessions a Coronation, each group of children focused on very different aspects of the process they had gone through at Concordia. Some groups wanted to spend a great deal of time extending their images through collage, drawing and writing. Other groups preferred to have more open ended conversations that jumped from their images to discussions about family, photography, memory, art, school-life and popular culture. The focus of these sessions with the children varied from week to week, however I would always begin with an art activity or a question and see where the activities or conversations would lead.

The children discussed many important issues, ranging from the future of Quebec or the qualities of a good political leader, to the personal photographic histories of their families or their excitement about a book, film or television program that they had recently seen. There were several occasions when the children used the time we spent together to register their unhappiness with some aspect of their school life. One group in particular made up of some of the older and more vocal girls in the class, was particularly interested in airing their complaints about how they were treated at school and the lack of art activities available to them. I sensed that some of their outrage at the lack of visual art classes at Coronation had to do with their desire to please me, to tell me what they thought I might like to hear. Still, many of their complaints were valid and they presented them in an intelligent and articulate manner.

I found that the children from Lynette's class took great pleasure and seemed to cherish the time we spent in conversation. It seemed to me that these

students, who are more successful with the written word, were using dialogue as their main mode of communication and learning. Unlike their schoolmates in Room 24, they would move with relative ease from their images to written commentary, then on to much more in-depth discussion of topics that grew out of the images and writing. The fact that someone was listening to them, and listing carefully, was what seemed to be engaging this group of children in the learning process.

Finishing up my work at Coronation

After the workshops at Concordia ended, I spent from December to mid-March visiting the children from Lynette's class, recording their ideas, concerns and feelings about their photographs and artwork. Towards the end of March, the Art Education students came to Coronation on two Fridays in order to help the children prepare all their artwork for an exhibition that was to be held at the school beginning in April 1998. Both groups of students were pleased and excited about their reunion. Since they had parted at the end of November 1997, I had made sure to keep them in touch with one another via messages and notes that I transported between Coronation School and Concordia University. The Art Education students were always pleased to receive word from the children in their workshop groups and the children looked forward to seeing the "Concordia people" again.

Lynette and I had arranged for Art Education students to spend two full days with the children setting up the art exhibition, which was to be hung in the library and the hallway leading from the main office. We were also given permission to use the two glass cases in the foyer, which were most often

reserved for sports announcements or trophies, and holiday displays. Each of the four workshop groups was assigned an area in which to display selected work.

On the first Friday that the Art Education students were to arrive at Coronation there was a great amount of excitement in Lynette's classroom. The children were practically bursting with anticipation, and when they caught site of their workshop leaders entering the school, they ran to great them with generous displays of warmth and pleasure at their arrival. I remember being rather surprised that the children's feelings were still so intense. Many months had passed and the children were on to new learning and activities. However, their level of connection and interest in the process was still very high. I believed this was indicative of some important qualities of the program we had implemented.

I observed that the Art Education students were overwhelmed by the reception and touched by the children's pleasure at reconnecting with them. After the initial chaos their arrival had caused began to subside, they broke up into their four workshop teams, each group staking out a workspace in different corners of the library. They spent this day together finishing up artwork, mounting images and texts, creating labels, and selecting and organizing the work that was to be hung. At the end of the day we laid out all their artwork on the tables and on the floor of the library. There was an impressive amount of work, and when we saw what each group had to display, Lynette and I decided where the work would be exhibited. The work was then packed up and stored until the next week, when we would all get together again to hang the show.

Inviting the Art Education students to assist the children in their efforts to prepare the art exhibition at Coronation served to broaden the outreach component of the program. The Art Education students were now the "guests", they were now the outsiders and the children took great pride in showing them around their school and helping them to find the equipment and materials they needed to hang the exhibition. Through this final collaboration the children were given the chance to share their world with the Art Education students. It seemed to me that this was an important part of the experience for both groups of students.

Hanging the exhibition

One week later the Art Education students walked up the stairs to Coronation School once more. The children were awaiting them in the library, already putting the artwork into piles to be hung and collecting the equipment necessary to display the work. At their last meeting each group had selected the work they thought best represented their efforts. There were two groups who had spent a great deal of time making portfolios and photo journals or albums, and these were displayed on tables in the library and in the cases in the foyer. All four of the large (5' x 25') painted murals the children made to be used as backdrops were hung as well. Two of them fit into the library and the other two were placed in the hallway framing the main office. The small color self-portraits or group portraits had been mounted on card stock, and the children had added their written comments to them during one of our work sessions together. These images were displayed along with black and white photographs the children had printed and the text they had written to accompany them. By about 1:30

p.m. all the work was up and the groups wondered around admiring their work and putting finishing touches on their displays.

Principal Townsend took a great interest in our work that day. She stopped by the library, the foyer and the hallways several times to show support. During these informal visits she talked with the Art Education students and offering her thanks for all their efforts. I noticed that Principal Townsend's presence seemed to be very important to the children, for they were proud of their work and they wanted her recognition and approval. During one of these visits, Principal Townsend's suggested that we have an opening celebration to which we invite parents and friends. She told us that she would be "happy to take care of putting this event together". The children were very pleased with her intention to organize a special event to recognize their efforts.

Once all the work was displayed, the exhibit immediately drew an audience of interested students and teachers. The handful of students from Room 24 who still attended Coronation School stopped by to have a look and share their experience and make some comparisons. The Art Education students looked tired, but they were satisfied with the exhibition and proud of their contributions. To close our time together we had a small celebration before school let out that afternoon. I brought in refreshments and we played music and toured the exhibit together.

In these last few minutes that both groups were together in the library, I noticed that the children were trying to get something organized. Several of the older girls in the group were sheltering something they did not want us to see. They were trying very hard to get the rest of their classmates to pay attention and to congregate around them. After what seemed to be a very long time, they

finally managed to get everyone together. They stood in an awkward semi-circle turning to face all of the Art Education students who had now gathered around. Nneka, chosen to speak for the group, was so nervous that she could not seem to get the words out. Jason, one of the more outgoing and theatrical boys in the group, jumped in and encouraged them to begin the presentation with one of his jokes. Nikki and Hanai's voices sung out over the rest of the group, " We want to thank all the teachers from Concordia University..." (see video tape included with this dissertation). The group then broke into applause and cheers and went on to pass out the small animal bookmarks that they had carefully designed and decorated as gifts. There was a bookmark for each teacher and I was presented with a handmade card signed by the entire group. The card, made out of paper and decorated with flowers and tied with a red satin ribbon read, "Thank you" twice on the cover and once inside. All the children had signed their names in colored marker around the bold block letter message inside. As the card was carefully placed in my hand the school bell rang signaling the end of the day. The children began to scatter, they headed for their classroom, grabbed their belongings and leapt down the front steps to their lives outside the school – lives they had generously shared with us for a brief time.

A noticeable quiet descended on the library after the bell stopped ringing. There were a few stragglers who had stayed behind, finding it difficult to say good-bye. The Art Education students were visibly worn out - they had forgotten how much energy it took to keep one step ahead of the children. Although there were tired they were very pleased with the results of their efforts and sad that they would not be seeing the children again.

Ceremonial recognition of the children's efforts and accomplishments

In early April 1998 Principal Townsend and Lynette worked together to arrange a formal opening ceremony for parents and friends of the children who had worked with me sometime between 1996-1998. Principal Townsend envisioned this as a "recognition ceremony". I helped to support this event by making "Certificates of Participation" for each child with whom I had worked over the two years I spent at Coronation School. All of Lynette's students were invited and so were the children from Room 24. Several of them who had moved on to new schools came back for this event. Principal Townsend insisted that this event be held in the evening, so family members would be available to attend.

In preparation for the ceremony, the library was tidied up and chairs were brought in and set up in neat rows. Lynette and Principal Townsend provided all the refreshments. They brought in lots of cool drinks and West Indian "patties". Parents and children alike came dressed in their finest clothes, hair elaborately braided and beaded, some children dressed in Saris. Once everyone had assembled and taken their seats, Principal Townsend welcomed the guests and addressed the students, congratulating them as a group for their efforts and the fine results of all their hard work. Following this speech, Lynette called upon each child to come up and collect the Certificate of Participation, which I was invited to hand out to them. As they moved to the front, each child very politely shook our hands as they passed, holding on to their certificates. They were proud and so were their parents. The event had the feel of a graduation ceremony and after the formalities were over music was played and

the families were invited to tour the exhibition and enjoy the refreshments. I really enjoyed having the opportunity to meet and talk with the children's parents. This was the "formal" closure of my work at Coronation.

Our "farewell party"

As it turned out I was to have two more meetings with the children. On one occasion we toured the show together and Anick video-taped the work on display. We also gave the children one last chance to be recorded. At this final session several of the children said their good-byes on tape. Some of these were spontaneous recitations, while other chose to read a journal entry. These final statements were very revealing, as some of the children took great pains to put into words what the experience had meant to them.

Severing my connection to the children, to Lynette and to the school community at Coronation was difficult, and it was made more so by the children's insistence that I come and see them "just one more time". I had the sense that they would miss "being heard" as much as I would miss listening to them. To comply with their requests for "one last visit", I arranged with Lynette to see the children once more towards the end of June.

On a very hot and humid June afternoon, I made my way to Coronation. This time I was not there to collect data or to work with the children. I was there to say spend the afternoon talking with them about their lives, their plans for the summer and their dreams for the future. I baked them one last cake and brought drinks for our "farewell party". The children knew that I was moving away from Montréal and several of them were concerned that they would lose touch with me. To alleviate some of their anxiety, and my own, I gave each

student two stamped envelopes on which they could copy down my new address from the chalkboard in their classroom. Over a year has passed since I said good bye to the children on that summer day in Montreal. Happily, they are still sending me letters.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Connection

Connection: Context and definition

In the context of this inquiry, the term *connection* implies relationships, building rapport or "a fastening together" (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 1992, p. 399). The metaphor of joining or fastening together is a good one for relating the notion of *connection* to my work with the children and their teachers at Coronation Elementary School. The image of two integrally related, yet individual, parts coming together brings to mind the powerful nature of the relationship between teachers and students.

A major objective of this analysis is to discover how *connection* was accomplished in my work at Coronation School. To begin to elucidate the processes that functioned to establish *connection*, I found it necessary to reflect on my teaching practice and the effect of that practice on the children, as evidenced through the data. I felt it was imperative that I begin with my own assumptions about what constitutes good teaching and how these values affected the choices I made in my teaching practice in both phases of this study. How did my beliefs, my cultural location, and the varied experiences I have had as a teacher, play out in my interactions with the children and the Art Education students from Concordia University? What currents run through the river of experiences I had with these groups of learners over the two years we worked together? What insights can the data provide to help bring me to increased understanding of the ways the pedagogical processes I employed affected the learning environment in this study?

This reflective analysis of my teaching practice was significantly aided by the visual and aural documentation that was collected throughout both phases of the study. This data includes an extensive video document of the workshops held at Concordia University and the follow-up activities that took place at Coronation School, as well as a series of audio-tapes of my conversations with the individuals who figured prominently in this project. This included both groups of children, Principal Townsend, Lynette Thomas, and the Art Education students. Their voices and observations proved to be extremely helpful as I worked to examine in detail the processes and outcomes of my teaching practice. Each time I listened to the audio-tapes or viewed the videotapes, I was transported to a place outside myself. In this role of participant-observer (Merriam, 1998) or reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983; Fried, 1995), I was able to step back and consider the actions I took, and the specific characteristics of the program I designed for this group of children. This helped me to identify and articulate what had previously been the largely implicit qualities of my teaching practice.

Through this reflection I have identified three major attributes or sub-themes that functioned to bring the children from Coronation School closer to their teachers, and thus, to the learning experience at hand. These sub-themes were reinforced or triangulated in the data through my conversations with the children and their teachers, the principal, and the student art teachers from Concordia University who participated in this study. I have named these thematic categories:

1. Care
2. Dialogue
3. Pleasure in learning

I observed that these components worked together to build *connection*, and in turn created an atmosphere whereby the children felt comfortable and secure enough to use the media at hand - photography, drawing, and writing - to explore and express various aspects of their identities which in turn built pathways to engagement for these children. For analytical purposes, I found it necessary to consider these three sub-themes as discreet or distinct components; however it is important to point out that these parts continuously overlap, intersect and are mutually influential.

My location as teacher

It is my belief that meaningful learning can only take place when strong personal ties or connections are built between students and their teachers. My intention as a teacher in any setting, is to encourage students to value their own intellectual strengths and to make explicit their real and powerful presence in the classroom and the world. To do this requires that I listen intensely, in a deep, multi-layered way to what students are saying and that the classroom becomes a place where students' voices can extend to the edge of their current vision and understanding – a place where they can embrace their own authority. At the same time, students need to be challenged to think more deeply about their ideas and their concerns. Teaching in this sense encourages students to look out from a place of self-recognition towards new horizons by becoming active researchers of their own experience.

I endeavor to make my classroom, by its physical arrangement, the materials I select, and the culture of communication I strive to employ within it, a place where students are permitted, in fact, expected to speak about what they

see and what they know. In my classroom, the visual arts become a multifaceted, complex and integrated means of communication. I provide all the students with whom I work regular opportunities to listen to one another and to "read" and respond to each other's artwork. I believe that all teaching must strive to link students to the world of ideas, events and activities that take place inside and outside the classroom. I try to keep each curricular decision open to the creation of new knowledge, to enhancing the skill and the efficacy of the student, and to extending the possibility of building a community of learners.

It is with these biases and beliefs that I enter into a conversation between myself as "researcher" and myself as "teacher" in the context of this analysis. For me, these two modes of being are inextricably linked. I believe that the act of teaching is an ongoing inquiry and the act of researching is all about learning and building knowledge.

## Connection: Care, Dialogue and Pleasure in Learning

### Care

I begin this exploration of the process of connection by examining the theme of *Care*. In The Challenge to Care in Schools by Nel Noddings (1992), care is defined as "primarily relational" (p.15). Care in these terms is all about being receptive to the other (Noddings, 1992; hooks, 1994; Ashton-Warner 1960; Shor, 1995). Within the teacher-student relationship caring encompasses listening, seeing, and feeling what the other is trying to convey (Noddings, 1992; hooks, 1994; Shor, 1995; Heath, 199?). It also refers to what Noddings (1992) describes as "motivational displacement" (p.16). I understand this to mean a clearing of one's mind of personal motives and agendas, and a

redirection of this mental energy towards reception which will allow the students to fill this space with their own purposes, interests and ideas.

Another important aspect of a caring relationship is that it should be just that, a relationship (Noddings, 1992). This means that there are important characteristics of consciousness in the cared-for, as well as the caregiver. Noddings (1992) describes the cared-for's contribution to the relationship as "reception, recognition, and response" (p. 16). In other words, the individuals being cared for need to receive the care, recognize it and respond. This process can create a positive cycle that may move both parties towards understanding, communication, and ultimately, connection. Care happens through a series of encounters between people, and ideally teachers and students should be able to take on the role of caregiver or cared-for as opportunities arise (Noddings, 1992).

Bell hooks (1994) describes *care* as a route to engaged pedagogy in that she recognizes that "excitement about ideas, although a fundamental component is not in and of itself enough to create a dynamic learning process" (p.8). She goes on to explain that our "capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, and in recognizing one another's presence" (p.8). I believe that this deep interest in "the other" must be demonstrated in tangible ways through expressions of *care* that flow from teacher to student, student to student, and from student to teacher. Expressions of *care* may work to build a caring community of learners, especially if teachers model caring in their own practice. "To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary

conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (hooks, 1994, p.12).

Critics of the belief that *care* is fundamental to both children and teachers, have denounced it as an anti-intellectual approach to developing schools. Nodding (1992) refutes these criticisms by insisting that instruction is not our main task as educators. "Intellectual development is important, but it cannot be the first priority of schools" (p.10). This is a brave statement in the current climate of back-to-basics learning, standardized testing and the movement towards more segmented, compartmentalized, subject-specific and technological curriculum and delivery. Many educational institutions and curriculum developers state an interest in integrated learning, holistic teaching, reflective pedagogy; however, in practice most schools do not support teachers in their efforts to create learning environments where care can truly become a fundamental philosophic stance.

Like Noddings, much earlier in this century John Dewey (1902) found it necessary to defend his belief that there must be an organic relationship between what is learned and personal experience (Dewey, 1916, 1938). In Crisis in the Classroom, Charles Silberman (1970) makes clear his distrust of educational programs that position intellectual development over all other aspects of human growth. He does so by focusing our attention on the devastation that Nazi Germany brought to Europe and the world with an unwavering program of intellectual development. Silberman (1970) asserts that this sort of focus on intellectualism cannot provide a shield against moral depravity.

Ira Shor (1992) recognizes the need to develop the affective as well as the cognitive in the learning process. He suggests that "an empowering educator seeks a positive relationship between feeling and thought" (1992, p. 24). Some of the ingredients he has identified as supporting student learning are respect, attentiveness and concern, which together contribute to the creation of a caring environment in which engaged learning can take place. "Critical learning in this model is emotional as well as rational. Critical thought is simultaneously a cognitive and an affective activity (Shor, 1992, p.23). Shor goes onto comment that in most traditional classrooms,

> ...affective and cognitive life are in an unproductive conflict. Students learn that education is something to put up with, to tolerate as best they can, to obey, or to resist....To help move students away from passivity and cynicism, a powerful signal has to be sent from the very start, a signal that learning is participatory, involving humor, hope and curiosity (p26).

By recognizing and respecting the emotional or affective aspects of students lives we signal to them that we care and we broadcast optimistic feelings about their potential and their future (Shor, 1992). Is it really any wonder that children respond to this sort of positive attention?

An identification of the need to create a caring learning environment does not negate the importance of the role of instruction in schools. However instruction need not, and should not, be our only task as educators (Noddings, 1992; Shor, 1992; hooks, 1994; Coles, 1993). Schools and teachers must be aware of their multiple goals and purposes. Care and instruction need to be viewed as two parts of the same whole, functioning together to increase the chances that children will grow up well rounded and able to continue learning

on their own (Noddings, 1992; Coles, 1993; hooks, 1994; Bruner, 1996). If schools must choose a goal that guides the establishment and priority of all others, Nodding (1992) writes:

> ...it should be to promote the growth of students as healthy, competent, moral people. This is a huge task to which all others are properly subordinated. We cannot ignore our children—their purposes, anxieties, and relationships-in the service of making them more competent in academic skills. My position is not anti-intellectual. It is a matter of setting priorities. Intellectual development is important, but it cannot be the first priority of school (p.10).

The realization on the part of educational theorists that classroom life can all too often leave out the personal, lived experience of students is well documented (Noddings, 1992; hooks, 1984; Coles, 1993; Bruner, 1996; Gardner, 1998) and related directly to my efforts to create an environment for the children at Coronation School in which *care* functioned alongside instruction. In the section that follows this discussion of the literature, I will focus on how *care* functioned in this study to connect the children to their teachers and ultimately to engage them in the learning experiences that were presented to them.

Expressions of *care* in both phases of the study

> When new teachers come in, [to Coronation Elementary School] when student teachers come into the school, I always tell them, don't try to teach, connect with the kids. I say, if you can connect you can teach them anything and that's what this project did, you guys connected with them. They knew that there were people who cared about them (Beverly Townsend, Principal Coronation School, 1998).

In this quote from a recorded interview, Beverly Townsend, Principal at Coronation School, points to the power of connection and care to enable teachers to teach her students "anything". Principal Townsend, a wonderful teacher and a specialist in working with children with learning challenges, believed very strongly that the success of my work with her students was, to a large measure, due to the caring approach we took with the children at every point in the learning process.

Fundamentally this notion of *care* translated into expressions of trust and respect. First and foremost, I expected that all the children - no matter what their academic and personal history at the school had been – would be successful in their work with me. I believed that it was necessary from the outset to demonstrate my trust in their intelligence, their ideas and their ability to master the technical skills presented and to contribute to the project in interesting and meaningful ways.

At the most rudimentary level, these expressions of care began with the tangible, for example, I decided that I would, whenever possible, have the children work with high quality art materials. In the case of the children of Room 24, this is first exemplified in my selection of the spiral bound sketchbooks that became the children's journals. I chose these rather expensive books over the more familiar children's scrapbook or ruled notebooks for a number of reasons. Practically, the black hard-covered sketchbooks that I purchased at a local art supplier, were sturdy and could stand up to the wear and tear they were to endure.

I distributed these books during my second session with the children of Room 24. The pleasure they got from receiving these "professional drawing

books", as Boris called them, was obvious in their excitement and in their desire to personalize them through collage and writing. Special gifts did not arrive in this classroom unless they were a reward for good behavior, used as "carrots" in a system of behavioral bribery that I had observed on many occasions in this and other classroom settings in which I had worked. In contrast to that technique, I wanted to convey my concern for this group of children up front, even before they had "proven" themselves worthy. I wanted them to know that I believed they were worthy and capable from the outset.

These sorts of simple, yet powerful expressions of care were repeated on many occasions throughout the two years that I worked with both groups of children at Coronation School. By inviting the children of Room 24 to work in my photography studio, by lending them cameras to use in unsupervised settings (school yard, homes, community), and through my unwavering belief in their ability to master the complex technical processes involved in making photographs, I signaled to them that in the context of their work with me, they were respected and trusted. By initiating or modeling a caring relationship, the children were encouraged and given permission to care about me, and to care about the materials we were using, the environment in which we were working, and the work we were doing together.

The children contributed to this caring relationship by being extremely responsible with the cameras that they were lent. Not one camera was lost or damaged over the six months we worked together. They were respectful of the studio environment in which we were working and they were appreciative of the materials and the time we spent together. The children expressed their recognition of these caring acts by responding with physical demonstrations of

affection, good behavior and-most importantly-with their respect for the teaching process and their engagement in the art and writing activities I presented to them. They became attentive and engaged, when before they had most often been distracted and bored. They took great care with their materials, when in the past they had been careless. "There was an unbelievable transformation in them. It was an aura about them" (Beverly Townsend, Principal, Interview 1998).

When working with Lynette's students in the second phase of the study, many of the same factors were illustrative of the caring relationship I intended to build with these children in a "regular" classroom. We lent them cameras, invited them to work at Concordia University, and gave them the opportunity to use specialized materials and equipment. On another level, I modeled the creation of a caring learning environment for the student art teachers at Concordia by insisting that they take great pains to transform the stark classroom in the Fine Arts Building into an inviting atmosphere for the children. I asked them to think of ways that they could set up the room to appeal to the children's senses. In response, they laid out art materials in thoughtful and beautiful ways and organized the physical environment and workspaces to maximize comfort and ease of use.

In addition, I insisted that the children be escorted from Coronation Elementary School to Concordia by a small group of Art Education students. This meant that two or three of my University students would arrive at Coronation early each Friday morning that the group was working with us at Concordia University. They helped the classroom teacher, Lynette Thomas, organize and supervise the children as they made their way via subway to the Fine Arts Building. Upon their arrival at the nearby subway stop, they would be

met by another two or three Concordia students who would help marshal the children up the hill to the front doors of our building.

In the first weeks of our collaboration, this organization played a very practical role as Lynette and the children learned their travel route. However, once they knew where they were going and how long it would take them to arrive at Concordia, this practice of accompanying Lynette and the children to and from their work with us took on different purpose. From the first moments the students left their school community to join our community at Concordia, we were working to close the gap between the children's experiences in the school and their lives outside the classroom. We were working to build a learning community with shared responsibility, commitment, and respect that could lead to connection.

These overt expressions of care left an impression on all the children and I observed that they helped to build ties between the children, and the student art teachers - ties that developed more quickly then usual and that were deeper than the normal student-teacher relationships. These sentiments were echoed in many of the conversations that I had with Lynette, the children, and the student art teachers throughout the study.

The following is an excerpt from a conversation I had with a group of boys from Lynette's class. We were talking about their experience of learning at Concordia; here's what they had to say:

**Bavesh:** They were good teachers [referring to the student art teachers].

**Kevin:** ...They [student art teachers] were into us. They were helping us and they're not just staying over there [gestures to the other side of the room] and saying, do that. They were coming to you, and helping you, and telling you what to do and they're like, you can do this, they don't go screaming at everything they just come by and help you. They stayed with us.

**John:** Most of these teachers here [at Coronation School] they scream a lot and they make me real mad with them. The Concordia teachers were always nice and they don't scream at us and they are always with us. So, if we were supposed to do something, they would always help us, if we don't really understand, they'll break it down for us. They care about us.

**Kevin:** And, like some teachers here, I tell the principal, if they give us respect we will give them the same respect back. I would like them [the Concordia Art Education students] to be our teachers because they would be nice to us, they like us and they respect us.

**John:** I was comfortable with them, for me it was like I was at home.

This brief conversation between Kevin, John and Bavesh took place back at Coronation School in the spring, just prior to setting up the exhibition of their work. We were having an informal conversation about their experiences at Concordia and what they thought of the way they were taught. The children were very frank with their comments. Time and time again, when I asked them about the teaching approach they commented using words like "gentle, patient, nice", which I understand to be descriptive of the nurturing parent-like approach we took with the children.

These comparisons to home life confirm the positive impact the expressions of care we built into the program were having on the children's desire and ability to connect and therefore to engage in learning. They were comfortable enough to connect with us in a similar way that they might to individuals in their world outside the school. This was the sort of connection that I intended to model for the student art teachers and the children, alike.

## Food as Care

Sharing meals and edible treats with all the children who participated in this study became one of the more easily-observable illustrations of care. Within the field of folklore, there is a large body of literature that examines the ways in which the "unique, incorporative nature of eating makes food an important

sacred and social symbol" (Goode, 1992, p.233). Personal relationships between members of a given community are revealed during events of food sharing and exchange.(Goode, 1992). Nel Noddings (1992) points out that food is often provided to children through lunch programs in many schools across North America. However, the reason behind the giving of food and the way it is presented often diminishes its power to nurture because it is removed from a nurturing context - a location where adults and children share food and in the process share their ideas and interests.

> Students are fed, but the rationale for feeding them is not that loving people compassionately feed hungry children, but rather, that "hungry children cannot learn." ...Kids are fed, but educators rarely consider providing adult companionship with food. At home, in the best conditions, an adult shares that she really does know her seven-times table, that her story for English is in good shape, and that tonight they will talk about the teacher's reaction. Feeding children's bodies is important; feeding their spirits is even more so (Noddings, 1992, p.13).

For the children at Coronation School, the sharing of food became an important component in our work together. As Noddings (1992) suggests, more important than the food itself was the context in which it was shared. Occasions of meal-sharing served to bond the children and the teachers together, and worked to break down barriers to intimacy. These quiet moments built trust and respect, which allowed for dialogue and "fun" or pleasure in learning to take place.

When I began the study with the children of Room 24, I immediately sensed that this particular group of children were very "hungry" and needed as much nurturing as possible. Food has always figured prominently in my own

personal family history as a means of demonstrating love and care, so the sharing of food with my students was a natural outgrowth of my own history and cultural location. I began by bringing homemade baked goods for the children along with fruit and other snacks, to add to the cartons of milk that the children already received each afternoon as part of the milk program at Coronation School. At first the children were rather surprised that I baked for them; however after a while they came to expect the snacks and looked forward to the quiet time that accompanied the food-sharing.

Once the children of Room 24 began traveling to my studio to use the darkroom facilities and spend the entire day working with me, I decided to provide them with a complete lunch each time they visited. As part of our preparation for their visits, we had a couple of brief conversations about the kinds of foods they might like me to make them. I prepared the lunches according to their suggestions, which in many cases included foods that I would not have chosen myself, i.e. bologna and cheese sandwiches.

Sharing our lunch break together was meaningful on all sorts of levels, but most importantly it provided the children with the "adult companionship" that Nel Noddings (1992) describes. It afforded us some additional time to share our ideas, our concerns and our stories. The preparation of the food took a great deal of planning and expense on my part and the children were aware of this. They understood this gesture of care; it was familiar to them. They knew it took time and money to make these meals because they could relate these efforts to what they saw in their own homes. This helped to make the learning environment less artificial and disconnected from real life.

After seeing the positive force that this meal-sharing exerted on the children's desire to connect and then engage in the learning activities that I presented, I felt that I needed to figure out a way to include this component in the second phase of the study. With the larger numbers in Lynette's group, the implementation of this important expression of care would have to take on a different form and rhythm. Although I continued to provide snacks for all the children, the baking responsibilities were shared with the Art Education students. The children's birthdays became occasions for sharing food, as we baked cakes and provided special treats for those special days.

Obviously, I would not be able to prepare lunch for 21 children each week; however once the children began working at Concordia University, we could provide adult companionship and attention while the children ate the lunches they had brought from home. This process worked very well. Initially, the Art Education students felt that giving up their lunch hour break was an imposition, an encroachment on their free time. Yet, once they began to see the positive impact this extra time spent with the children had on their ability to develop bonds with them, and ultimately to teach them more effectively, they became more open to devoting their lunch hour to the students.

During an informal interview session held at Concordia, the student teachers and I discussed their initial reluctance to spend their lunch hours with the children. Several of the student art teachers stated that they had never thought of spending time with the children outside of the classroom setting. Most of them said that they had never shared a meal with their own teachers and that they would have continued to pass on their experience in their own teaching practice. Through reflection papers that they submitted at the end of

the course in April 1998, several of the student teachers pointed to the growth of their understanding of the children and the increased dialogue that was a direct result of spending non-instructional time with the children. The following is a quote from one art education student's final paper. In it she points to the power of these lunchtime encounters.

> Some of the most insightful times we had as a group came not during the lessons themselves, but during our lunch periods when we were able to discuss things candidly as a group.
> (Stephanie, 1997, Art Education)

Food sharing in a nurturing, familial environment played an important role in setting a caring tone throughout both phases of this study. Food was shared through snacks, lunchtime meals, in celebration of personal milestones like birthdays or graduations, and at each of our final art exhibition opening celebrations. All of these occasions of food-sharing signaled to the children and to the student art teachers, that the learning environment we were creating did not begin and end with instruction, but that the nurturing of mind and body were both integral components of this learning experience.

Care was a philosophical foundation in all of my work with the children of Coronation School and it functioned in myriad ways throughout both phases of this study. It would be impossible to elucidate each demonstration of care that flowed from the teachers to the students, and from the student's back to the teachers. However, what I observed in my own practice, and especially in the children's responses, was that these manifestations of care were essential to

the establishment of meaningful engagement in the complex dance of teaching and learning.

## Dialogue: Listening Carefully to the Talk

> Hearing student's voices I am moved. Awe is the appropriate response for the marvelous complexity of humans. I add my voice, working to amplify student's own voices. Sometimes this is in harmony, or in the repetition of a refrain. Sometime it is in counterpoint or discord which brings the intensity forward. Always, it is in the making of a composition, welcoming tentative themes. Oftentimes, my part is to honor a pause (Smith, 1999, p.5).

I begin this discussion of dialogue by reflecting on my own use of conversation as a tool for collecting, sorting and analyzing information that comes to me through a variety of sources. Anyone who knows me personally will confirm that I love to talk. For me, talking is a way to synthesize ideas. I have always used talking and discussion as a way to figure things out. This conversational mode of learning began around my own kitchen table, where family meals were most often loud and boisterous events. Fast, loud, lively chatter, arguments and laughter resonate through my memories of family mealtimes. Once I had learned to talk, I quickly realized that if I wanted to be heard I had better chime in and see where my contributions might take the conversation. It was around this table that I learned to speak my mind, to question ideas, and to listen carefully to others. I learned a great deal about the world and my relationship to it through the lively discourse that took place in my home.

Sadly, this communicative practice did not translate well into my role as a student in the elementary classroom. In Toronto in 1965, I was required to wear attend school wearing a blue tunic with a crisp white blouse and each day would begin with our cacophonous rendition of "God Save the Queen". Our classroom had neat rows of desks to which each student had an assigned seat. Within the classroom speaking was something reserved for the teacher - our talk was confined to recess or after school. Unfortunately, I was regularly reprimanded for my desire and compulsion to talk, to communicate with a neighbor, to discuss the ideas that the teacher was presenting. My inability to stop the stream of questions that emanated from my mouth often placed me at the business end of my teacher's displeasure. My report cards continuously were riddled with comments like, "Miriam is a generally respectful and interested student, however, she often disrupts the class by talking out and speaking to her neighbors". My personal cultural codes and experience of family life, ran in direct opposition to the modes of expression that were acceptable in the context of my life at Appian Drive Public School in the mid-1960's. Perhaps my discomfort with having to keep my ideas and questions to myself or to save them for my family dinner table, compelled me to consider ways that dialogue could be used in positive, productive and natural ways in my own teaching practice.

In the following quotation, Howard Gardner (1996) points out the qualitative difference between the kind of talking that occurs in school, in comparison with talk that takes place at home, in the playground or on the streets:

> Young pupils are exposed in class to talk about personages and events that they cannot see and may never encounter in the flesh. Older pupils hear discussion about abstract concepts that have been devised to make sense of data or facts that have been collected by scholars for their own disciplinary ends. Children of all ages are asked questions about remote topics, required to respond individually, and evaluated on the basis of the content and form of their responses (p. 134).

The language of the classroom is of a less spontaneous nature than it is in the home or on the street (Gardner, 1996; Olson, 1996; Heath, 1983) and "often favors abstract terms and concepts which entail formulaic exchanges between teacher and student (Gardner, 1996, pp.135). In listening to the voices of the children at Coronation School and through my conversations with them, it was apparent that the nature of our discourse was much more like the lively, seamless, meandering talk that continues to take place around my kitchen table.

## Dialogic teaching

> Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it. ...as we become more able to transform our reality, we are able to *know what we know*, which is something more than just knowing...(Shor and Freire 1987, p.98-99).

What Shor and Freire (1987) are referring to in this brief quote is the notion of reflection through verbal exchange, the process of standing outside an experience and considering it through language. Human beings are naturally inquisitive and communicative, and dialogue is the capacity and inclination of

human beings to reflect together on the meaning of their experience and their knowledge (Shor, 1992). Shor (1992) considers dialogue to be the threads of communication that tie people together and prepare them for considered action.

Dialogue in this sense is the two-way communication between individuals. Shor (1987) calls this "horizontal" dialogue because it cuts across the social landscape, be that the classroom, the home or the workplace. Horizontal dialogue promotes interaction between teachers and students, it challenges the alienation that can develop in traditional classrooms, where communication usually moves from teacher to student in a one way stream. "What horizontal dialogue does is build student-teacher mutuality. The teacher leads the dialogic curriculum with the students' participation. This kind of teacher balances learning with listening..." (Shor and Freire, 1987, p.171).

When I refer to dialogic teaching, I am not describing one way "teacher-talk", but rather I am referring to what bell hooks (1994) suggests is "the creation of a classroom community where there is respect for individual voices and that there is infinitely more feedback because students do feel free to talk - and talk back" (p.42). Within this study, dialogue was part of every aspect of the teaching and learning process. Not only did it work to connect the children to their teachers, their peers and the activities at hand, it also functioned as a very important research methodology. I gathered much of my data through recorded conversations with the children, teachers, administrators and Art Education students. In the following section I will illustrate how dialogue played out in a variety of ways throughout the study.

Dialogue at Coronation

I will begin by considering how informal conversation was a thread that bound this whole project together. Whenever I worked with the children from Coronation, I encouraged them to move about and to question and comment on their experiences to avoid what Shor (1992) calls, "a unilateral transfer of knowledge" (p.12). From the outset I set up all the preliminary and follow-up activities around dialogic teaching strategies. For example, during my very first encounters with the children, we viewed a series of slides of photographic images I brought into the class. During these sessions, I spent very little time instructing students as to the "facts" around each of the images that they viewed. I left much of this information behind in favor of encouraging the children to read the images carefully, first individually and then through discussion within the group. Information about the artists, when and where they lived and worked, how their work fit into the history of the genre would be inserted if, and when, the children brought up these questions.

For both the children of Room 24 and Lynette's students I made at least two preliminary visits to their classrooms in order to spend time listening to what the children had to say about photography, learning, art, and school in general. I gave them ample opportunity to ask questions of me. I realized that the way in which a teacher sets up rules for talking is a key mechanism for opening up or shutting down students ability to speak (Shor, 1992; Friere, 1970; Ashton-Warner 1960; hooks 1994). During these informal meetings with both groups of students, it was my goal to set the tone for our work to come. It was my intention to send a clear message to the children that they were to be partners in the negotiation of the curriculum and that what they had to say mattered. I did this

by responding to their questions, recognizing their ideas and allowing them to lead the discussion by building on their comments and their concerns.

In conjunction with the discussions I had with each of the classes as a whole, I made regular visits to Coronation in both phases of the study to meet with smaller groups of children. For the students of Room 24, this meant meeting with two or three children at a time. For Lynette's students these groups were made up of a maximum of six students at a time. In these meetings, we used the photographic images that they had produced as the impetus for our conversations.

Most of the children responded very well to this approach. They asked good questions and they listened carefully to one another. There were a few children who were reluctant to speak out in front of a large group. I took this into consideration and made sure to build in opportunities for dialogue in different settings. Within their smaller workshop groups, the students who were more reticent, shyer or less confident had the chance to speak. I observed that some of these children enjoyed the more structured conversations where I would ask specific questions directed at individuals within the group. These less spontaneous discussions allowed the quieter children, who often retreated rather than compete with the more confident speakers, to take the floor and share their ideas.

Keeping the children of Room 24, who were easily discouraged and distracted, involved and engaged, meant listening extremely carefully to everything they said. At times they would tell long, rather theatrical, at times emotionally charged stories about personal situations in their lives or experiences they were having with other children at school. Principal

Townsend commented on this process, " Many of these children don't understand what it is to listen. When they work with you, all of the sudden they are paying attention. Because someone is listening to them, they now know how to listen". I found that by taking the time to listen intensely to these children, they began to listen more carefully to me and to each other. This required a setting aside of a constraining curricular agenda in favor of a more fluid and naturalistic set of teaching goals that were attuned to the needs and interests of the children.

Recording their voices

In a further effort to keep the children of Room 24 engaged in the follow-up discussions and writing activities, I began to use the tape recorder as a tool to get the children to speak thoughtfully and listen carefully. The use of the tape recorder in the first phase of the study, and the addition of the video camera in the second phase of this study, worked very well to encourage all the children to speak with a certain air of authority that verged on performance (Heath, 1983). I found that most of these children communicated very well when they had the stage. Their skill as performers became evident early on through the creation of their self-portraits (see Chapter 5) and the use of the tape recorder helped the children to focus and enhance their communicative skills. They became more confident and able to comment on their photographs, compose interesting and meaningful texts to add to their images, and articulate their ideas. The microphone and tape-recorder amplified and solidified their ability to speak.

In addition, the children in both groups associated the recording process (audio or video) with popular culture, media and with a kind of celebrity status.

This was evident in the ways they interacted with the media and their excitement and familiarity with the equipment. These media gave the children a chance to put their performative skills to use - skills that draw form very different sorts of literacy practices encouraged and celebrated outside the school, in the homes and in the community (Heath, 1993). Therefore when their "talk" was mediated by these audio and recording devises the children were more thoughtful when they spoke and more inclined to stay quiet when others were speaking. These tools helped the children to learn to value the conversations they were having, and to be more composed and reflective about what they were saying. The use of these recording devices became another symbol of care, as the children were proud that we valued their voices enough to record and preserve them.

In many cases the children's imagery served as a starting point for a myriad of conversations. Most of the students were very anxious to be heard and to tell stories of their experiences. I directed the students to begin talking by opening up a discussion of some aspect of their work. For example, we might begin by talking about an image they made, a process they learned, an encounter they had with one of the Art Education students or an experience they had at the studio, at Concordia or in their homes or classrooms.

The children discussed family histories and events, family albums, images of family members that were no longer alive. Then a story might emerge. For example, Kevin's story of how he cared for a weak and dying grandparent in their home began with a discussion of their family album. He went on to recall in great detail how he "brought meals and water to his grandmother, who was too sick and old to take care of herself". This sort of

powerful narrative held the attention of all the children and led others to relay related experiences of their own. Other conversations led us to explore politics, memory, personal history and popular culture, as many of the children were extremely pleased to be able to recount the popular narratives they engaged in through novels, television and movies. These stories were at the front of their minds: these were *their* stories and *their* experiences and given the chance these stories became important pathways to engagement.

It was my practice to allow these conversations to develop naturally. As Ira Shor (1992) points out, these sorts of conversations can "help students develop their intellectual and emotional powers to examine their learning in school, their everyday experience and the conditions in society" (p.12). I did have questions that I hoped the children would answer. I wanted to gain insights into how our work together was effecting their learning and their interest in school; however, I would not press my intentions at the expense of developing the children's ability to recount narratives, construct questions and build inquiries of their own. By encouraging the children to talk about their images and their experiences of making the photographs, artwork and related written commentary, I was provided with a great deal of insight into both their concerns and their interests.

In the following section, I provide a transcript of a conversation in which a self-portrait image created by John, a student in Lynettes' class, stimulated a complex conversation among a small group of boys. This group comprised the only all-male workshop team from Lynette's classroom. They were one of the quieter groups when they were working with the entire class. However when they had the opportunity to work with me in a smaller group context, they spoke

more openly and readily. Their conversations were thoughtful and expressive, as was much of their artwork. The conversation I would like to focus on here is exemplary of the sort of dialogic learning that was often initiated by the children through a focus on the elements they had described visually in their self-portraits and in the other photographic imagery they produced.

This conversation began with one of a series of self-portraits that John made with his group at Concordia.

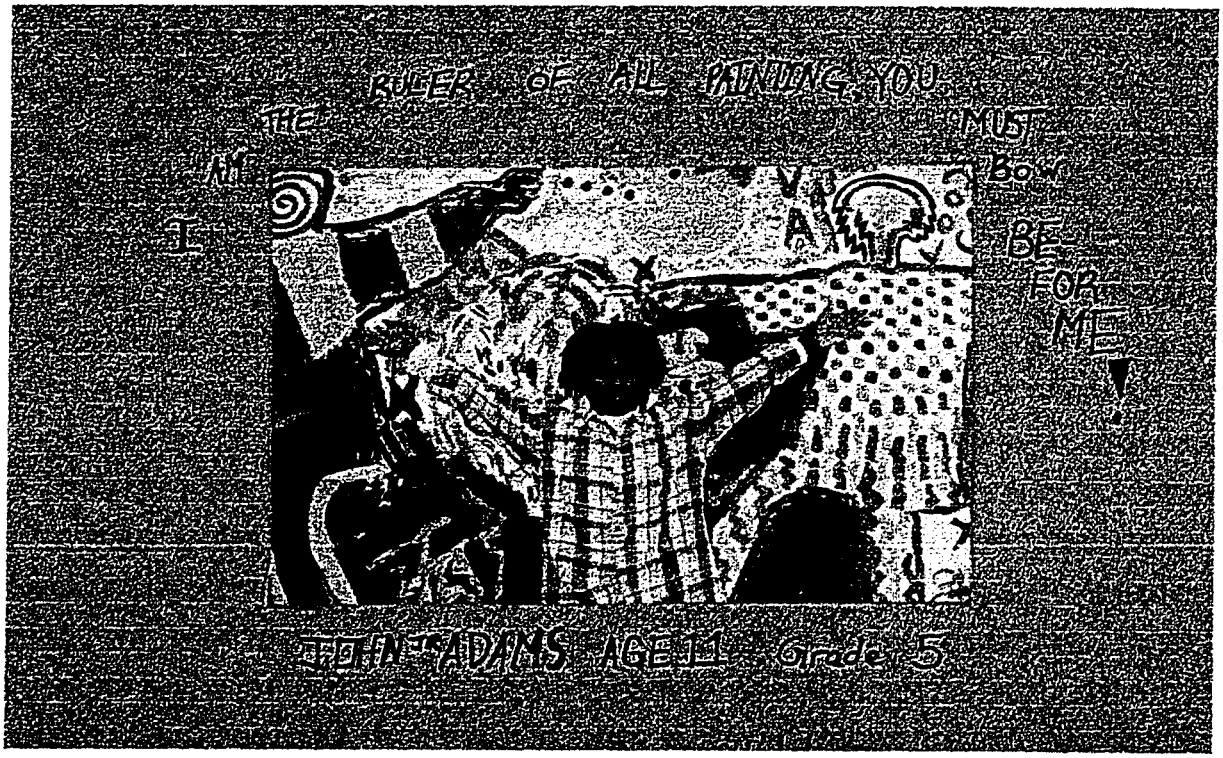



**Figure 9. John's self-portrait.**

John, a very popular student, has a reputation for being "difficult in a quite way" (Lynette Thomas, 1998). He is often passive-aggressive in his resistance and bored by many of the rote exercises he is required to do at school. He is extremely bright and sensitive but acutely aware of his public persona. At the time he made this image he was verging on a kind of

adolescent self-consciousness that was mainly reserved for the older girls in this class. In this way, John was a leader for his group, defining for them what "being cool" means for ten-year-old black boys in inner city Montréal.

In this excerpt I have included my voice as a way of illustrating my role in these conversations.

**Miriam:** Can you guys tell me what the theme for your whole mural was?

**John:** Games, and people trying to race to get to the video games.

**Me:** What are you going to write to accompany your self-portrait?

**John:** I am the king!

**Miriam:** What are the rest of you going to write about your portraits?

**Andrew**: I am serious?

**Bavesh:** I want to write about the arcade games. Is that O.K.?

**Miriam:** Sure that's fine. Do you ever play those games? So write about the games. That would be fine. Do you want to show me that John? What are you going to say about it?

**John**: I am the ruler of all paintings. You must bow down before me.

**Kevin:** If I was the ruler, I would stand up for all Canadian people.

**John:** And STOP racism.

**Kevin**: And stop the killing of each other. And stop the tax of people when they get money.

**Miriam:** Do you think taxes are too high?

**John:** Yeah! Too high and there are too many taxes.

**Bavesh**: It's true, it's true!

**Andrew**: I think a good leader should stop all the taxes.

**Roshan**: But if there wasn't any taxes what would happen to all the people in the hospital -- what if they have to pay for every little surgery?

**Miriam**: That is certainly a good point.

**Roshan**: (more emphatically) If you don't pay any taxes, suppose you get a big cut on your head - they are going to charge you.

**John:** Taxes go for the hospitals and good leaders put taxes in the hospitals.

**Kevin**: But look, you pay less, you still pay less.

**Miriam**: Can you tell me what else a good leader would have to deal with?

**John**: You must stand up for all people.

**Roshan**: You must have a good memory, a good mind!

**Miriam:** How do you get a good mind?

**Roshan:** By having a good education.

**Bavesh**: Study everyday.

**Roshan:** I don't think I have a good mind.

**Miriam:** I think you have a good mind! All of you have good minds!

This conversation began with an image of John as King and evolved into a discussion of politics, taxes and the qualities and goals of a good political leader. I am sure some of the issues they brought up echo conversations they heard at home and in the media. "Stopping racism" and "standing up for all Canadian people", "stopping killing" and "lowering taxes" -- this is a political platform that many Canadian people would happily support.

In this conversation the boys moved from John's self-portrait to dialogue that incorporated their real life interests and concerns. As Bruner, (1996) suggests, "modern pedagogy is moving increasingly to the view that the child should be aware of her own thought processes... (p. 64). With this goal in mind, through dialogue the children became "metacognitive" in other words they were able to reflect on their artwork and writing and make links from those personal representations to the world of ideas and experience both inside and outside the school.

The students' discussion of important issues such as racism and the personal qualities of political leaders reflected the concerns of family and community members. By listening to their discussions I was placed in closer proximity to these students. Often when the children spoke, there were

undertones or obvious expressions of their fears or self-doubts. This gave me many opportunities to respond to their concerns and reinforce my belief in their abilities and potentials. I cannot count the number of times I had to counter their expressions of self-doubt and concern over their scholastic abilities. Roshan's comment, "I don't think I have a good mind", is one good example of how this dialogic teaching process helped to release the children's deeply held concerns and provided an opening for me to combat their feelings of worthlessness and failure. In my experience with the students at Coronation, these sorts of negative feelings were covered with a surface bravado or seeming lack of interest. This was especially true in my work with the children of Room 24. However, once these fears were unearthed through dialogue, they could be acknowledged and placed in perspective, and the children could receive the positive reinforcement they required to move ahead as learners and whole, healthy people.

In these ways, dialogue serves the very practical function of helping the teachers to get to know the inner lives and day-to-day struggles of their students. This understanding can help us to provide guidance as children develop a moral life (Coles, 1995). Within this study, the personal stories that the children recounted led to a sharing of individual experiences and helped us get to know one another in a meaningful and richer ways. Dialogue fostered trust and respect and built personal and intellectual bonds to the project in both the cognitive and affective realms. Bruner (1996) says it best when he refers to this sort of reflective dialogue as, "thinking about one's thinking" (p.49). That is precisely what I was aiming for when I made dialogue a fundamental element in

my work with all the children from Coronation School, as I worked to move them toward connection and then on to meaningful engagement in learning.

## Pleasure in Learning

> The first paradigm that shaped my pedagogy was the idea that the classroom should be an exciting place, never boring. And if boredom should prevail, then pedagogical strategies were needed that would intervene, alter, even disrupt the atmosphere.... The idea that learning should be exciting, sometimes even "fun"...(hooks, 1992, p.7).

Although this third component theme *pleasure in learning*, is perhaps the least tangible of the triad that come together to build *connection*, it is possibly the most important to illuminate in order to uncover how engaged learning is actually experienced, recognized and articulated by children themselves. I found it to be a great interpretive challenge to reveal the embedded meaning in the children's use of the word "fun" to describe their feelings about the nature of their experience throughout this study, however, when I listen carefully, their words provide guideposts to understanding.

The notion of pleasure in learning, or "fun" as described by the children, is often thought of as the antithesis of the "real work" of traditional schooling. Fun is something that happens after school and on weekends - when the "real" work is done. Children who desire to be successful at school learn quickly that education is not fun - it is important, necessary, academic, and difficult, at times exciting, but most often boring and painful. "Real" learning is full of right and wrong answers and top-down transmission of knowledge (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1992; hooks, 1984).

Many educators believe that the early make-believe play of children is the beginning of the development of narrative thought (Ashton-Warner, 1963; Bruner, 1983; Hilton, 1996; Paley, 1990; Singer, 1994).

> To many teachers and educators children's early imaginative play is considered of immense importance. Long before 'play therapists' began to point to its therapeutic properties for disturbed or anxious children, the great educational theorists of the early nineteenth century, Pestalozzi and Froebel, believed that children learned through play, particularly free imaginative play (Hilton, 1996, p.20).

In the early childhood classroom these play activities are encouraged and accepted by teachers and parents alike. However, once children move out of the kindergarten classroom, they are enculturated into classroom environments that are invested in the "more serious" enterprise of instruction. Thus, research into how pleasure in schools might contribute to student engagement are rather uncommon outside early childhood contexts or the literature dealing with the role of play in the developing child.

As a teacher and researcher working with upper elementary students, I wonder, do serious learning and pleasurable activity need to be diametrically opposed? What role might "fun" or pleasure, play in helping to engage children in their learning? Can children have "fun" while participating in valuable, challenging learning experiences? I believe that they can and should, and in this study the children spoke very clearly about their enjoyment and pleasure in this learning experience.

Since the birth of mass public education in the late 1800's, schooling has been considered a serious endeavor. In their 1976 study, Bowles and Gintis

hypothesize that "schools were constructed to serve the interests of the capitalist order in modern society. With these goals in mind, public schools were designed to employ curricula that stress rule following, provide minimal discretion in choice of tasks, and teach obedience to authority (p.59)". In attaining the capitalist goal of creating a workforce for an industrial economy, the creation of pleasurable learning environments and experiences was not a priority.

As educators work to re-create schools to educate young people to live and work in a post-industrial society, we need to ask ourselves, is it productive for us to continue on with the notion that learning and pleasurable activity are diametrically opposed? We need to ask ourselves what role might "fun" or pleasure play in helping to engage children in their learning? Can children have "fun" while participating in valuable, challenging learning experiences? I believe that they can and should, and in this study the children spoke very clearly about their enjoyment and pleasure in this learning experience.

## Pleasure in Schools

As Gardner (1996) suggests, "much of what we have discovered about the principles of human learning and development conflicts sharply with the customary practices of schools, as they have grown up around the world" (p.143). In the interest of efficiency and accountability, schools tend to operate with sweeping sets of rules and procedures, which of course filter into the daily life of the classroom. "Adhering to the rules...asking students to memorize definitions and lists rather than to tackle challenging problems, [help teachers]

to maintain control over their classrooms, but [this is accomplished] at the cost of educational inspiration" Gardner (1996, p. 141).

"When the schools' organization becomes centered on managing and controlling, teachers and students take school less seriously. They fall into a ritual of teaching and learning that tends toward minimal standards and minimal effort" (McNeil, 1986, p.75). There have been a number of studies conducted that confirm this state of bad feelings in most classrooms and point to an alarming lack of positive emotions on the part of both students and teachers (Goodlad, 1984; Bruner, 1959; Kozol, 1991; Silberman, 1970, Coles, 1970). In response to these findings, Paulo Freire (1990), suggests that the "great difficulty (or the great adventure!) is how to make education something which, in being serious, rigorous, methodical, and having a process, also creates happiness and joy...A good school is one in which in studying I also get the pleasure of playing (pp.168-69).

Ira Shor (1992) has pointed out the "relationship between play and joy to critical thought and social change (p.25). This relationship is central to my analysis of the teaching processes that took place within this study. The children from Lynette's class in particular described time and time again of how much "fun" they had doing photography, and working with the student art teachers and myself. They made dramatic comparisons between their day-to-day life in the classroom and their experience working with the Art Education students and myself. It is interesting to note that although all the children regularly spoke about having fun with us, they had a very difficult time making connections between those pleasurable experiences and their beliefs about schooling, learning and work.

The following transcript illustrates one of many conversations I had with the children about the subject of "fun" in relationship to their learning and art production within this study. The group was comprised of five girls and one boy. Most of the girls in this group were in Grade Five and were quite mature and outspoken. They were leaders in their class and in their work at Concordia. Before this segment of the interview, the children had been speaking to me about how much they enjoyed our time together. I took this opportunity to ask them to think about their assumptions about work, fun, and learning. I began by asking them this question:

**Miriam:** Can you tell me why you like this kind of learning?

**Sueann:** Cause it's not math.

**Jencika:** It's fun!

**Miriam:** What makes it fun Jencika?

**Jencika**: Because we don't have to study and there's no work.

**Miriam:** You don't think this is work?

**Jencika**: I think it's fun!

**Sueann:** There's no right or wrong! There is no right or wrong to art. To math there's always wrong.

**Jason:** In school we're not supposed to have fun, were supposed to work, work, work...and usually that's all we do is work, work, work. It's only on Friday's that this class has fun! On Friday's only...

**Miriam:** Do you think you can learn and have fun together?

**Group:** Hesitantly...Yeah

**Sueann:** (her voice rising up over the rest) Only in art! Only in art! It could happen in lots of other stuff but we never do, only in art.

**Nneka:** In our class we can't do work and fun at the same time. We can't...we're not allowed to. If we are drawing or studying and we laugh we can't do that.

**Jensika:** Can I say something? O.K. This is all that's in our class. Number One: Work Number Two: Work Number Three: Work work work work work work....

**Miriam:** What makes you think that what you've been doing with this photography and writing and drawing isn't work?

**Sueann**: Because it's fun.

**Katrina**: It's exciting!

**Miriam:** Why is it exciting?

**Nneka:** Because it's cooperation!! (Said musically)

**Miriam:** Do you like to work in a group?

**Nneka:** Yeah! You work good when everybody is working together. Sueann and Jessica and Katrina... Mostly we don't do this.

**Sueann:** It's really a shame.

For this group of children "fun" is tied to the subject matter "art", to collaborative learning, "everybody working together", and to the dynamic or "exciting" nature of the learning activities presented. The children talk about "art" in direct opposition to "math", a subject that many of the students feel inadequate in, thus they describe math as work, and art as fun. Therefore it seems reasonable that the children are equating the word "fun" with success, and it follows that their use of the word "work" is linked to their experience of failure. In this transcript, Sueann expresses her feelings on this subject when she says: "There is no right or wrong to art. To math there's always wrong". Providing the wrong answer in the context of classroom life, is a painful experience.

In contrast, the art activities that the children took part in through this study were designed to leave little room for "wrong" answers in the traditional sense. Of course mistakes were commonly made in the darkroom or studio, however, the nature and structure of the learning environment we created, took the focus off individual success or failure. Instead we worked to view each child as an active participant and encourage them to share their ideas and to try out new means of expression. This meant that all the children's artistic production was valued, not just the ones that had natural facility or more experience in the

visual arts. Therefore, their fear of failure was reduced, if not eliminated, and this freed even the most insecure or "unsuccessful" students to give themselves over to the learning experience. It is this immersion or engagement with the learning experience that they describe as "fun".

Furthermore, the children from Coronation School derived great pleasure through their participation in the art activities. In part, this was because they were provided with "the opportunity to enter into the conversation of their culture by recognizing and then building upon the insights that they brought into the school with them (Gardner, 1996). This was accomplished because the visual and written texts that the children were asked to produce gave them ample opportunity to make their real world experience explicit, serving to narrow the gap between the lives outside school and their work in the classroom, and thereby creating pathways to engagement.

In my conversations and interviews with the children from Coronation, they describe their work with me and with the student art teachers as "fun" or "exciting". The children were describing their participation in a learning environment that allowed for personal freedom within a structured, nurturing framework. In this setting they were actively engaged, "excited", and-most importantly - they were not bored. On several occasions, they point to the personal qualities of the teachers. They describe them as "friendly, caring, supportive, encouraging and helpful". Humor was encouraged, and the children were allowed to laugh, provided it was not at the expense of anyone's remarks. Ira Shor (1992) has noted the role of humor in the classroom,

> ...when leading dialogue, I listen for opportunities for humor related to the material under discussion....It is not pre-scripted but is part of the

texture of the developing discourse. Sometimes the comedy is simply my expression of joy at an insightful remark by a student...I try to express my joy of learning something new (p.257).

In my work with the children from Coronation, joy and humor played an important role in engaging the children in their learning. They expressed their understanding of this process by through their use of the world "fun". The active, open nature of the workshops allowed for, as Nneka suggests, "cooperation" or "everybody working together". This environment provided the children with the space to "have their wonderful ideas", which Eleanor Duckworth (1970) suggests is "the essence of intellectual development" (p. 1)

In the following dialogue excerpt, I am speaking with one student from Lynette's class, as he expresses his feelings about the experience he had at Concordia. This interview took place at the end of the study, in June at one of our last meetings. Gabriel was one of about ten children who insisted that they record their voices one last time.

**Gabriel:** I am Gabriel and I'm in Coronation Elementary School and I want to say that the Concordia experience was very fun and I would like it to continue.

**Miriam:** Why would you like it to continue Gabriel?

**Gabriel:** 'Cause I liked the teachers. They were nice. They showed me lots of fun stuff and I had fun with them.

**Miriam:** Do you think you can learn when you're having fun?

**Gabriel:** Let me think...sometimes... yes you can. I learned a lot. Making photographs, sun pictures, painting murals and making pictures.

**Miriam:** If you had to say you like something best about coming to Concordia, what would you say you liked best about the experience?

**Gabriel:** Staying with the teachers. They were very kind and nice. They wasted their time teaching me instead of doing something else.

**Miriam:** How did that make you feel?

**Gabriel:** Nice...good. It was really fun.

The positive feelings Gabriel had about his work at Concordia stemmed from his personal relationships and interactions with the teachers who presented the activities to him. In this example pleasure combines with care in the students positive experience. For Gabriel, much of the pleasure or fun he associates with the Concordia workshops, has to do with the way he was treated by the teachers, as evidenced in the way he spoke about them: "They showed me lots of stuff and I had fun with them. They were very nice and kind". For Gabriel, it is clear that having adults pay close attention to him made this a pleasurable experience, and he states clearly that he "would like it to continue". Fun for Gabriel is bound up with his need for acceptance, love and kindness and his desire to be cared for. What is especially poignant and rather disturbing is his statement that " They wasted their time teaching me instead of doing something else". This sentence speaks volumes about how Gabriel feels about himself in relation to the adult world. Gabriel had internalized the message that he might not be worthy of such adult attention, and his comments are a resonant call for care in the classroom.

Summary

The three components examined in this chapter, care, dialogue and pleasure in learning, collaborated to connect the children from Coronation Elementary School, to their teachers, to their peers, and to the learning experiences at hand. Their increased connection to these individuals, and to the learning opportunities presented, functioned to build active commitment, and enabled the children to take part in the visual art activities with confidence and deeper interest. This made it possible for the children to join their new skills in art and photography to both verbal and written narrative, thus giving

them a stronger voice with which to articulate important ideas about their individual and collective identities. These explorations of identity through the visual arts, (which will be examined in detail in Chapter Five), come together with a pedagogy of connection, to build bridges between the children's experience outside the classroom and their life in school, thereby creating wider pathways to engagement in learning.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### The Visual Arts, Communication and Identity

> Modern pedagogy is moving increasingly to the view that the child should be aware of her own thought processes, and that it is crucial for the pedagogical theorist and teacher alike to help her to become more metacognitive—to be as aware of how she goes about her learning and thinking as she is about the subject matter she is studying (Bruner, 996, p.64).

In the pages that precede this chapter, I have dealt extensively with the pedagogical practices that I identified as integral to creating pathways to engagement for the children at Coronation Elementary School. Thus far, an analysis of the role the visual arts played in this study has remained on the periphery of my discussion, as I endeavored to illuminate the setting, the characters, and the educational processes that I employed. Up until this point, I have not directly engaged with the visual and written "texts" that the children produced, which constitute the material outcome of our work together. In a sense I believe that I have left the best for last. With the stage set and the characters in place, the artwork that I present, analyze and interpret in this chapter may resonate with substance and meaning.

In this chapter, I discuss how the visual arts, with an emphasis on photography, worked alongside a pedagogy of "connection", as described in Chapter Four, to encourage and empower the children to, as Bruner (1996) suggests, become 'metacognitive'. Through the medium of photography, the children achieved skill in a series of artistic and creative processes, which

enabled them to explore and express various aspects of their individual and collective identities.

Considering the children's artwork as "texts"

Throughout this discussion I will refer to the artwork that the children created as "texts". I chose to use this term for a number of reasons, most importantly I employ it to emphasize that the ultimate aim of the visual art techniques taught to the children through this study, was much more about creating complex narratives than it was about creating aesthetic objects. I borrow the term "text" from cultural studies literature (Hilton, 1998; Bromley, 1998; Giroux, 1997; Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 1994), which recognizes and describes all works of art as constructions that can be "read" by their audiences. From this perspective, texts can be constructed and meaning can be explored and generated through a variety of symbolic systems such as music, dance, drama, math, advertising, film, and the visual arts. The recognition that meaning can be conveyed and interpreted through a wide range of communication systems is central to understanding the approach to art learning that I employed in this study.

Gardner (1983) suggests "the introduction and mastering of symbolic systems is a major burden of childhood and might even be regarded as the principal mission of modern educational systems" (p.302). This idea was fundamental to the selection and design of the art activities presented to the Coronation students, which were organized to encourage the children to bring together a number of different "symbolic systems". Thus, the visual imagery,

writing, and talk came together to create multifaceted "texts" that functioned to illustrate the multiple forces that are at play in the construction of the children's individual and/or collective identities.

Transmediation across symbol systems

Within pre-school and primary classrooms, interpreting pictures is often the starting point for developing spoken language, which in turn becomes the basis for the further development of reading and writing skills. Sadly, visual literacy and analysis is most often dropped once competence in reading and writing is established. In the early childhood studies conducted by Harste, Burke and Woodward (1983; 1984), children repeatedly demonstrated the integration of "sign systems" to express their ideas. They found that children would invent representational forms, which have been referred to as scribbles (Lowenfeld, 1987), to communicate linguistic and semantic intent. These researchers proposed that "alternate communication systems mutually support one another and these multi-systems constitute a "communication potential" of which language is but one system" (Harste, Burke and Woodward, 1983, p.43).

It has been my observation that once children move out of primary classrooms into the upper elementary grades (i.e. four, five and six), their learning becomes increasingly fragmented, with each mode of communication or "sign systems" presented in greater and greater isolation. Books for older children are often devoid of the illustrations that they cherished in the earlier grades, the visual arts are usually taught in isolation, removed from any context except perhaps the rhythm of yearly seasons or Judeo-Christian holiday themes.

In an effort to build literacy, language arts activities for these older elementary children emphasize exercises that focus directly on spelling, comprehension and building vocabulary, often leaving behind more creative or integrated writing activities.

Of course, I will not argue against the importance of mastering these important literacy skills, however, through a process that has been referred to as "transmediation" (Cole and Griffin, 1983;Eco, 1976, 1979; Harste, Siegel and Stephens, 1985; Siegel, 1984), creative, integrated learning activities may offer the 'sign user' opportunities to gain new insights, which might serve to extend "the mental trip taken" (Hartse, Siegel and Stephens, 1985, p.22). Hartse, Siegal and Stephens (1985) propose that transmediation is a cognitive activity in which we engage as we mediate information from more than one sign system in our environment. This mental activity "affords language users the opportunity to psychologically and sociologically gain alternate and new looks on their knowing" (Harste, Siegel and Stephens, 1985, p. 40). Therefore, if older children are encouraged to continue their early childhood explorations in which they move fluidly and naturally between their talk, their visual imagery and their developing ability to write, all of their communicative powers might be enhanced.

In the context of my analysis of the children's texts produced through this study, transmediation helps to describe the processes they were encouraged to engage in as they were given many opportunities to flow from one mode of expression to another, alternating fluidly among their visual imagery, talking and writing. In this way they experienced the visual arts as a continuum through which they were encouraged to become active researchers of their own

experience. Via their self-portraits, their books, their drawings, their photographs, their writing and their dialogue, the children expressed their thoughts and ideas about themselves and about the world in which they live. As Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963) suggests, "Children have two visions, the inner and the outer. Of the two the inner is brighter" (p.32). The process of transmediation helped the children at Coronation to create texts in which these inner visions were allowed to shine brightly.

Explorations of Identity

The texts that the children in both groups created range from one word, or one image stories, to series of pictures or a string of sentences that describe the children's worlds, both real and imagined. Throughout the study these visual, oral and written texts, functioned as both beginnings and endings—as both the process and product. For many of the children it was through their experience of making and discussing their artwork and their ideas, that the children began to consider they perceived and understood the world around them. For others, it was through the public presentation of their "finished" work to peers, teachers, family and friends, that they were able to come to "think about their own thinking" (Bruner, 1996).

In the section that follows, I present a selection of the children's work, in an effort to paint a picture of the numerous ways that they made use of the materials, processes, and opportunities for dialogue, to explore, record and express important aspects of their individual and collective identities. After carefully examining the data through a process of qualitative content analysis

(Altheide, 1987; Holsti, 1969), three categories or themes emerged that provided a framework with which to organize and discuss the diverse texts that the children created. In the context of this discussion, the theme of identity functions as an umbrella concept under which these three sub-themes operate. They are as follows:

1) My World: Self and Family
2) Popular Culture and the Media
3) The Material World: Play Spaces and Playthings

Once again, I believe it is important to reiterate that for the purposes of clarity of analysis and interpretation, I have outlined these three themes as distinct or isolated components, discernable across all of the children's texts. However in reality, these themes are very difficult to separate and within each individual text that I examine in this chapter, there might be several themes at work. This "messiness" is the direct result of collecting data from a real life setting in which phenomena do not usually fall into pure, neatly organized packages. This overlapping makes the analysis and interpretation of this sort of data challenging. Nevertheless, I believe that the resulting understandings are ultimately far more enlightening and meaningful because they are drawn from the rich complexity of the lived-experience of children and teachers as they negotiate the somewhat messy world of teaching and learning.

## My World: Self and Family

### Photography and the Family Album

The importance of popular photography in the construction of our individual histories and identities – particularly though the 'family album' – has

been well documented (Sontag, 1979; Bezencenet and Corrigan, 1986; Spence and Holland, 1991; Kenyon, 1992). For the children who took part in this study, photography was one of the few visual media that they were personally familiar with. From the outset all of the children expressed their understanding of, and experience with, photography in the context of the family. Family portraits, images taken on holidays and during family celebrations, graduation pictures, wedding photographs and baby pictures were all recognized genres of photography for this group of children. All of the children had family albums, family picture boxes, or similar collections of photographs that contributed to their personal histories and to their awareness of the transient nature of experience and relationships. These collections are cherished items in all of the children's homes, and their familiarity with the photographic image helped me to interest them in using cameras as part of their art making activities.

When we talked about the contents of their family albums, many children described photographs of old family homes in far away places - homes that were left behind for a new life in Canada. For the children at Coronation, most of whom are first generation Canadians, part of their identity, their past and their ideas about who they are, is shaped by images of the "old country", be that Trinidad, Haiti, India, Pakistan, or Vietnam. Their experience and understanding of these distant places, places that had shaped their parents lives, are to a large measure known by way of the pictures in their family albums. These photographs provide important personal and cultural history for these children, as most of them had not yet visited these places themselves. The children's heritage and family roots are depicted in these images, and they are often enriched and extended through

stories that their parents and grandparents shared about what life was like in "the old country". The photographs that reside in these family albums sit at the center of these tales and speak volumes about the power and importance of the photographic image in the construction of identity – particularly identity that is built on family history and kinship.

As part of the dialogic teaching strategies I employed to work towards connection and then engagement, I would regularly talk with the children about the ways that photography impacted their lives. Although all of the children in both groups are deeply immersed in popular imagery through television, film and print media, for the most part they spoke about the power of photography to collect important moments in their lives and hold them for future consideration. The transcript that follows is drawn from a conversation I had with a group of students from Lynette's class at Coronation in February of 1998. I have included it here because it is a notable illustration of how the children made their knowledge of photography and its role in the family explicit.

**Miriam**: How many people here have family albums at home?

**Group response:** Oh, yes! (Everyone put their hands up) We have hundreds, millions, lots...of pictures...

**Miriam:** Who takes care of the family album in your home?

**Panumathy:** Sometimes my father does it and sometimes I do it – like for my birthday pictures. I put them in it. Sometimes, my sister says, "oh no this is not the good way" – I try to choose images that look good together.

**Miriam:** How do you decide how you should put your albums together? How do you decide on the order of the pictures?

**Panumathy:** My father does that, like when he got married, he put the first thing he did and then the second, in order – like a story.

**Meshan:** They [his parents] put first when I was a baby, and then when I was big.

**Miriam**: What about you Greg?

**Greg:** Well, I have a stepbrother and a stepsister, we each have an album of pictures of all of us. They do it from when I was a baby, to when I grow up, all the events I do.

**Miriam:** Where do you keep your photo albums?

**Greg:** My mom just keeps it in our special place – under the table -so that we can look at it.

**Miriam:** Why do you go and look at those pictures Greg?

**Greg:** Just gives me good memories.

**Nikki:** I have pictures of my nieces, my nephews, my family and pictures when we were doing our Christmas vacation, and on Christmas day. And say, we were having a party we would take pictures also, and put them in a photo album. Our baby pictures too.

**Miriam:** Why do you think people bother to make family albums?

**Shannel**: Because, when they get older they can remember the other days when they were younger.

**Miriam:** How do you think looking at those old photos would make your feel?

**Nikki**: They make you feel good. And if you have a long lost friend - or something - at least you'll have a memory. Or if say, if your mother passes on, or your father, you'll have memories of them.

**John:** Yeah. To remember. To remember the older people in your family. Like your relatives that happened before.

**Kevin:** Because if somebody died in your family – when you're born you can see pictures and say: " Who is this?", and you can see your grandparents and say: "oh, that's my grandfather", even if you never saw them.

**Bindya:** I think that it could be like a souvenir of an experience, of what you did when you were smaller.

**Miriam:** What else can photographs do for people? You've mentioned that they hold memories. What else can they do?

**Nikki:** Make them feel good! Like looking at, say if your child grew up and they moved off to college, and you're left alone, and you're two parents. And you would like to have a memory of your child. And say you're sad because you can't speak to them, you can't kiss them good night, or tuck them in, you'll just look at their picture and it will make you feel good. Photographs hold your memories and they hold things that you like.

**Hanai:** Yeah, in a way you could draw the world with your camera, a way to draw the world...

This conversation illustrates the ways that the children understand and interact with photography in the context of the family. All of the children who took part in this discussion demonstrate their understanding of the power of photography to capture fleeting moments, special events, and the passage of time. In the photographs the children took themselves, they demonstrated their awareness of photographic conventions that are derivative of family photography and family portraiture. These images were then embellished through text and dialogue in much the same way as their family pictures inspire storytelling in their homes. In the section that follows, the children's knowledge of these photographic conventions come to life in the texts they created.

Celebrating themselves and their families

In Figures 10 and 11, it is clear from the quality of the composition that Jahleeki spent a considerable amount of time choosing the setting, arranging his subjects, and getting their poses and gestures just right. When I talked with him about how he went about making this images, he told me, "I took tons of pictures

of my sisters. It took way too long to get them to listen, but I made them stop talking and pay attention. I took the pictures and asked them to sit a certain way. They like how the pictures turned out and so did my mom". Jahleeki took time and care to produce images that he knew his family would appreciate. He drew on his prior experience of family photographic traditions to inform his own visual practice.

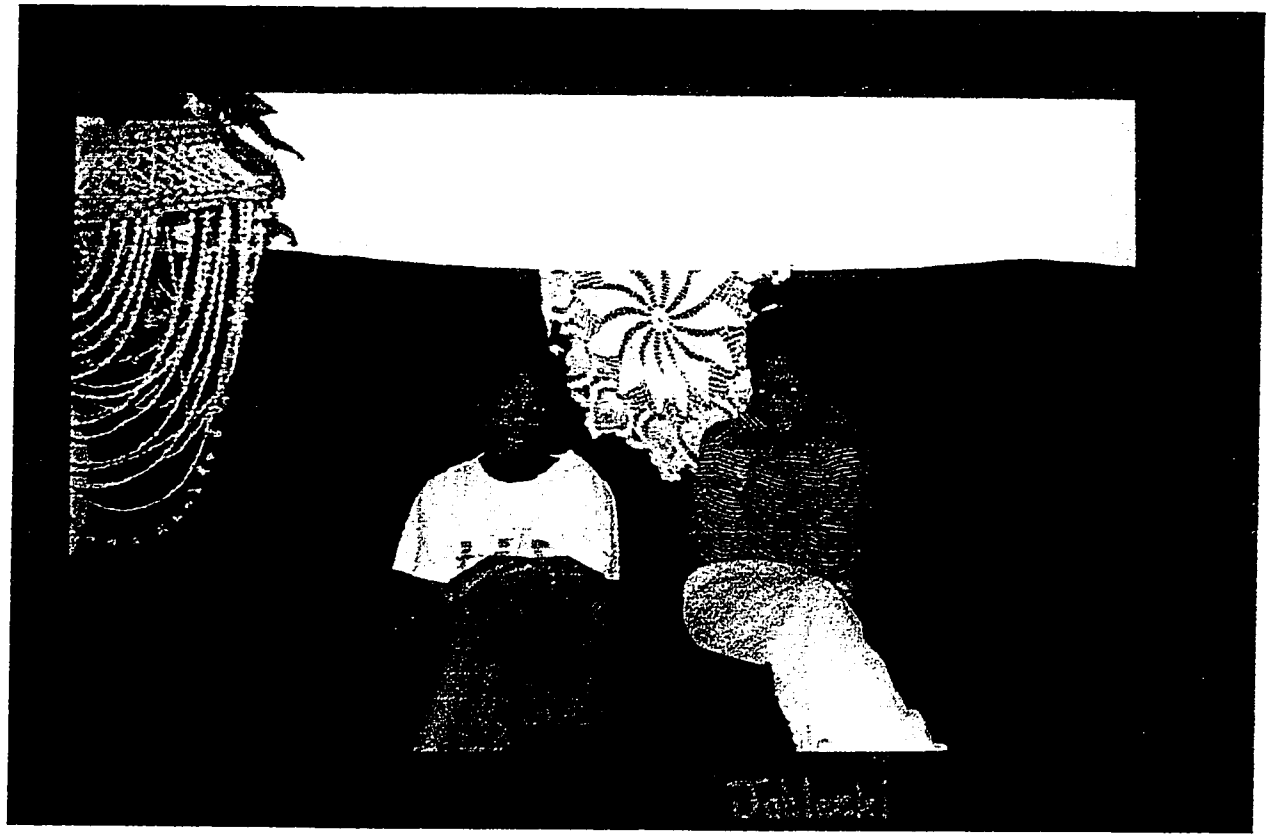


**Figure 10. Jahleeki's portrait of his two sisters taken at home.**

**Figure 11. Jahleeki's portrait of his sister in front of the drapes in their home.**

O'Brian of Room 24 produced figures 12, 13, and 14. He was an extremely reluctant writer who had many negative experiences in this area. To combat his disengagement from the activities presented I encouraged him to draw. When I watched O'Brian working in his classroom, it was clear that he derived great pleasure from drawing and that was a very skilled draftsman, possessing a wonderful sense of composition. O'Brian had earned some much-needed positive recognition from his peers and teachers by demonstrating his skill at drawing. Working from this place of confidence for O'Brian, initially he spent a significant amount of this time with me translating his photographs into detailed line drawings. He especially enjoyed drawing cars and often talked of "becoming a car designer" when he got older.

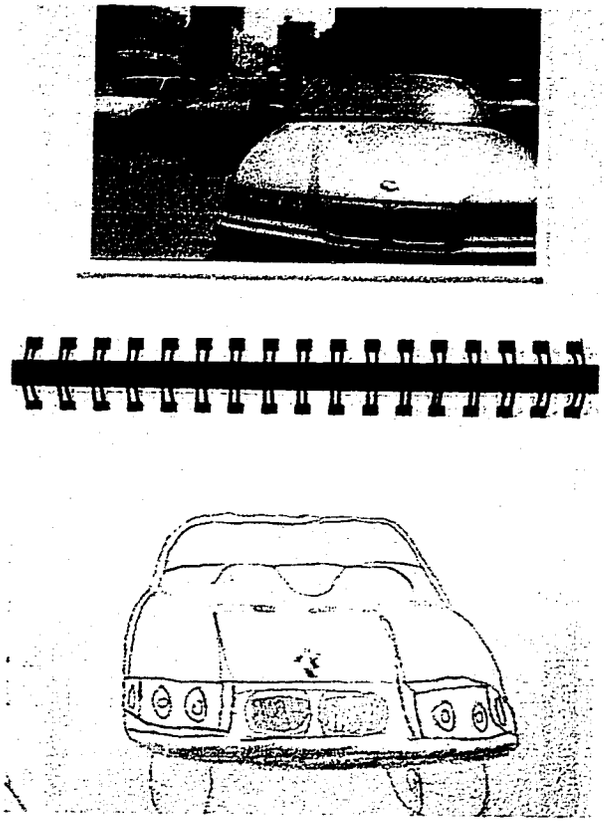


**Figure 12. A page from O'Brian's journal where you can see a drawing he made based on one of his photographs.**

In spite of the fact that O'Brian's primary interest was photographing and drawing cars, he too used a portion of his film to record family members in portrait-like ways. In the images that O'Brian made of his family, (Figures 13 and 14) he went to great lengths to compose each photograph. When I talked with O'Brian about how he organized his "photo shoot" he told me, "I had to tell them [his family members] where to sit and how to pose". In the role of the photographer, O'Brian was offered a very positive way to interact with family members, friends and teachers. The images he produced became important items in his home, as they did for many of the children who took part in this study.

In Figure 13, we see one of the images that O'Brian made of his family. In this photograph his mother and his brother are in locked in an affectionate embrace. His mother gazes warmly at O'Brian, offering him a smile while he takes the photograph. Her arms encircle his young brother, tender and protective. When O'Brian developed this photograph with me at the studio, he was very excited about it because he knew that his mother would appreciate and value this picture - and she did.

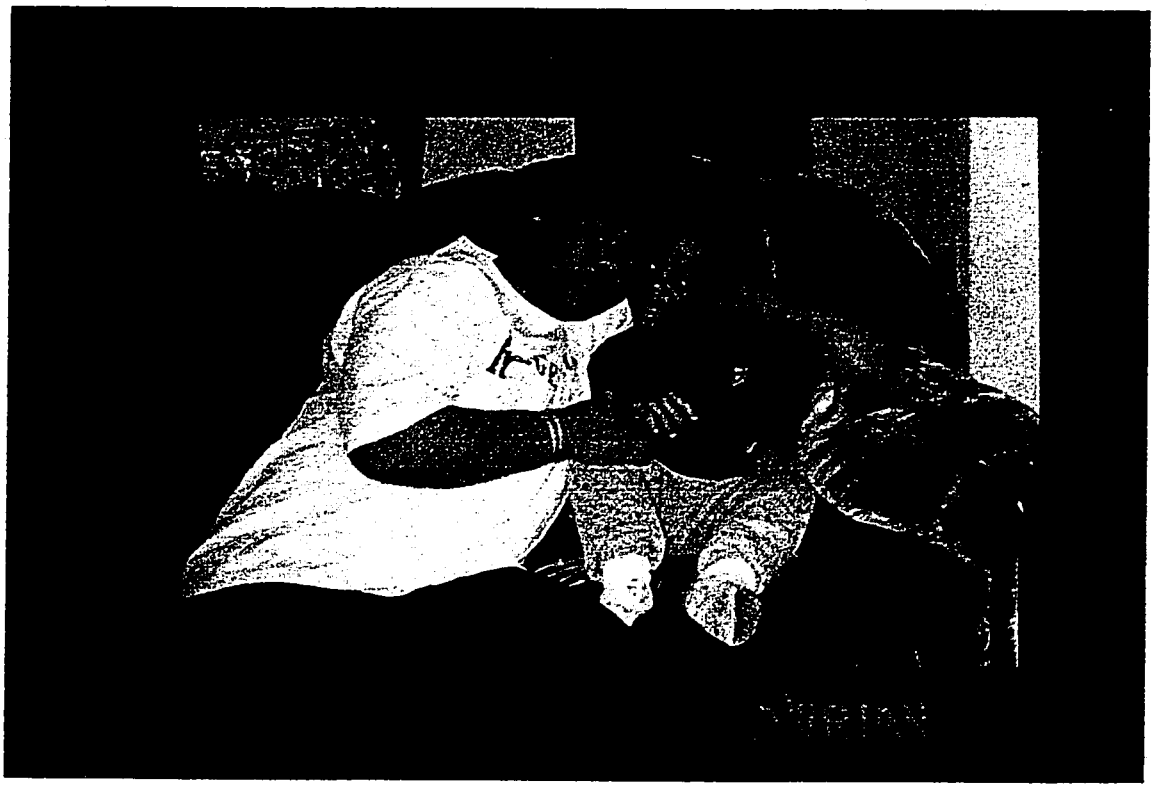


**Figure 13. O'Brian's portrait of his mother and his brother on their sofa at home.**

In Figure 14, on the next page, we see another image of O'Brian's younger brother, surrounded by his stuffed animals and toys, sitting on his bed in the room that they share. O'Brian was very careful to include the posters, photographs, and certificates that are displayed on the wall above his bed. The deliberateness of the composition is telling. O'Brian did not just "snap" this photograph unthinkingly, on the contrary, he was very specific about what he wanted the image to include. He was careful to make sure his finished photograph contained all the elements he deemed as important to "telling the story". He described the photograph this way, " This is OUR room. My mother

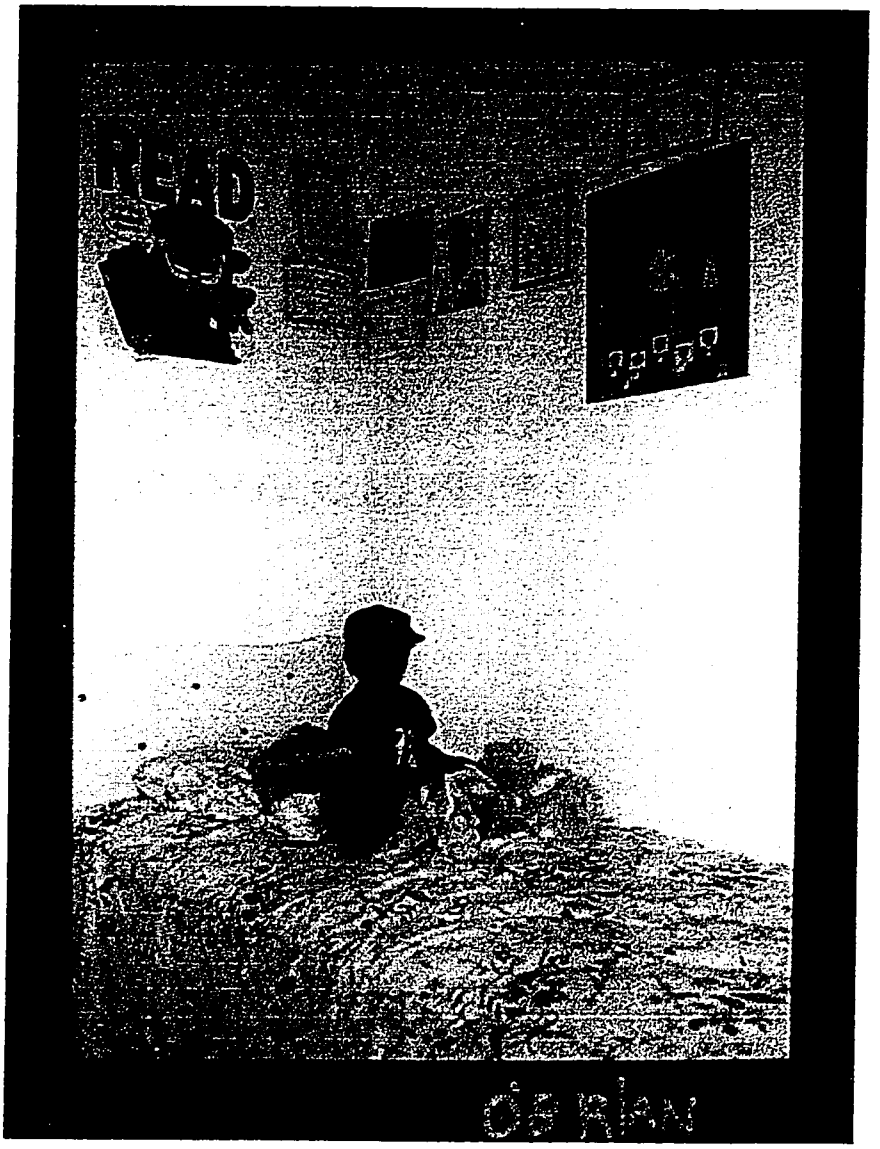


**Figure 14. O'Brian's portrait of his brother sitting on the bed.**

helped me hang up our stuff on the wall. We put it so high because Marlen won't get it there. Sometimes he rips things. I put Marlen on the bed and put all his stuffed animals around him. I took a picture of all the pictures that are there [on the wall] - I like them there, they are easy to see from my bed." O'Brian carefully composed this picture to tell us several important things about his world. He wanted to capture his brother in their room and share with us the space he calls his own.

For a number of the children, the opportunity to make family portraits helped them to explore and work through some of the difficulties they had relating to family members or teachers. For Boris, it was his relationship with his mother that sat at the center of his image making activities. Boris had ongoing conflicts with his mother, however, his photographs belie this point. Over half of the pictures Boris produced depict his mother in their home. These are respectful portraits of a strong and forthright person, someone who Boris obviously admires. In Figure15, we see Boris' mother, posed in the kitchen. She is dressed in her "work clothes", as Boris described them. It is important to note that although Boris often talked of the strained and complicated relationship that he had with his mother, a state of affairs that Principal Townsend confirmed on several occasions, at the final exhibition the only images Boris chose to display were those that included his mother.

**Figure 15. Portrait of Boris' mother in their kitchen.**

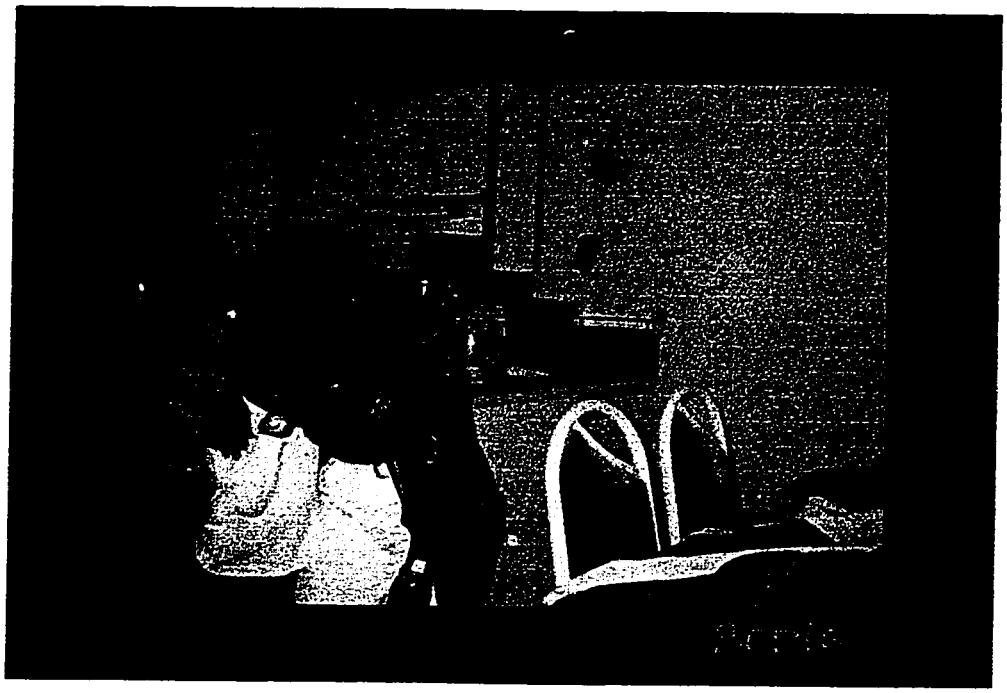


**Figure 16. A portrait of Boris' mother and brother in their kitchen.**

In addition to the photographs that the children made which drew on family portrait traditions, they also produced more candid images of family members and friends in their homes. Some of these pictures were taken at special events, others are intimate portraits of daily life in the home, the community and at school. These pictures often depict playful tender moments, and like the more formal family portraits they are celebrations of the individuals who are most important to the children. Furthermore, these images provided the children with a way to illustrate and explain cultural traditions that are central to their family life.

In Figure 17, Bindiya shares images of her family as they celebrate the birthday of her brother. I observed Bindiya to be a quiet and thoughtful child who does extremely well in school. She was always eager to please and did very little to attract attention to herself in the context of classroom life. Most of the

photographs Bindiya took depict her family in their traditional East Indian clothing, taking part in specific celebrations or meals. For Bindiya the camera, in conjunction with writing, provided her with the communicative tools she needed to have a stronger voice with which to explain her Indian heritage and traditions. When Bindiya exhibited her photographs at the end of the study, she was proud and excited to share "her kind of dresses" with the school community, family and friends who attended the event at Coronation School. Bindiya gained confidence and derived great pleasure from these experiences.

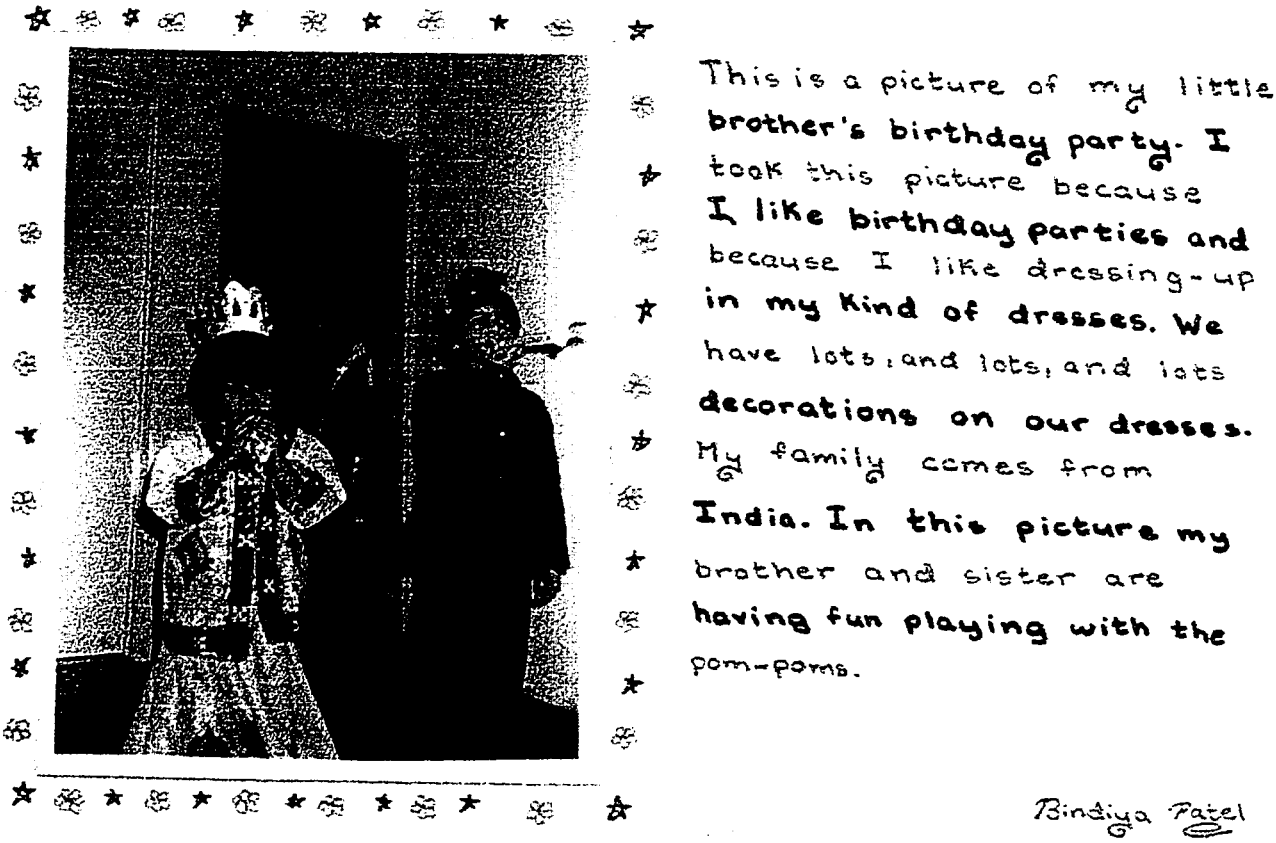



**Figure 17. Bindiya's image of a family celebration in her home.**

Other children made use of candid or documentary photographic techniques to respond to, and record the more routine events of everyday life in the family. For Bryan, this approach translated into the creation of a series of photographs that record his older brother Asher (See Figures 18-20). Asher is a larger-than-life personality for Bryan. Being the youngest child in a single parent family, Asher fulfills many of the male parenting responsibilities for Bryan and he looks to Asher for guidance in a number of areas. Many of the pictures Bryan took of Asher appear to be spontaneous moments that they shared together in the privacy of their home. The image below (Figure 18) is taken from Bryan's journal. He glued a section of a contact sheet onto one of its pages and then used it as a catalyst for a writing activity. The two images that Bryan singled out here both depict Asher. The left image shows him sitting at their kitchen table.

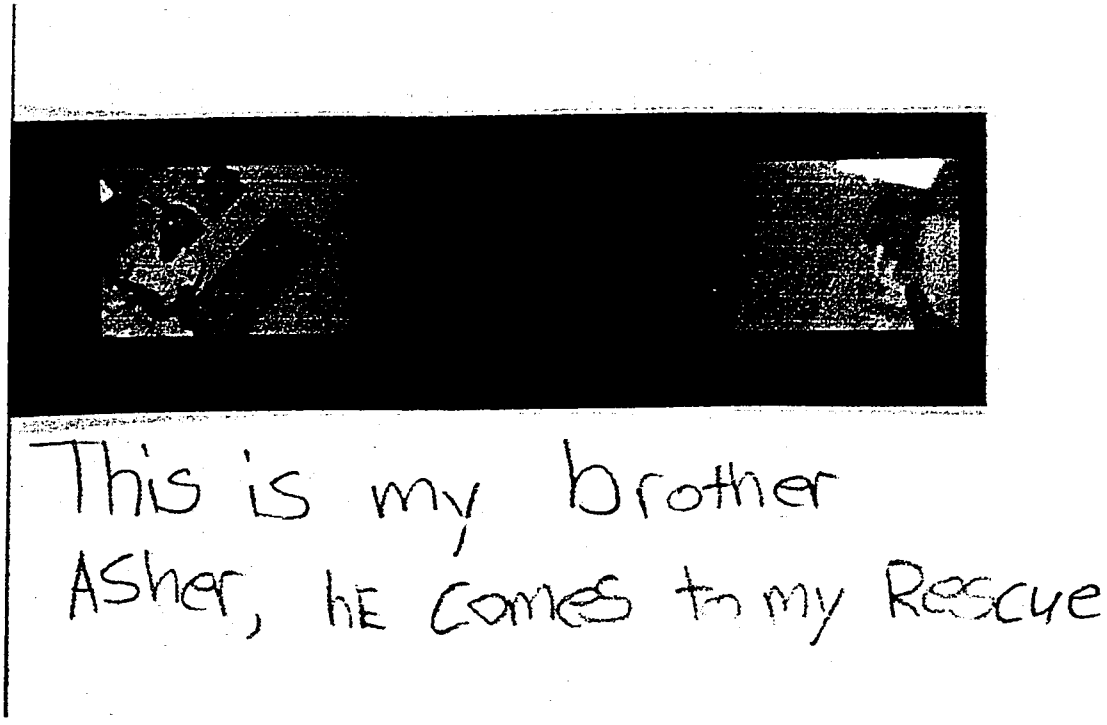



**Figure 18. Segment of a contact sheet from Bryan's journal.**

The right image has Asher laying on his bed in their bedroom. The written material that accompanies these images does not need much explanation - to me they speak loudly about Bryan's relationship with his brother. Asher is Bryan's protector, his friend, and his ally. On many occasions before and after Bryan wrote about these images, he told me several involved stories of his adventures with Asher. His admiration and love for Asher are made explicit through Bryan's humorous and moving series of images of his older brother.

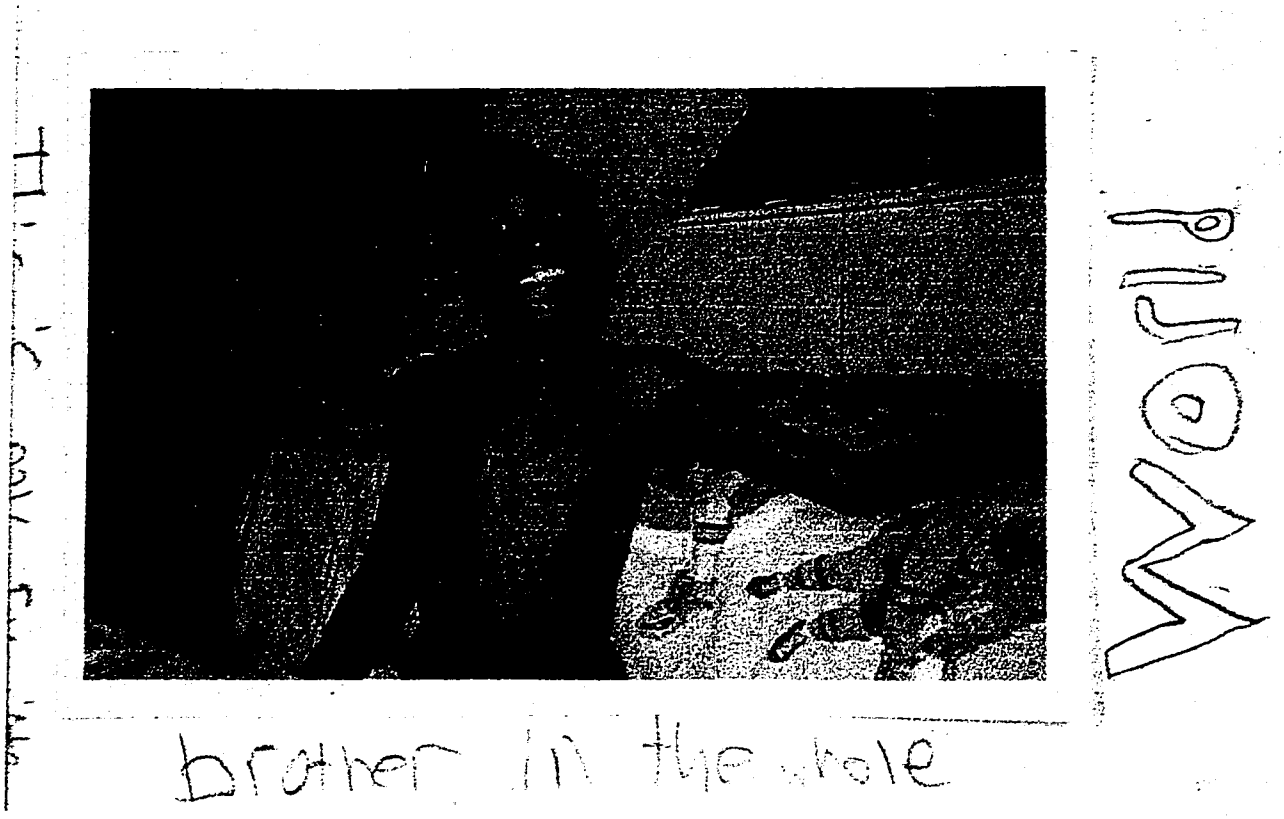



**Figure 19. "This is my favorite brother in the whole world" by Bryan.**

Asher in the Air

**Figure 20. Image of Asher in his bedroom by Bryan.**

The opportunity to tell the world about his relationship with Asher provided Bryan with a subject that he cared to think about. This in turn increased his engagement with the art and writing activities presented to him through this study and through other classroom activities. More importantly, Principal Townsend communicated to me that Bryan's engagement with school life was strengthened through his involvement in these activities. In part this was because he was able to use the variety of communicative tools at his disposal to record, share and celebrate the things in his life that are most important to him. This process excited Bryan about the learning process, when previously he had been disengaged and apathetic about his life at school.

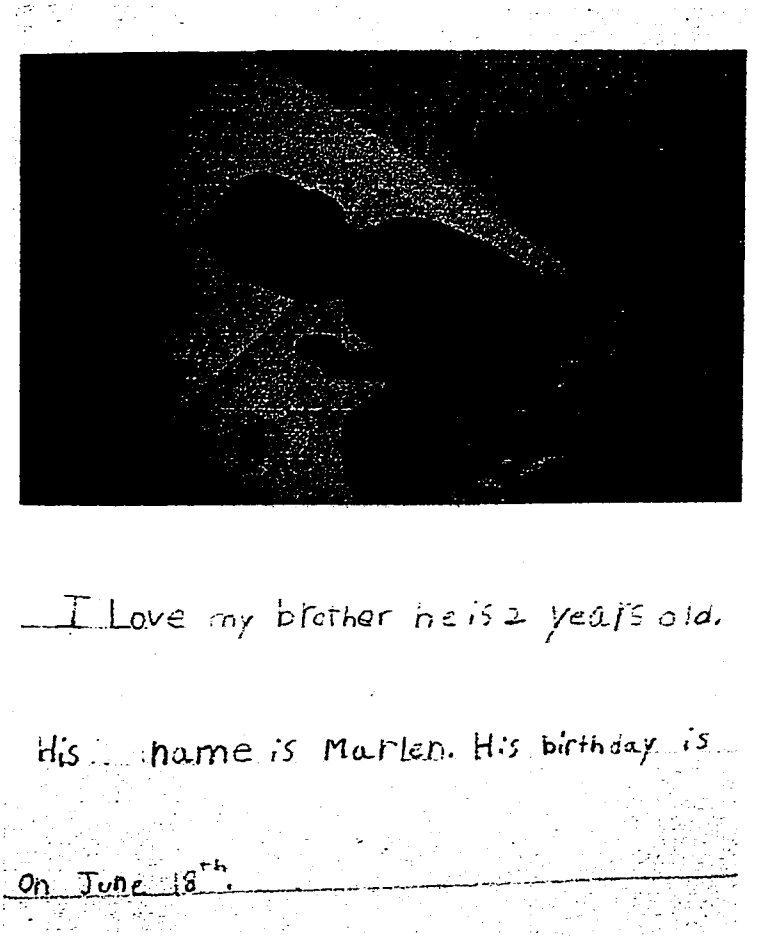



**Figure 21. O'Brian's candid image of his brother Marlen.**

In contrast to O'Brian's formal portraits of his mother and brother seen in Figures 13 and 14, here we see a candid image he created of his brother Marlen sitting on his bed. This more personal, spontaneous form of family photography elicited an emotional response from O'Brian. He begins his written statement with the phrase, "I love my brother..." and he goes on to introduce Marlen to the reader by telling us his age and his birthday - both very important details in any child's life.

After examining all of the images of family and friends that the children created, it appears that the candid or informal environmental portraits drew the most personal or emotive responses. Although the formal portraits were cherished by family members, and by the children themselves, for the most part they had greater difficulty constructing narratives to accompany these less natural depictions of family and friends. The active, performative nature of the candid photographs presented the children with evocative scenarios that they found easier to extend through both oral and written narrative.

This finding is perhaps related to Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) study of the ways that different ethnic groups are enculturated into oral and written traditions, through what she calls "literacy events" in their homes. In her extended ethnographic study of three different communities in the North East United States, Heath (1998) found that "each community has rules for socially interacting and sharing knowledge...(p.13), and that these practices are related to children's success in mastering classroom literacy lessons. Heath found that African American parents ask relatively few analytical questions of their preschool aged children. Conversely, European Americans socialize their children to language depending heavily on questions conducive to teaching basic analytical skills typical of elementary school discourse (i.e. labeling, identifying parts of a picture, naming parts of a whole, and talking about parts out of context).

In African American homes, Heath found that children are expected to learn how to respond to questions similar to those used in adult conversations. For example, children were frequently asked to relate to the whole of incidents and the composite characteristics of persons, objects, and events (eg. What's happening here? What's that like?). With the incorporation of these sorts of questions into elementary school curricula, the teachers with whom Heath worked, discovered that the "previously disengaged African American children became actively involved in the lesson and offered useful information about their past experiences" (Heath, 1983, p.124).

Almost all of the children at Coronation school come from minority groups where preschool communicative practices might differ from those found in

European Canadian communities. In contrast to their routine classroom language and art activities, the activities they took part in through this study allowed them to present their knowledge of the world in more active performative ways which contributed to their success. This phenomenon was particularly striking in the work created by the children of Room 24. Many of the children in this class had been placed there because they were experiencing failure in mastering literacy skills at an appropriate level. When given the opportunity to take part in the active, dramatic, multifaceted communicative activities provided through the workshops, the children of Room 24 revealed that they were indeed extremely literate and articulate and could make their knowledge of the world explicit in sophisticated ways. In a sense they were freed to put together ideas in ways that might be more familiar to them, thereby bringing their literacy practices in the home and in the school into closer proximity.

Self-portraits: "Recognize me! Recognize what I can do!"

> Sure, she [Jencika] is somebody! She's really somebody – these images tell her there is a reality here. Because...she comes and she goes, she comes and she goes, but his image stops us, as Bryan said, it "catches time". Oh, this photo stops us and says to us, hey, you know, here I am! Recognize me! Recognize what I can do. I think those displays [of their artwork and writing] in the library gave them [the children] a lot of power, unbelievable power! (Beverly Townsend, April, 1999)

In this quote from an interview, Principal Townsend points out the important role photography played in helping the children to represent themselves and to have others recognize them. In the brief transcript below,

Jencika, a student in Lynette's class, confirms Principal Townsend's feelings about the importance of the images that the children made of themselves and their world.

**Jencika:** Well, I painted a picture of space and I'm standing beside my astronaut friend and we're both happy.

**Miriam:** Why are your happy?

**Jencika**: I'm happy because I'm getting pictures?

**Miriam:** Why do you like pictures?

**Jencika**: Cause everyone gets to see me!

In this brief dialogue about her self-portrait, Jencika expresses sentiments I heard from many of the children in both phases of the study. They felt that being seen, presenting themselves to the public through the texts they created, was one of the most important components of this program. Their heightened visibility in the school and in the community was integral to their enjoyment of, and engagement with the activities they took part in through this study.

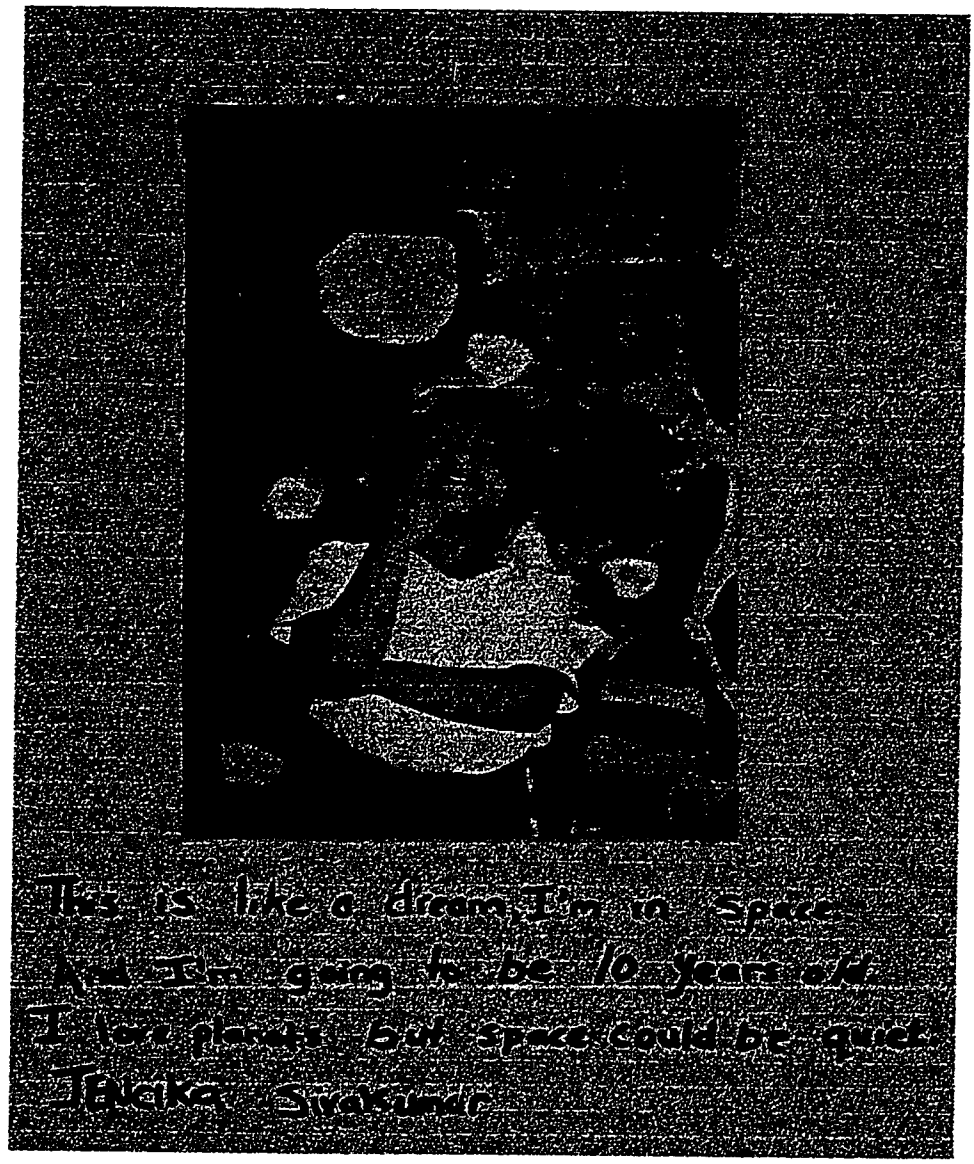


**Figure 22/23. Jencika's self-portrait.**

After analyzing and interpreting the self-portrait images created by the children I was struck by the self-confident, self-possessed and distinguished manner in which they chose to represent themselves. For the children of Room 24, the listless gestures of apathy and boredom I observed in their classrooms and in their initial Polaroid images are absent from these photographs. By offering the children the opportunity to direct and construct these self-portraits, they had the power to portray themselves with control and sureness. Their poses

are reminiscent of fashion, advertising and sports imagery found in a variety of magazines and seen on billboards and television. Their sophisticated images suggest that they have internalized and are expressing notions of the way "successful people" are portrayed in popular media. By allowing the children to become producers of imagery, rather than just consumers, they were moved into an arena where they were empowered to represent themselves in ways that surprised their teachers, parents and peers because of their thoughtfulness, composure and confidence.

In Jahleeki's self-portrait (see Figure 24) he presents himself in front of the Canadian flag, in the pose of the scholar or thinker, pondering the future of the country. When Jahleeki saw this image of himself for the first time he was surprised by how mature and "serious" he looked. He wrote the caption, "This is me thinking about separation", and went on to tell me that "my family will leave Montreal and go home to Trinidad if there is a yes vote". Although the referendum on Quebec's sovereignty had taken place in October 1995, its impact was felt for many months after the actual event. Negative comments from the leader of the separatist movement after the referendum upset many minority communities in Montreal, making them feel like "unwelcome outsiders". Through his self-portrait, Jahleeki acknowledged the social and political climate he felt all around him. He was responding to his parents' concerns, and to what he heard through the media. Through his thoughtful and sophisticated combination of image and text, Jahleeki has successfully expressed his concern for his own future, and the future of Canada. His self-portrait tells his parents, his teachers, and his peers that he is aware of what is happening around him, and that he too has something to say about it.


**Figure 24. Jahleeki's self-portrait.**

In Figure 25 we see Bryan's self-portrait. Jahleeki and Bryan painted the flag backdrop together, however they used it for very different purposes. Bryan's self-portrait does not connect him directly to the political scene in Quebec, however it does link him to media imagery through his choice of pose and his written commentary.

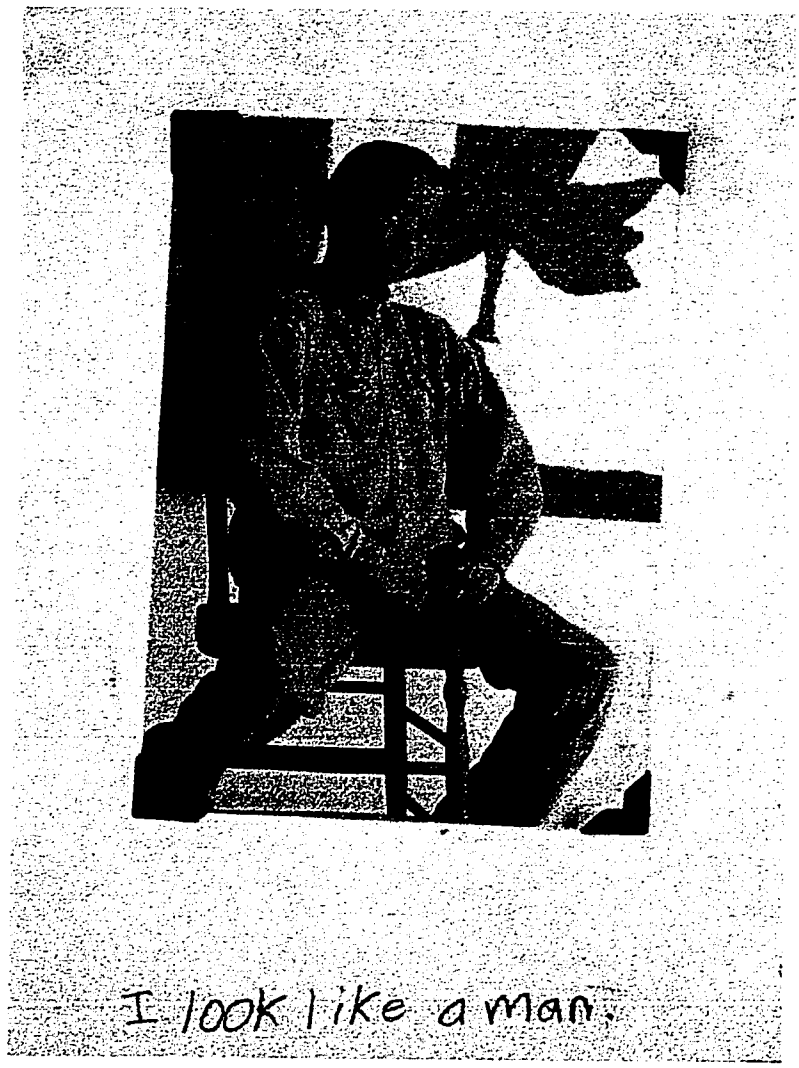



**Figure 25. Bryan's self-portrait**

Through this powerful image Bryan is expressing his notion of what it means to be a man in our world. If we compare this photograph with images found in popular advertising or sports photography, the similarities are obvious. Bryan's confident face, his gesture of power and strength, his clenched fists and the sense that he might pounce at any moment are evident in his body language. These are qualities that echo contemporary images of masculinity found in print and television media. In this image Bryan is no longer a vulnerable child in a dead-end classroom, instead he is secure and powerful, able to meet any

challenge. Bryan was not the only Coronation student to use the self-portrait project as an opportunity to present dramatic images of themselves in very adult ways (see Figures 26). The backdrops vary - sometimes they have a great deal to do with the pose the children move into once they confront the camera's gaze. Others created large mural-like paintings that do not directly relate to the way they present themselves when they are photographed.

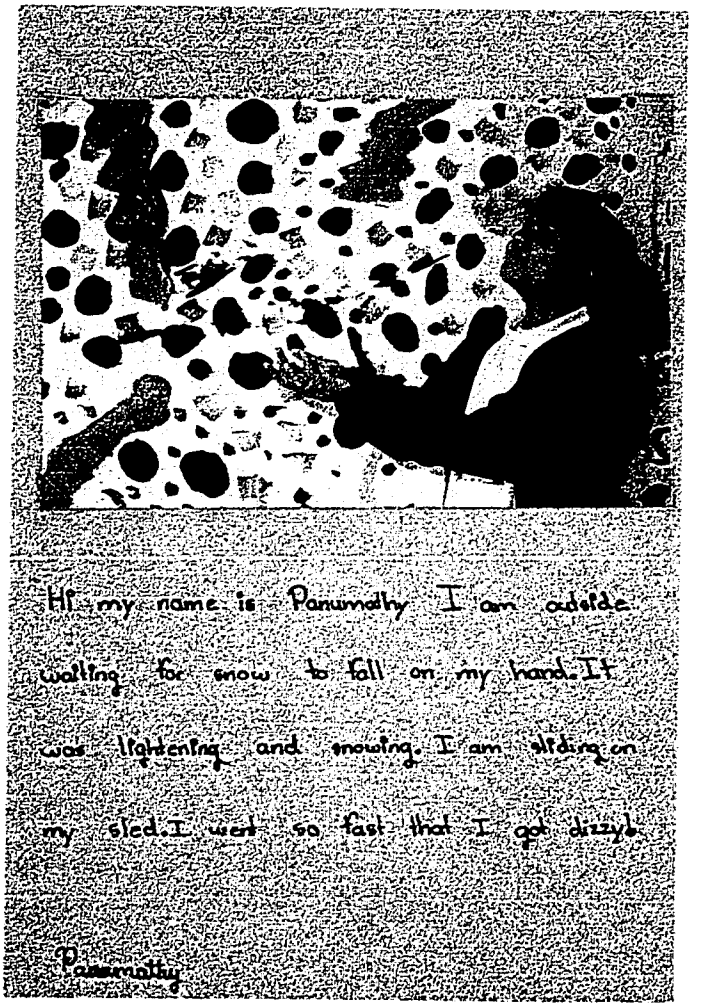



**Figure 26. Panumathy in the snow.**

I will close this segment on the first theme I named "My World": Self and Family, with two images that are anomalies of sorts. These images grew out of the pedagogical process we employed throughout the study; however the children who created them used the camera and other visual media in ways that hadn't been demonstrated through the workshop sessions. I include them in this section because I feel that they are excellent examples of how a pedagogy of connection functioned alongside the visual arts to allow the children to express deeply felt aspects of their individual identities.

In Figure 27 below, Gabriel has created a dramatic image of himself. He spent the better part of one of our workshop sessions working furiously and secretively on this image. I found Gabriel to have a sophisticated sense of

**Figure 27. Gabriel's "evil twin".**

humor and in part this mixed-media image, which is a combination of photography and drawing, is a clever play on his name, which everyone he equates with the biblical angel Gabriel. When I spoke with Lynette about this picture, she told me that Gabriel had had a very bad week at school. He had been sent to the office several times for incidents that he had been involved in, and Lynette said that he was "feeling rather low." Lynette and I agreed that by creating this image Gabriel might be working through some of his feelings about "getting into trouble" so often.

When Gabriel finally shared his finished piece with the group at the end of our work session, he told us, "This is my evil twin". I asked him to explain, and he went on to say, " This is the guy that gets into trouble at school. He's the devil!" It seemed that Gabriel was making us aware that he knew he could be troublesome and difficult - yet that was only one part of his identity. When I invited Gabriel to exhibit his image in our final exhibition, he was concerned that it might offend some adults, especially his mother, who he said was someone with strong Christian beliefs, "and no time for the devil". Therefore she might not appreciate his sense of humor. With his concerns in mind, we invited him to hang his image in a less conspicuous location inside his classroom. Gabriel thought this was a good compromise, as he was eager to share this complex image with other students and teachers in the school.

The last image I will discuss in this section illustrates Boris' play on the self-portrait project that all of the children took part in. This image was created very near to the end of our work together. Boris produced it by holding his

camera out in front of his face. Leaning back as far as possible, he held the camera still and took this charming photograph of himself shown below.

This is me. I love myself.

**Figure 28. Boris' second self -portrait.**

Boris' simple, direct self-portrait is particularly poignant because of the caption he composed to accompany this image. Like many of the children in Room 24 Boris had self-confidence problems; however this picture captures what Principal Townsend describes as the "unbelievable power" that the creation of these images helped to build for the children at Coronation. As Principal Townsend suggested, this image stops us and says, "This is me". He elaborates on that statement by letting us know that he loves himself. Perhaps Boris, who is wonderfully bright, funny and capable, but who has many behavior problems at school and at home - is telling us that he knows he is worthy of our love, as well

as his own. This positive image reflects what the future could be for Boris - one of promise and success.

The images I included in this section illustrate how the children feel about themselves both in the context of their families, and in relation to family members. These mixed-media texts were particularly helpful in dispelling myths about the children's home environments. For many of the Art Education students that I worked with that year, their only knowledge of minority communities came from media, television, film and news programs, most of which originated in the United States. These media images most often create negative perceptions of minority children, and many student teachers in all disciplines carry these stereotypes with them into their field placements in schools. The family photographs that the children from Coronation made through this study worked to counter and combat these negative perceptions, offering the Art Education students a more realistic and positive view of the home lives of these children.

The success that the children had creating their photographs, along with the praise and recognition they received for their work, were extremely important factors in engaging all the children in this learning experience.

## Popular Culture and the Media

The place of popular culture within the school curriculum has been a thorn in the side of educators for over a century. The renewal of interest in media studies at the end of the twentieth century (Alvermann, Moon & Hagood 1999; Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994; Considine, D. & Haley 1992; Fiske, 1987, 1989; Giroux, 1994; Hilton, 1996; Luke, 1994; Schostak, 1993) has to a large measure been driven by a growing desire to integrate information technologies into school curricula. This reconsideration of the role of popular culture in the classroom has "re-awakened traditional anxieties about 'cultural value' in their most absolutist form" (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1997, p.1). Parents, teachers and school administrators are increasingly concerned with children's enormous exposure to, and interest in, a variety of popular media, much of which they believe contains inappropriate content, especially for children in the elementary classroom.

Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood (1999) identify three of the most common approaches to dealing with popular culture (photography, television, music, film and multimedia) in the classroom. The first of these is what is commonly termed the "inoculation" method, through which educators work to make children aware of the numerous evils of all popular culture. The ultimate goal is to persuade students through rational argument and example to turn off their television sets, their C.D. players, and their "Sega Playstations" - or at least to have them reduce the time they spend engaged in these "mindless" activities. This approach makes preachers out of teachers, as they give sermons about the harmful effects

of all media (Lusted, 1991), and attempt to help students to recover from their addiction.

The second approach to critical media literacy outlined by Alvermann, Moon & Hagood usually involves "recognizing the importance of popular culture in students lives and including critical discourse practices in the classroom as a means of examining examples of popular texts" (p.24). This approach is usually employed when teachers assume that their students are thoughtlessly consuming popular culture, so "in an effort to educate them, the teacher assumes the role of liberating guide for students who passively take in all forms of popular culture that surround them" (p.25). By learning how to critically analyze popular culture they learn how to become "the ideal viewer...the one who is never persuaded or fooled, who sees through the illusions the media provide-in effect, the viewer who is impervious to influence" (Buckingham, 1993, p. 146). Under the guise of critical literacy, this approach becomes a mechanism to invalidate the pleasure students derive from the popular culture they are attracted to and enjoy.

The third approach outlined is one that emphasizes the "pleasures that popular culture can provide students"(Alvermann, Moon, Hagood, 1999, p.26).

> When exploring critical literacy practices in this way teachers pay close attention to students ' perceptions and liking of the popular culture forms brought into the classroom, and they are careful not to force students to analyze and critique that which they like. ...this approach...has its drawbacks. Students who are not encouraged to look at popular media from a more discerning perspective are left without having their perspectives challenged or explored more deeply (Britzman, 1991).

Finally, Alverman, Moon & Hagood outline a fourth approach to popular cultures studies that incorporates components of all three other approaches, to give form to what I believe is a far more comprehensive and balanced pedagogical process . "Grounded in feminism, postmodernism, and cultural studies, this approach attempts to address the issues of analysis, pleasure, positioning, and audience, so that a balance is created in the classroom" (Alvermann, Mood & Hagood, 1999, p.28). This "self-reflexive" (Buckingham, 1998, Ellsworth, 1989; C. Luke, 1994; Lusted, 1991) method of recognizing, and integrating popular culture into the classroom is accomplished through "a constant movement back and forth between practice and theory, between celebration and critical analysis, and between language use and language study" (Buckingham, 1993, p.151) or, as in the case of my work at Coronation, image use and image study. It is this self-reflexive approach that best describes my efforts to incorporate popular culture into the classroom at Coronation, where I acknowledge the pleasure and imaginative possibilities that the children derive from the media they interact with daily.

Popular Culture and Art Education

I have observed that much visual art curricula, particularly at the elementary level, overlooks children's tremendous exposure to, and interest in popular media. I believe that this omission is in part responsible for the growing schism between what is considered to be educationally valuable and relevant content, and what children are absorbing through an array of media in their lives outside the classroom. In many cases schools not only omit this powerful

"cultural capital" from the classroom, they prohibit it, thereby disregarding the tremendous impact these media have on students' emerging identities and value systems. As a result, the gulf between the real-life of students and what is currently deemed as appropriate content and teaching methodology continues to widen.

By turning our back on these potent cultural experiences, are we helping our students to develop the skills they require to examine and understand the increasingly hybridized, media-saturated world in which they live? It is my feeling that we are not, and that there is an urgent need for educators to develop useful curricula that address these popular narratives, thereby building bridges from children's world outside the school, to their lives in the elementary classroom. To begin to construct these bridges, parents, teachers and school administrators need to acknowledge children's desire to participate in these popular cultural forms. We need to view these experiences as increasingly influential forces in the development of young people's individual and collective identities, and their value systems.

While I wholeheartedly support children's explorations of popular media in the classroom, I am mindful of the part these popular cultural forms play in maintaining the social and economic "status quo". The media continues to be one of the major means through which dominant groups in society maintain their power and influence. The steady flow of media images produced and disseminated each day often provide us with the only information we possess about the world which lies beyond our first-hand experience. Therefore, it is imperative that children have the opportunity to share the information they glean

from these sources in a context in which critical dialogue can take place. With these goals in mind, the children at Coronation Elementary School were invited to create texts through which they had a chance to share their interest and understanding of the some of the popular culture they enjoy. They accomplished many different things as they reacted to, transformed, and celebrated the media that they call their own.

Sharing Popular Narratives

The children expressed their love of, and interaction with, popular media through a number of the art activities that were presented to them in both phases of the study. In particular, examples of their response to popular culture and the media, are evident in their self-portraits, their black and white photographs, and in the drawings they created for their journals or hand-made books.

I begin this section of analysis and interpretation by focusing on a series of texts produced by nine-year-old Gregory. More than any of the other children with whom I worked at Coronation, Gregory's engagement in this learning experience was dependent on the frequent opportunities he had to relate his love of professional wrestling to an audience of his teachers and classmates.

Gregory, a Grade Four student in Lynette's classroom, was one of the only Caucasian children in her class that year. Therefore, within the perimeters of his classroom he was in the minority. I found Gregory to be a very intelligent, extremely verbal young person, who is far more articulate than he is socially adept. Gregory is a loner. Although he did participate when we were in our small workshop groups, he spent much of his time working alone or interacting

with the teachers in the group. Gregory is socially isolated; however, he has a great deal to say and enjoys being the center of attention. On many occasions, if I had not stepped in, Gregory would have monopolized our classroom discussions, taking the floor for long periods of time while he recounted complicated personal stories. Lynette confirmed that this happened on a regular basis in her classroom as well. Gregory is a student who can be highly disruptive or, in contrast, very withdrawn and uncommunicative. He does not like to complete his in-class assignments or his homework, and he enjoys drawing attention to himself as the "class clown". Gregory lives with his mother and brother in a single-parent household. He often speaks of his grandfather, who is clearly an individual who adds a great deal of joy and color to Gregory's life.

Gregory's passion is wrestling produced and televised by the "World Wrestling Federation" (WWF). In the eyes of the principal and teachers at Coronation, Gregory's interest in WWF, verges on obsession, and keeps him from focusing on his "real" studies. Gregory is not the only student who is interested in WWF. Several boys in both phases of the study are fans. Their interest in WWF often led to reenactments of wrestling matches in the school playground. The children told me that these "mock" battles resulted in a series of minor injuries, culminating with a student who had "their arm broke". After this incident occurred the school ordered a ban on any WWF paraphernalia or play on school property, thereby putting a lid on the children's enthusiasm for this highly controversial popular entertainment.

I met Gregory for the first time in the fall of 1997, and only a few minutes passed before he began sharing his love of WWF wrestling with me. After our

initial meeting, Lynette and I agreed that within the context the art activities presented through my study, we would not censor out Gregory's interest in WWF. This decision applied to all the children we worked with, and we made our feelings clear to the student art teachers and the children themselves. Although we took great care to structure the activities that the children took part in, we allowed them plenty of room to insert their won content.

Gregory's self-portrait series made his interest in professional wrestling explicit. He painted a backdrop that depicted a wrestling ring, referees and the wrestlers themselves. When he inserted himself into this scene, he did so by taking on the persona of several different wrestlers whom he admires. In the passage that follows Gregory describes his pose as "Lockness Monster" (Figure 18). Through Gregory's thoughtful description I learned many things about his enthusiasm for, and connection to this particular form of popular entertainment. He describes the image as follows:

**Gregory**: Here is me making one of the oldest poses you've ever seen. It's from a wrestler in 1920. His name was "Lockness Monster". A long time ago - he's a wrestler, he was hairy, he looked kinda like a monster, he had wrinkles on his forehead, he had long teeth, and he had a moustache that curled up and touch one of his eyeballs.

He used to grab us like this, lift you up and yell like a monster and slam you down. He actually broke two person's necks like that, and back then it was partly real.

I heard about him from my grandfather - he told me all about him.

At first glance Gregory's obsession with the entertainment/sport of professional wrestling might seem like a mindless, rather violent way for him to pass time. However, when Gregory began to explain his images, I began to understand why

**Figure 29. Gregory as "Lockness Monster"**

he is so attached to this form of entertainment. When I asked him to describe the image depicted in Figure 29, he began by recounting a detailed history of the wrestler who made this pose famous. Gregory made his in-depth knowledge of the historical roots and theatrical nature of professional wrestling apparent. Not only does this form of popular entertainment capture Gregory's imagination, perhaps more importantly it connects him directly to his grandfather, who we learn is another very devoted wrestling fan. Gregory's love of wrestling

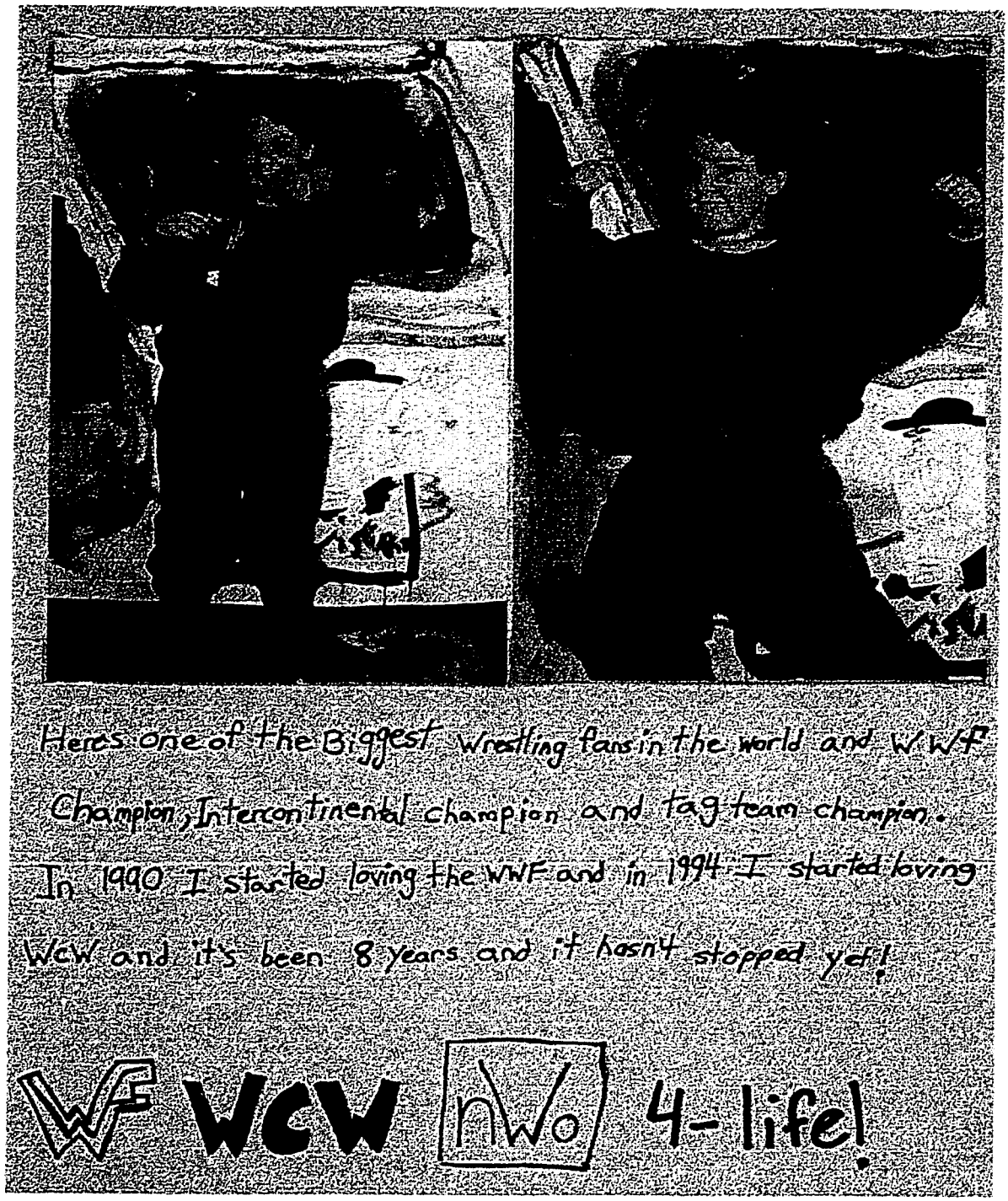



**Figure 30. "One of the Biggest Wrestling Fans in the World"**

bonds him to his grandfather, and provides him with a constant in his somewhat disorganized and stressful home life. Through the images of wrestling that he

created, Gregory transforms himself into a famous wrestler from the 1920s, a character that his grandfather introduced to him.

Through these self-portraits Gregory not only celebrates the art of professional wrestling, he recognizes the importance of the audience, he writes, "Here is one of the biggest wrestling fans in the world". For the time being, Gregory cannot be a wrestler, but he can certainly work hard to be a good fan. To accomplish this he researches the history of the entertainment/sport, he knows all the characters, he makes himself familiar with the different plot lines, and he spends a great deal of time trying to master his ability to render realistic images of the various wrestlers whom he admires. In the quote that follows, Gregory talks about his recent efforts to learn to draw his WWF heroes:

**Gregory:** I drew Undertaker like a cartoon I saw in one, one of my old movies. "Bashed in the USA" - with Brad Heart [a famous WWF Wrestler]. I saw a video of him talking and drawing all these characters - like a long time ago. I saw that and I started drawing the Undertaker. It turned out really bad, and I kept trying and trying and I can do it now, but not as great [as Brad Heart].

**Miriam:** Are you pleased with the result?

**Gregory**: Oh yes, very happy, it's actually not how I pictured it in my mind, obviously, but it's pretty close. I think I did a pretty good job.

**Miriam:** I think you did a good job too!

Gregory's knowledge of wrestling has the potential to be a great source of pride and accomplishment or a tremendous problem for him. Allowing him to explore this passionate interest in productive ways enabled him to engage much more deeply in this learning experience than he had with many of his other activities at school that year. In the passage that follows, Gregory explains his

understanding of the reasons why wrestling is banned from this school, and he registers his discontent with this censorship. In this excerpt Gregory also makes sophisticated distinctions between what is real ("the fighting--wrestling") and what is illusion ("the [wrestling] magazines), letting us know that he realizes the difference between fantasy and reality.

**Miriam:** Why aren't you allowed to bring your wrestling magazines to school?

**Gregory:** They just don't like wrestling! I don't know why? They had bad experiences because all the children were wrestling in the schoolyard in the winter and it was getting a little bit annoying. So they banned wrestling from the school. But that's not good! Because some of us like that [wrestling]! The fighting--wrestling should be banned, but NOT the magazines. It's OUR magazines, we buy them!!!

**Miriam:** What did you enjoy most about your work with us at Concordia?

**Gregory:** Ohhh, it was such a break! I could finally talk about wrestling!!

The relief that resonated in Gregory's voice when he told me how much it meant to him to "finally talk about wrestling", confirmed to me that for certain children, it is imperative to allow this sort of exploration to occur. If we do not, I believe we run the risk of impairing some children's ability to synthesize their experiences, which may contribute to their increasing disengagement from school life and more generally from learning.

There were several other boys who created texts that focused on wrestling and other forms of popular entertainment. In Figure 34 on the following page, Andrew is pictured in front of a collaborative backdrop created by the members of his all-male workshop group. This group of boys decided to design a backdrop

mural illustrating some of the media that they enjoy. In this case the boys selected the theme of video games, arcades, and comic book

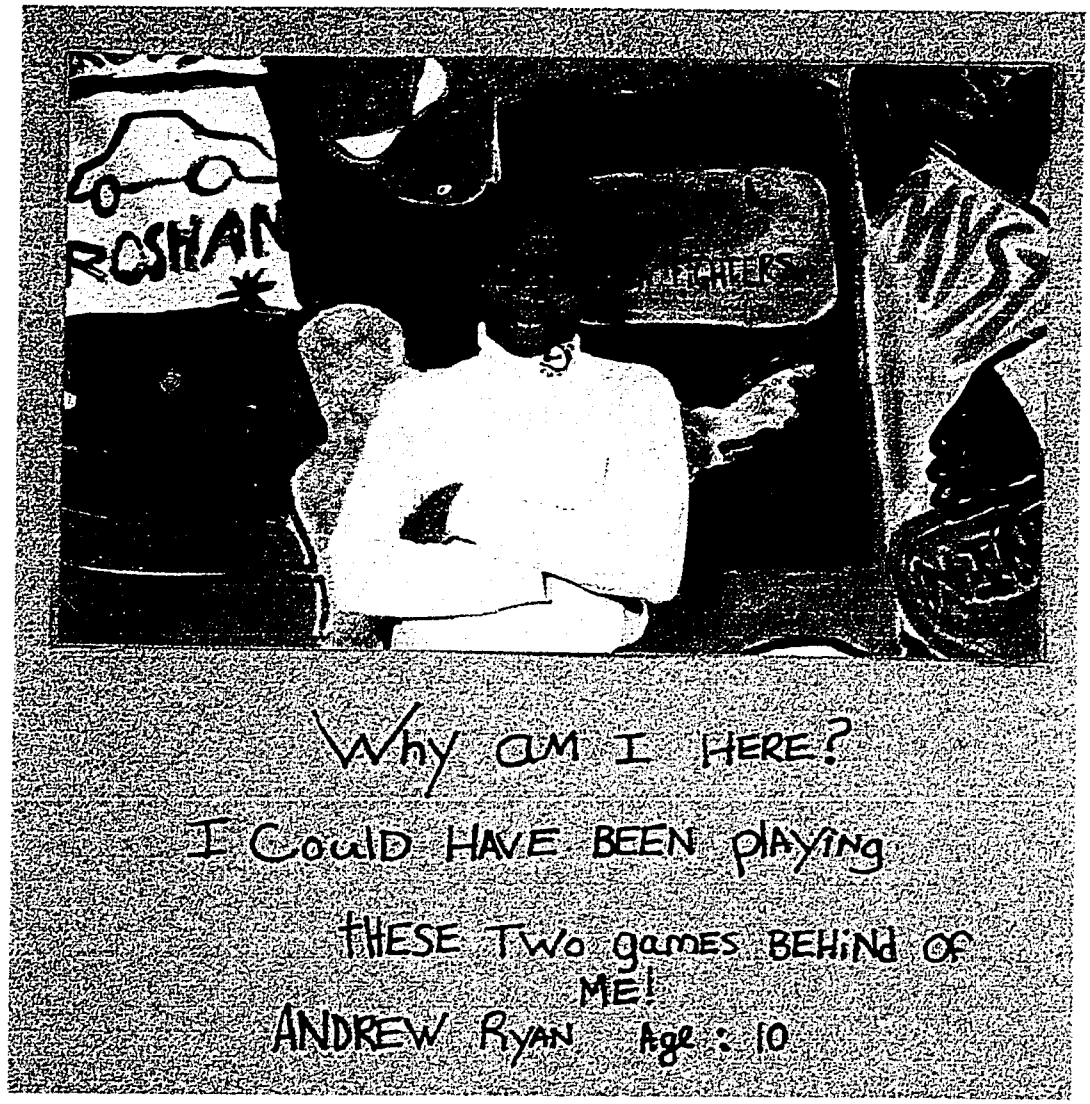



**Figure 31. Andrew in front of collaborative video/comic book backdrop**

characters. Beside Andrew we see the word "Myst", the title of a very elaborate and visually appealing computer game that all the boys in this group enjoy playing. Also pictured are images of Spiderman, and words like Marvel (comic

book publisher) and Nintendo. Andrew told me that he would like to "jump into the picture and be at the arcade".

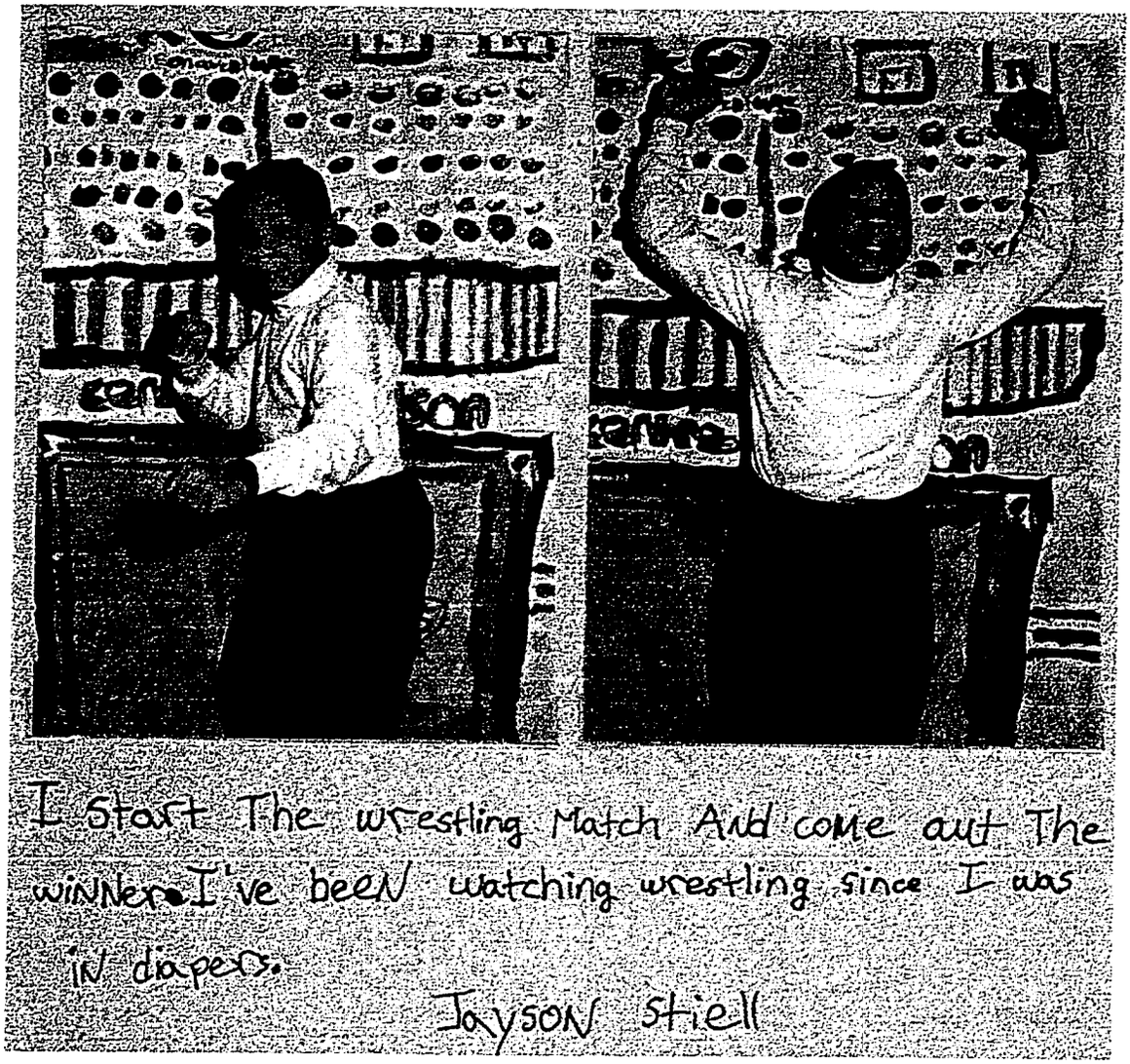



**Figure 32. Jason at the Molson Stadium. He is both a wrestler and a fan.**

In Figure 32 above, Jason, like Gregory, focuses his self-portrait on WWF wrestling. In his mural we see an image of the "Molson Centre", a relatively new sports and entertainment stadium located in downtown Montréal. Jason used the stadium to create an environment for his portrait because he had just been there to see a hockey game. Jason told me that when, " the WWF are in town they do their show at the "Molson Centre". In Jason's mural he includes rows of fans in

their seats. He also includes the stairs that take them to their seats and the wrestling ring complete with stickman-like representations of the wrestlers and referees. Unlike Gregory, Jason did not attempt to draw realistic images of each of the wrestlers, instead he was more interested in the poses he took, and the captions he wrote. In these self-portraits, Jason pictures himself as a wrestler, taking on very dramatic gestures and facial expressions. In the image on the left he is the fighter, poised to throw a punch. On the right side we see him as the champion.

In the brief narrative that accompanies his images, Jason refers to himself as both a wrestler and a member of the audience. He stands inside the wrestling ring, celebrating the glory of victory, while at the same time he explains to us that he has been a fan since he was a small baby - in his own words, "since I was in diapers". Through this text, perhaps Jason recognizes the integral relationship between the performer and the audience. This relationship is especially important in professional wrestling, where fan involvement and participation is encouraged and expected. Without avid fans wrestling would be very dull. Both Jason and Gregory are cognizant of this important part of the wrestling experience, and were anxious to tell us that they are dedicated and informed fans.

"Girls with Power"

When I when I began analyzing this segment of the data, it seemed as though the boys from Coronation responded to popular culture more often and more directly than did the girls. But when I looked very carefully, it became apparent that the girls also presented a number of texts that are direct responses

to aspects of popular culture. At the time that I worked with these children, the "Spice Girls", a British pop music singing group, had recently become popular with the pre-teen and young adolescent audience. Girls in particular seemed to respond strongly to their "sassy style" and slick dance moves. Perhaps this is in part because there are very few female vocal groups directed at a pre-teen female audience. From their first appearance on television and radio the "Spice Girls" were controversial because of their overtly sensual dance moves, their skimpy costumes, and their sexually provocative lyrics. However, when I asked the children from Coronation why they like this group as much as they did, they told me, "cause they have GIRL POWER!" Over the course of this study, different groups of girls would imitate or act out "Spice Girl"-like routines. They took every opportunity at their disposal to be video-taped performing these routines or adopting "Girl Power" poses, which they learned directly from the music videos they watched over and over again on the cable TV channel, *MuchMusic*. In addition to these spontaneous outbursts of enthusiasm for the "Spice Girls", there were a few students who spent their time creating very detailed drawings that are responses to this pop singing group.

For example, Nneka did a wonderful drawing of her workshop group as the "Spice Girls". In Figure 33 on the following page, Nneka was able to respond to the "Spice Girls", without *becoming* them. In this image, she takes the "Spice Girls" and remakes them. In her drawing, she and her best friends identify with the "Spice Girls" - but not completely or exactly. The original "Spice Girls" group was comprised of five "twenty-something" women, of which only one member of the group was Black. In Nneka's version, she envisions the "Spice Girls" as four

Black girls and one Caucasian girl. This reconfiguration of the group's members reflects the real-life make up of her workshop team, and more importantly depicts her circle of close friends.

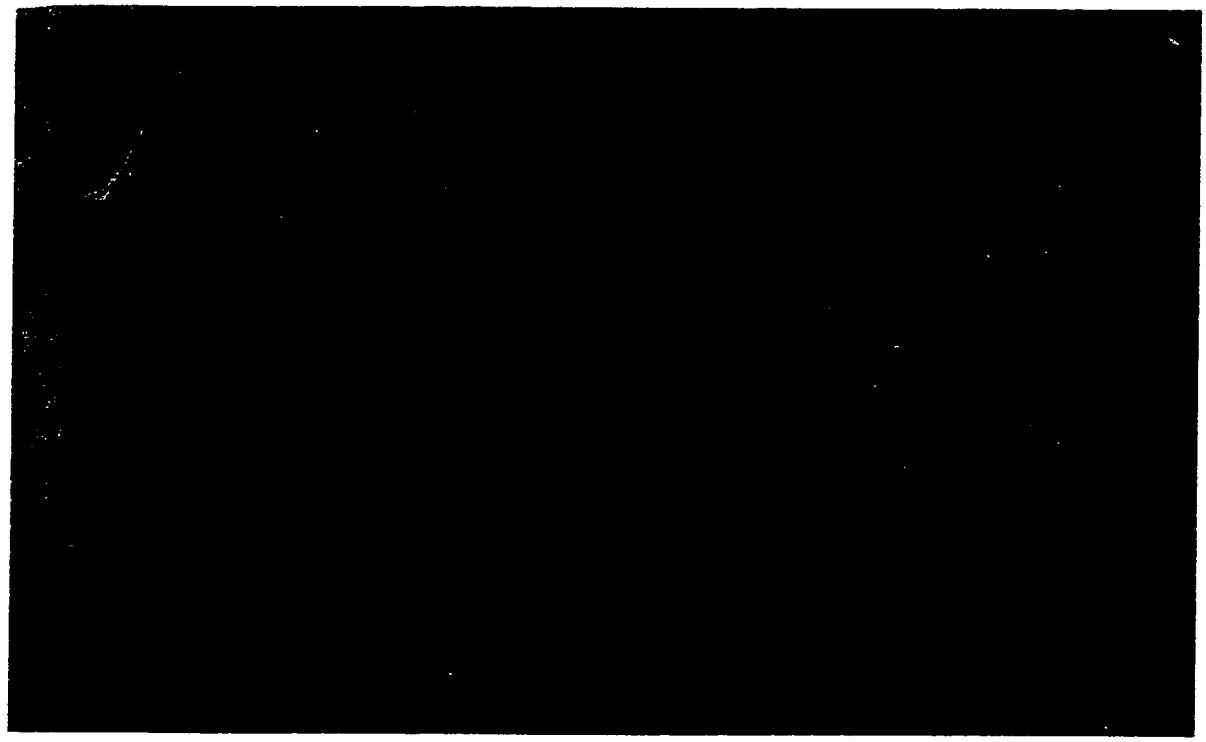


**Figure 33. "Nneka Spice Girls".**

Nneka subverts the image of the "Spice Girls", taking possession of it and making it her own. By doing so she lets us know that although she wants to take on some of the attributes of the Spice Girls", (notice the careful attention she has paid to rendering their "funky clothes and jewelry", their "cool hairstyles", and their slim figures), she is not willing to give up her identity in the process. Nneka's playful drawing of her version of the "Spice Girls" illustrates how she has responded to this popular cultural form by integrating it into the reality of her day-to-day life. She takes part in the fantasy, but the fantasy has not obliterated her

real-life relationships or sense of herself. This sort of imaginative use of popular cultural content leads me to believe that children do indeed have a great deal of authority over much of the popular entertainment they view. Moreover, if children are provided with a thoughtful educational structure that works to support and validate their experiences and interests both in and out of the classroom, they may respond in ways that are personal and unique.


**Figure 34. "Girls with Power!" by Sueann**

In Figure 34, Sueann, a member of the same workshop group as Nneka, responds to the "Spice Girls" by drawing three of her friends and writing the caption, "Girls with Power". When I asked Sueann what "girl power" means to her, she stated the following: "We can do things. We are strong and cool!" For Sueann and her friends, the "Spice Girl" motto is meaningful, especially once it

was reconfigured, letting us know that she and her friends are "girls with power". Responding to the "Spice Girls" motto was a way for this group of pre-teens to assert themselves, and tell their teachers, friends and family members that they do indeed have the capacity to control and direct the real world in which they live.

"Her style, her clothing, it's so perfect..."

Many of the students in the class incorporated their knowledge of popular media in ways that are less obvious than the images I have already discussed in this section. They did so by creating images that are reminiscent of advertising images found in print and television media. For example, several students took photographs of friends and family in which they incorporated their knowledge of fashion or advertising photography. In comparison to many of the more spontaneous or "naive" pictures that the children created, these are polished images, where the elements of light and physical gesture play very important parts in telling the story. These images reflect a surprisingly sophisticated awareness and understanding of visual conventions.

Figures 35 and 36 that follow were obviously taken with great care and attention to composition and setting. When I asked Hanai, the child who created these images, about her process, she told me that she preferred to tell me about it in writing. Hanna's analysis of her work is quite insightful and sophisticated. She describes her subjects' poses, their clothing, and their style. In addition to her desire to create "really stylish and very cool" pictures, it was also extremely

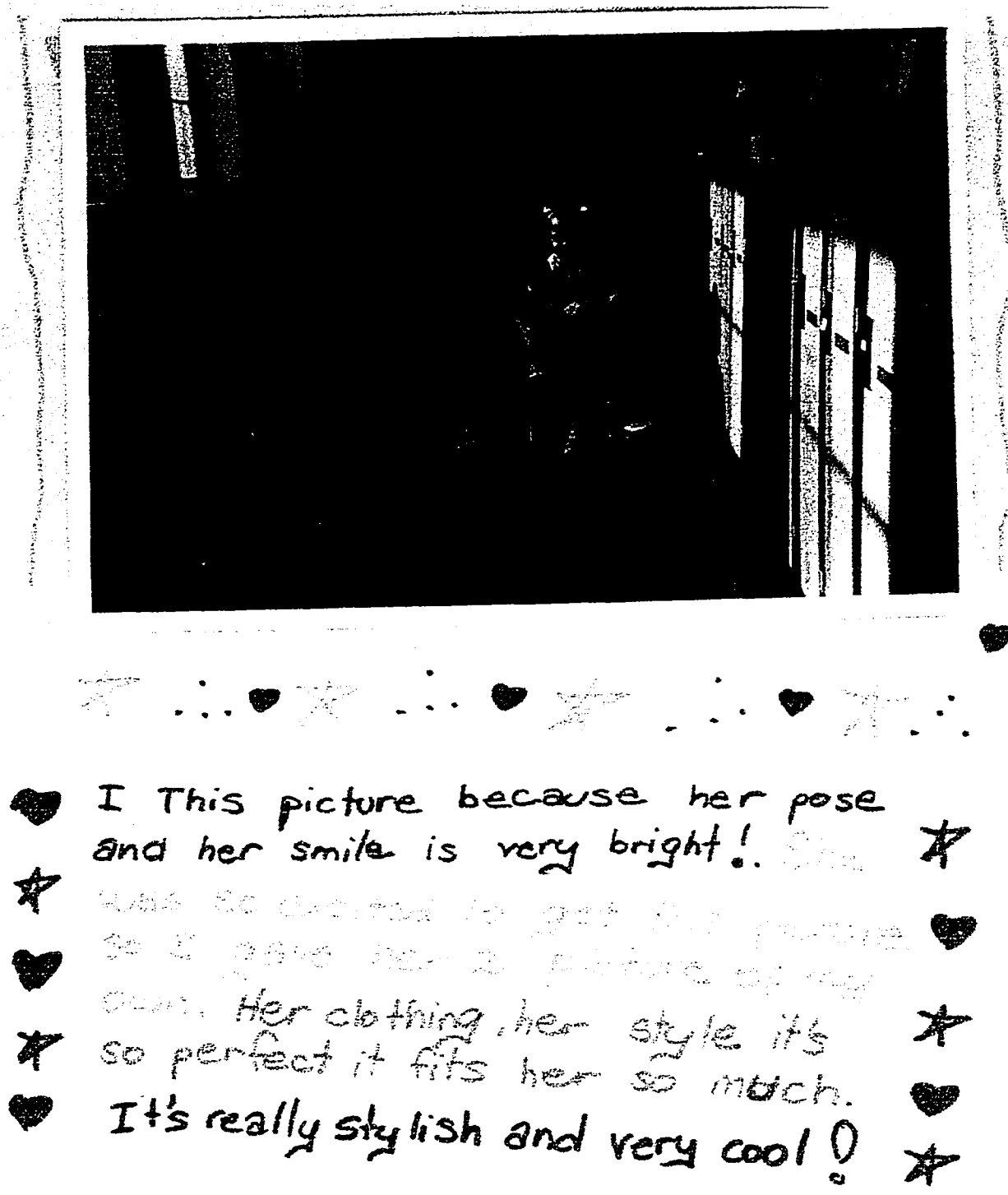



**Figure 35. Hanai's portrait of her friend by the school lockers**

I took this picture because I knew That was a good place. The light was so good and just had to take That spot. So took the milk box and they had to stand on or sit on. They just took their pose and their own style.

I like this photo because she took her own style.

Hanai Cole

**Figure 36. "She took her own style".**

important to Hanai that her friends value and appreciate the photographs that she created for them.

In both Figure 35 and Figure 36 Hanai approached the production of these images as if she were a fashion photographer - or at least the way she imagines a fashion photographer might go about taking what she described as "stylish magazine pictures". The carefully composed images and attention to detail indicate to me that Hanai was after something very specific with these photographs. She may have intended to recreate some of the images she had observed in magazines or she may have been reenacting a photographic ritual she had seen played out in a television program or feature film - the "fashion shoot". Hanai understands these commercial photographic conventions and she applied them quite adeptly to create these well-considered images that echo advertising and fashion photography.

In addition to her knowledge of fashion photography, Hanna's sensitivity to the quality of light in the locations she selected for her "photo shoots" seems to have been enhanced by our regular examination and discussion of photographic images that I periodically presented in the workshops. During these viewing sessions I encouraged students to study the images and identify the qualities that made them visually appealing. On many occasions, the children pointed out the properties of light and shadows in the images we viewed together.

Hanai's photographs demonstrate her understanding of the ways light can create drama and mood in a photographic image. In these images, Hanai joins her newly acquired understanding of how a photographer might go about making visually interesting photographs, with her prior exposure to popular imagery

through magazine and television advertising. She thereby transforms a rather dull gray school corridor, into a graphic and visually compelling backdrop for the portraits she made of her friends.

In Figure 37 on the following page, Jahleeki and Bryan are photographed together. Standing in front of their mural of the Canadian flag, the boys take on poses that are drawn directly from popular culture. When I asked them to provide captions for this picture, they immediately added two words that I believe speak loudly of the ways that this image is connected to their experience of popular media. Jahleeki takes the pose of a "Dancer", and Bryan describes himself as a "Fighter". Jahleeki went on to explain to me that, "I look like a Rapper in this picture". Rapping is an art form Jahleeki is familiar with from his exposure to music videos on television, and the radio. For example, on *MuchMusic* Jahleeki can regularly see images of successful young Black male "rappers". Bryan labeled his image with the world "Fighter". Here he takes the pose of the athlete, specifically a boxer. Boxing, a sport dominated by black men, is another one of the very few places in the media where black men are represented and celebrated. I see this image as an extension of Bryan's individual self-portrait, (see Figure 14 on p. 196). In that image he also took on a very common masculine pose. In it his fists are closed and he is ready to fight. In both of these images, Bryan presents himself as strong and defiant. He stares boldly into the camera's lens. He seems unafraid of any challenge or challenger. Through these images Bryan seems to be telling us how he would like to be seen. In addition, perhaps he is letting us know that he believes that young Black men need to be

powerful or perhaps willing to risk physical injury to attain success in the real world.

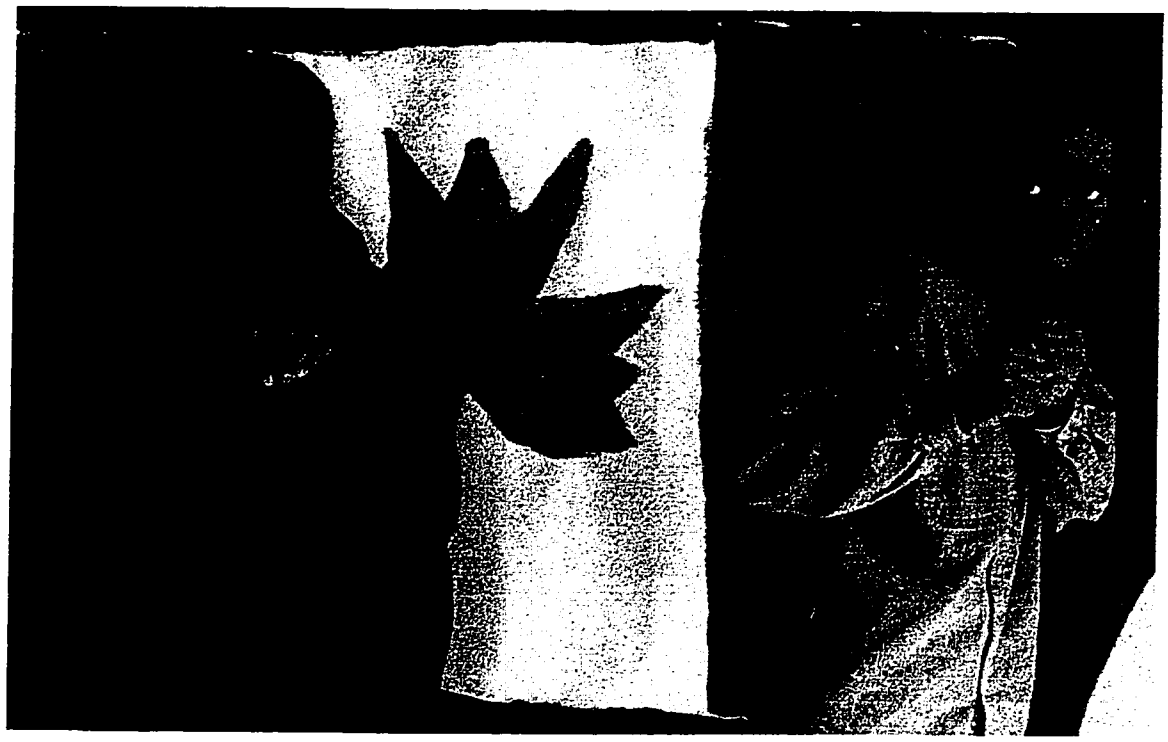


**Figure 37.** **"Dancer"** **"Fighter"**

Both Jahleeki and Bryan represent themselves as characters drawn from popular culture. It is my view that they are both liberated, and constrained by these media images. Although Jahleeki and Bryan appear positive and confident in the photographs they created, I wonder if their repeated exposure to a very narrow range of representations of Black men in the mainstream media puts great limitations on their notions of what they might become. This illustrates one of the powerful and often negative consequences of media exposure and provides evidence for the need for critical aspects of media studies in the classroom.

By inviting the children from Coronation to present themselves through these multi-media texts, I learned a great deal about how they view themselves in relation to the media images that are all around them. In this case I would use these insights to help me to broaden Jahleeki and Bryan's limited perceptions of the directions their futures might take. I would do so by exposing them to alternative possibilities. I would introduce them to black politicians, writers, artists, doctors etc., individuals who have made their mark in this world in ways that might not be as commonly represented in the segments of mainstream popular media that these children engage with. While I fear these alternative images of black men may not have the immediate appeal of the glossy, repetitive, quick-money representations that permeate popular culture, I do believe they might provide Jalheeki and Bryan with a wider view of the world and their potential in it.

The images I presented in this section reveal some of the ways that these powerful popular narratives are absorbed and integrated into the personal lived experience of these children. In addition, the children's texts might serve to alleviate some of the concerns of parents and teachers that their children's sense of reality is being blurred by their immersion in the virtual spaces created by television, film and-more recently-the Internet. The examples presented here support Buckingham's view that "children are active producers of meaning, and that this production of meaning is fundamentally a social activity (1991, p.13). By allowing the children to interact with, share, and explore the popular culture of childhood, many of them learned first-hand that media images are not frozen windows on reality, but instead are created through a process of selection and

decision-making, thus revealing the constructed nature of all media. In addition, the texts that the children created might be very useful tools in conveying information about a range of interests in self-image, youth cultural values and practices, and may have many applications for gender studies, literacy and language arts, and media studies.

**The Material World: Play Spaces and Playthings**

The third theme focuses on the physical spaces and material objects that the children depicted in the mixed-media texts they created. To provide a theoretical framework for this section I have drawn from literature in the field of children's folklore (Opie & Opie, 1959; Opie, 1993; Knap & Knap, 1976; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1990; Dargan & Zeitlin, 1990;) and material culture studies (Schlereth, 1982; Babcock, 1992; Dorson, 1972). Material culture has been defined as "the world of cultural forms and their material artifacts that define and shape human life and that, however simple and mundane, are essential elements in the production and reproduction of cultural persona and social relations" (Babcock, 1992, p.205).

Babcock's definition of material culture is relevant to this study in that almost all of the children who took part used their cameras to document the physical spaces and objects that are familiar and important to them. In this section, I have included texts in which the children record their toys and other cherished objects, as well as a number of their play spaces. These texts range from photographs of action figures carefully displayed, to images of intricately painted backdrops that depict the physical environment - both real and imagined.

Through these visual records we are provided with a glimpse into the ways that the children's individual and collective identities are shaped by the material world in which they live.

I begin this discussion by considering the ways that the children portrayed what I call their "play spaces". These representations are rarely devoid of people and thus they tell us a great deal about how these children make use of the urban environment that surrounds them. Often these images depict places that were not originally set up for recreation, however the children periodically take ownership of them, and use them in ways that are different from their original purpose.

> Play as a medium of adventure infuses all aspects of city life. As "poets of their own acts," players in the city occupy space temporarily: they seize the moment to play as the opportunity arises, inserting the game into the interstices of the city's grid and schedule (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1990, p.194).

The children from Coronation transform their back hallways, stairwells, and apartment balconies - especially when there is little adult supervision - into forts, castles or spaceships. In these ordinary spaces they hide their treasures and create make-believe worlds.

In addition to these rather malleable play spaces, the children recorded a number of locations that have been shaped by adults. In these more static or controlled environments, (homes, schoolyards or amusement parks), the children play and are entertained. In some cases these sites make a lasting impression. Although the children have little control over many of these spaces, they do have some power to decide how to make use of them.

Researching children's play has always been difficult because it is usually approached by interviewing adults about their childhood experiences. Bernard Mergen, who writes about the history of American children in Play and Playthings A Reference Guide (1982), warns of the difficulty of revisiting our childhood through memory alone. He writes, " Butterflies cannot become caterpillars. Much of children's play is a larval stage that leaves a small dry shell into which we try to pack our memories and later experiences" (p.3). This has made learning about children's play a difficult challenge and as a result, " most of what has been written about play looks at the way adults depict children" Dargan & Zeitlin, 1990, p. 7). In contrast, the children who participated in this study were allowed to select and record the moments of play, and the playthings that they deemed important and worthy of documentation. Thus they tell their own stories of a moment in time when they played, and through the camera they were given the means to watch themselves playing. These texts, along with those that record and reflect the influence of their families, friends and the popular media that they enjoy (as outlined earlier in this chapter), helped these children to bridge the gap between their lives outside school and their activities in the classroom.

Their "play spaces"

In Figure 38 on the following page, we see a text in which Jason has recorded his friends Samuel and Earlen in the stairwell of their apartment building. This is a space that the children periodically take control of, especially when there are no adults around to stop them. Here play is "crammed into the empty lots of time, the space between when the school bus arrives and the bell rings" Dargan & Zeitlin, 1990, p.31).


He was sitting then he
slid down the railing
and his name is Earlon
and Samuel is in the back ground

**Figure 38. Sliding down the railing.**

When I asked Jason to explain why he selected this photograph to include in his journal, he told me: "I like it 'cause it feels fast - the slide I mean. We hang here after school, especially if we got no key. Samuel lives next door." This image captures a brief moment in the routine of Jason's life. He has invited us into a play space he enjoys for a few minutes each day as he moves between his life at school and his home. In this brief period in time, Jason and his friends make the best of the ordinary spaces that surround them. Sliding down the

railing, they enjoy a few moments of independence as they exert control over their play, at least until the door of their apartment opens a parent intervenes to stop the fun.

In the schoolyard

Several of the children took their cameras into the cement schoolyard behind Coronation School. These texts illustrate the children's play environment and provide insights into their play practices. In several cases they depict the pleasure the students take in interacting with one another outside the confines of classroom or home. In the playground or on the streets in their neighborhood, students who do not excel scholastically have the opportunity to demonstrate their skill at climbing, jumping, teamwork, baseball and other sports. Just as importantly social relationships are negotiated in these play spaces (Knapp & Knapp, 1976; Opie, 1993; Dargan & Zeitlin, 1990), as the children organize themselves into teams, set up the rules for play, and work out conflicts as they arise.

On the pages that follow I have included several examples of these schoolyard images. Taken together they paint a picture of the ways that these children relate to, and make use of a particular part of their the urban environment. It is interesting to note that most often the "photographer", and the "subject" have collaborated to create these images. In a sense, the camera and the act of photography have become part of the game or perhaps a new way to play.

**Figure 39. On their way to the baseball diamond by John.**

In Figure 39 we see an image that John took as he and his friends made their way to the baseball diamond near Coronation. John explained, "It was hard to get this [picture] - he [Kevin] kept walking fast, and I had to run in front of him. It's a bit blurry, but I like the way the bat swings out".

Nikki took the highly evocative image (see Figure 40 on the following page). Nikki is a child who identifies with the plight of the underdog, therefore she did not want to name the individuals in the picture. Perhaps this is part of the reason she chose to dramatically crop this image, leaving the identities of these rather tough looking boys a secret. In one of my conversations with Nikki about her work, I asked her what she thought she might have seen if she had stayed to take one more picture of this playground conflict.

**Figure 40. Schoolyard conflict**

As a way to set up her story she began by telling me a bit more about what had happened before she took this picture. She told me that " they pushed the boy down and stood there for a few minutes trying to scare him, I think. Then they went away." Nikki told me that she thought the "next picture would show the boy's friends coming to help him." In this visually compelling image Nikki conjures up all sorts of possible narratives. She eloquently captures and relays the sense of danger that one can feel as a child embroiled in a playground battle - where turf is constantly under negotiation and rules are regularly shifting.

This is one of the only images of a schoolyard conflict that the children created. However, I certainly do not believe that this means the playground at Coronation or anywhere else, is an idyllic place that is free of conflict. What I do believe is that the absence of imagery that records these conflicts, indicates that

the children are well aware that scenes of playground fights are not what their teachers or family members want to see. Like adults who remove unflattering images from their photo albums, the children censor themselves, aiming their cameras rather restrictively toward the most positive interactions and accomplishments.

These positive playground images celebrate individuals who possess a special skill or talent with a basketball or a bicycle. It is interesting to note that boys produced most of the texts that record this sort of playground activity in both phases of the study. Although the girls brought their cameras into the schoolyard at recess, lunch and after school, the images that they created are more intimate portraits of their friends as the talk, joke and pose for the camera. Missing are photographs of girls skipping, playing ball and taking part in the intricate clapping games, that I saw the girls engrossed in on many occasions. In contrast, the images the girls created focus on people's faces, and those faces usually fill the frame (see Figures 46, 47 on pp. 240,241). For the most part the girls use these images as a means of analyzing and responding to peer relationships. They were less interested in documenting the surrounding environment, the games or the more blatant displays of physical skill that are so common in the boys' images.

In Figure 41, Andrew photographed his friend in the schoolyard. This environmental portrait is a celebration of the boy, the basketball, and the game itself. He stands confidently, holding the basketball as he gives Andrew and us the "thumbs up" sign. In the background we see a group of impatient team members, anxiously gesturing for the immediate return of their basketball, so that their play might resume. Andrew told me he called "a time out" from their play in

order to set up and take this well-composed portrait. The rest of the team members grow impatient until they are summoned to pose for a spontaneous team picture that Bryan takes for them (see Figure 42).

**Figure 41. A boy with basketball on the courts behind Coronation School.**

**Figure 42. The boys on the basketball team.**

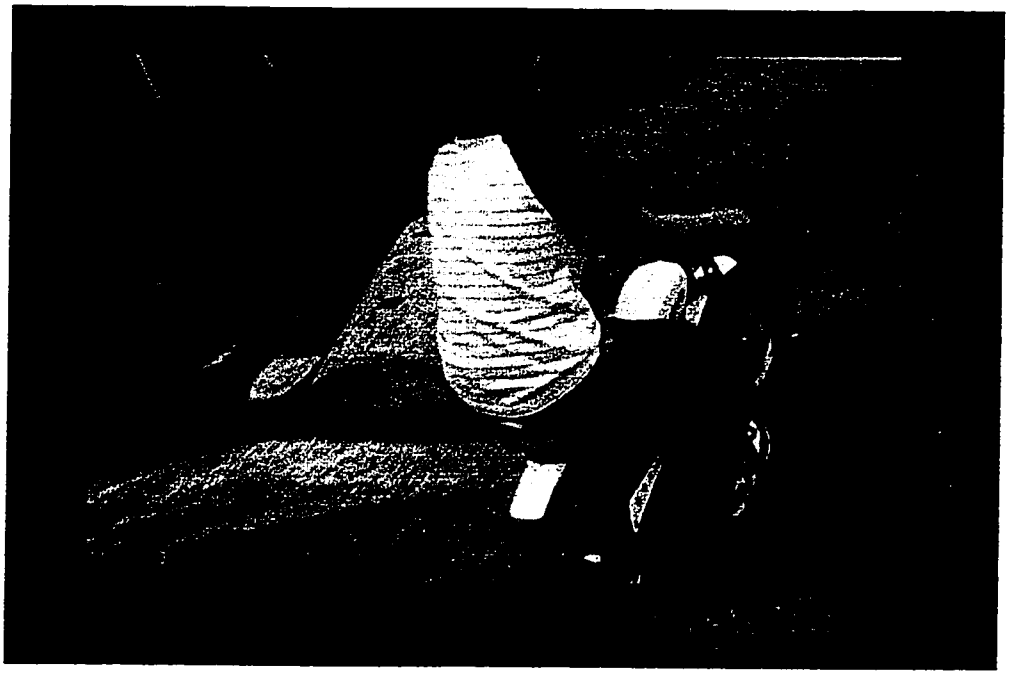


**Figure 43. "Trick riding" by Miguel.**

**Figure 44. Study in motion by Bryan. Part of the series he did of objects in the air.**

From this image I sense the camaraderie of the group and the playful nature of the boys as they take a break from their game. The boys in this image appear comfortable and confident. Perhaps they are reflecting the satisfaction that comes from being part of the group - of belonging. In Figure 43, Miguel took a photograph of his friend performing bicycle tricks on the sidewalk outside their apartment building. Cement curbs and bike racks provide obstacles to be conquered by skillful riders. Miguel, a boy who has great difficulty expressing himself verbally, has an excellent sense of composition and framing. In this photograph, he effectively communicates the tension Jeremy feels as he pulls up

on the handlebars of his bike in order to raise the front wheel over the challenging hurdle ahead.

> Barging out the door with play on their minds, city children confront stoops, hydrants, telephone poles, lampposts, cars, brick walls, concrete sidewalks and asphalt streets....Jumping off ledges,...or riding bikes up ramps made from scrap wood, they enjoy the dizzying thrills of vertigo. Each kind of play--vertigo, mimicry, chance, physical skill, and strategy--has its own city settings and variants (Dargan & Zeitlin, 1990, pp.11-12).

In Figure 44, Bryan created another photograph in his series of images that capture objects in motion. Like the photograph he made entitled "Asher in the Air" (see Figure 20 on p.189), Bryan took great care to get this photograph to work they way he envisioned. To do so he enlisted the assistance of a friend. Rather than a moment of spontaneous play or a display of skill on the part of the child throwing the ball, this image speaks of the vision, patience, and skill of the photographer. Early on in our work together, Bryan made his knowledge of the stop-action capability of still camera known when he wrote these words:

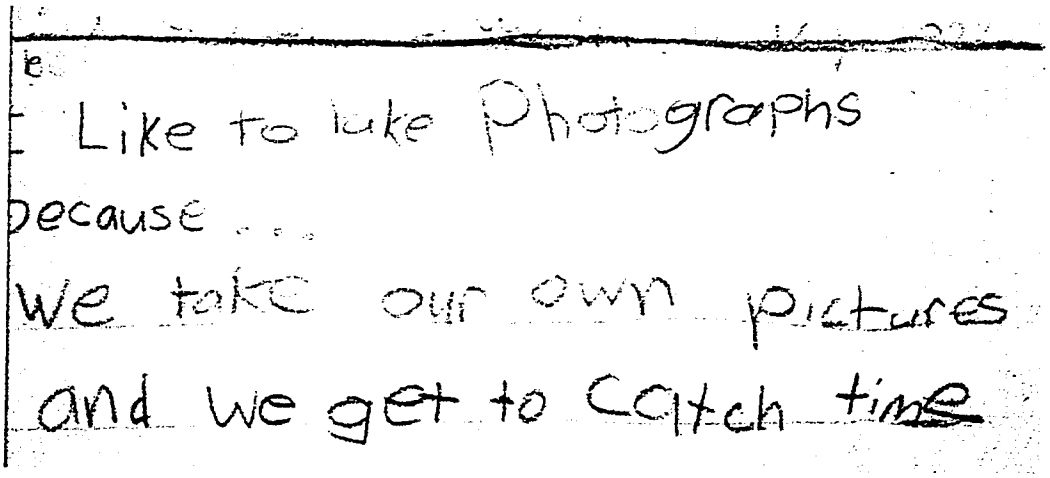



**Figure 45. Excerpt from Bryan's journal.**

As I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Bryan began his work with me cognizant of the fact that photographs have the potential to stop time and he worked very hard to use the photographic technology at his disposal to accomplish this goal. In his bedroom he "stopped" his brother Asher as he launched himself off his bed and into the air (see Figure 20, p.189). In this image he "catches time" once more, creating an intriguing image of the basketball in flight (see Figure 44). The ball seems to be hovering effortlessly above the boy's arms, defying gravity for a moment. Bryan was extremely proud of this photograph and requested that it be one of the images he displayed at the end-of-the-year exhibition and celebration.

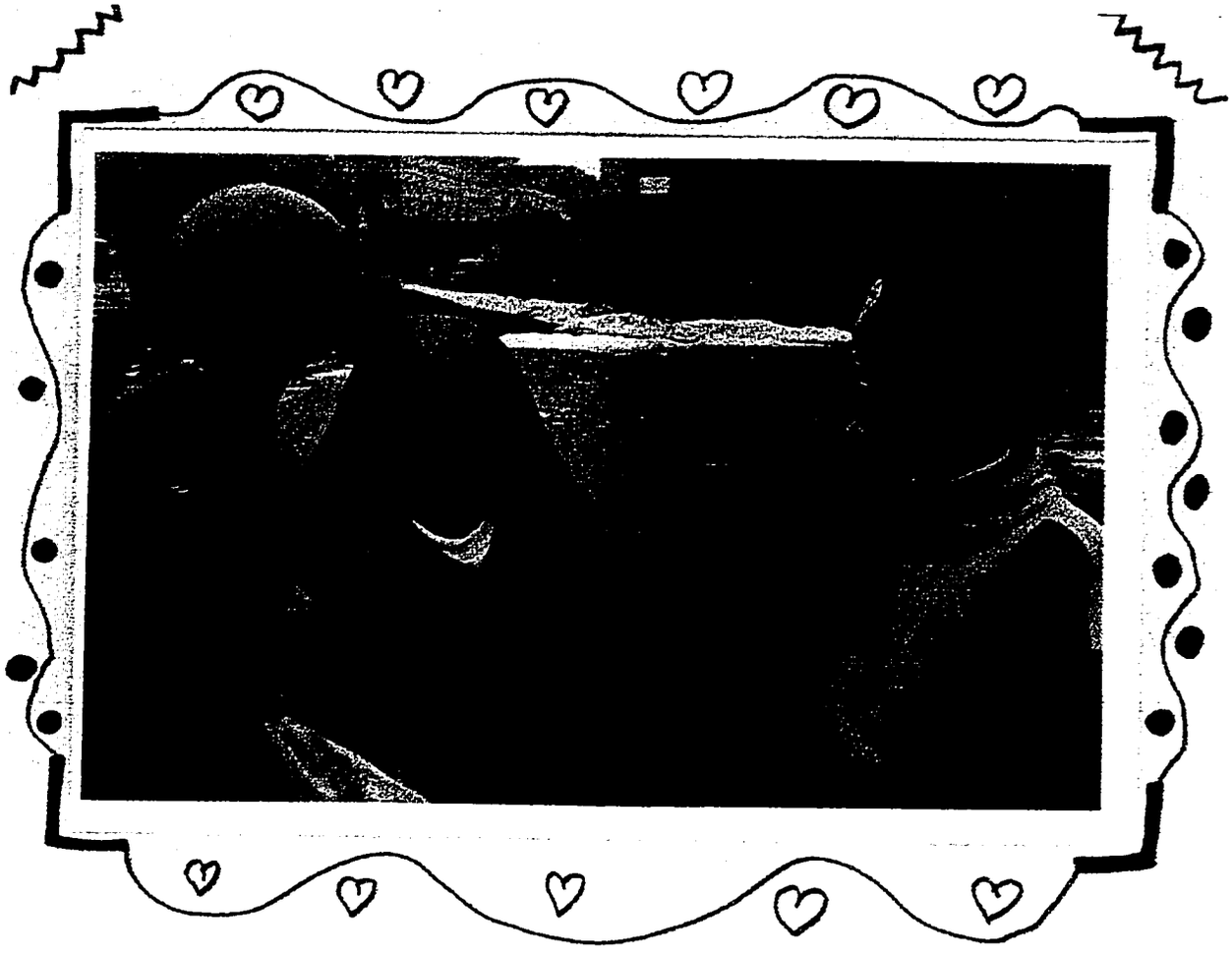
Looking and listening carefully...

In Figure 46, on the following page, Hanai shares a portrait of her friends in the schoolyard. She decorates the image with a border of flowers, a practice that was initiated by Bindiya when she embellished the images of her brother's birthday party (see Figure 17, p.187). This decorative framing device caught on with almost all the girls in Lynette's class. They used colored markers to adorn their photographs, and to add their written commentary. In this case Hanai talks in some detail about why she took this image, and how it differs from the way the girls look in real life. When I asked her why she thought they "look much younger here than they really do", she said it was "because they were acting so crazy that I couldn't take a really good picture, like the ones I did in the hallway" (see Figures 35/36, pp.222-223). Hanai did a series of portraits of her friends in the schoolyard, all of which are tightly composed and focus on capturing her

subjects' mood, gesture and attitude. Hanai did not make any photographs of the girls at play in the schoolyard, although as I already mentioned they certainly did play games between periods of just "hanging around" and talking.

This is a picture of my friends: Aviann, Zindzi & Taneshia. I like this picture because it reminds me of them when they were acting crazy for the camera. This picture was taken in the schoolyard, they look much younger here than they really do.

**Figure 46. Aviann, Zinzi, and Taneshia outside Coronation by Hanai**



I took this picture because Nneka was having a interesting conversation with Kevin, and John was listening while day dreaming....

**Figure 47. "Listening while day dreaming..." by Sueann.**

In the image above (Figure 47) Sueann, has captured a tender moment between her friend Nneka, in the far-left lower corner, and Kevin, a boy that Sueann told me "Nneka really likes". Kevin is pictured on the far right side of the image. The only person who seems aware of the photographer's gaze in this

image is John. Standing in the background he balances the basketball and looks rather irritated that he has to wait for Kevin while he speaks with Nneka. Hanai is aware that John, "is listening", however he is not really paying attention because he is "daydreaming" at the same time. Figures 45 and 46 are representative of the ways that many of the girls used their time in the schoolyard to record personal interactions and relationships that transpire in those spaces of undirected time between their school life and home life.

Worlds where they have been, and worlds they dream of going to...

In Figure 49 on page 245, Meshan created an image of himself at "La Ronde" (An amusement park in downtown Montréal, open each summer). Meshan had visited La Ronde the summer before we began working together. His experience of this amusement park left a lasting impression on him, especially the roller coaster that he told me he rode "over and over - hundreds of times". Meshan made several images of himself with his roller coaster backdrop.

Meshan is a very hardworking, serious student, with a quick wit. He enjoys performing as much as some of the more vocal, and less conscientious students in his class. Most of the other images that he created illustrate cars and trucks that Meshan knows a great deal about. He often spoke of his interest in "building things" when "he is older". In the text that accompanies the image on the following page, he states, "I used to like cars and wanted to be a car engineer, but now I like trucks!" From his writing and our conversations, I got the sense that Meshan had talked with his family members about this particular

career aspiration on many occasions. This image illustrates Meshan's interest in engineering, which I believe is part of the reason for his fascination with this roller

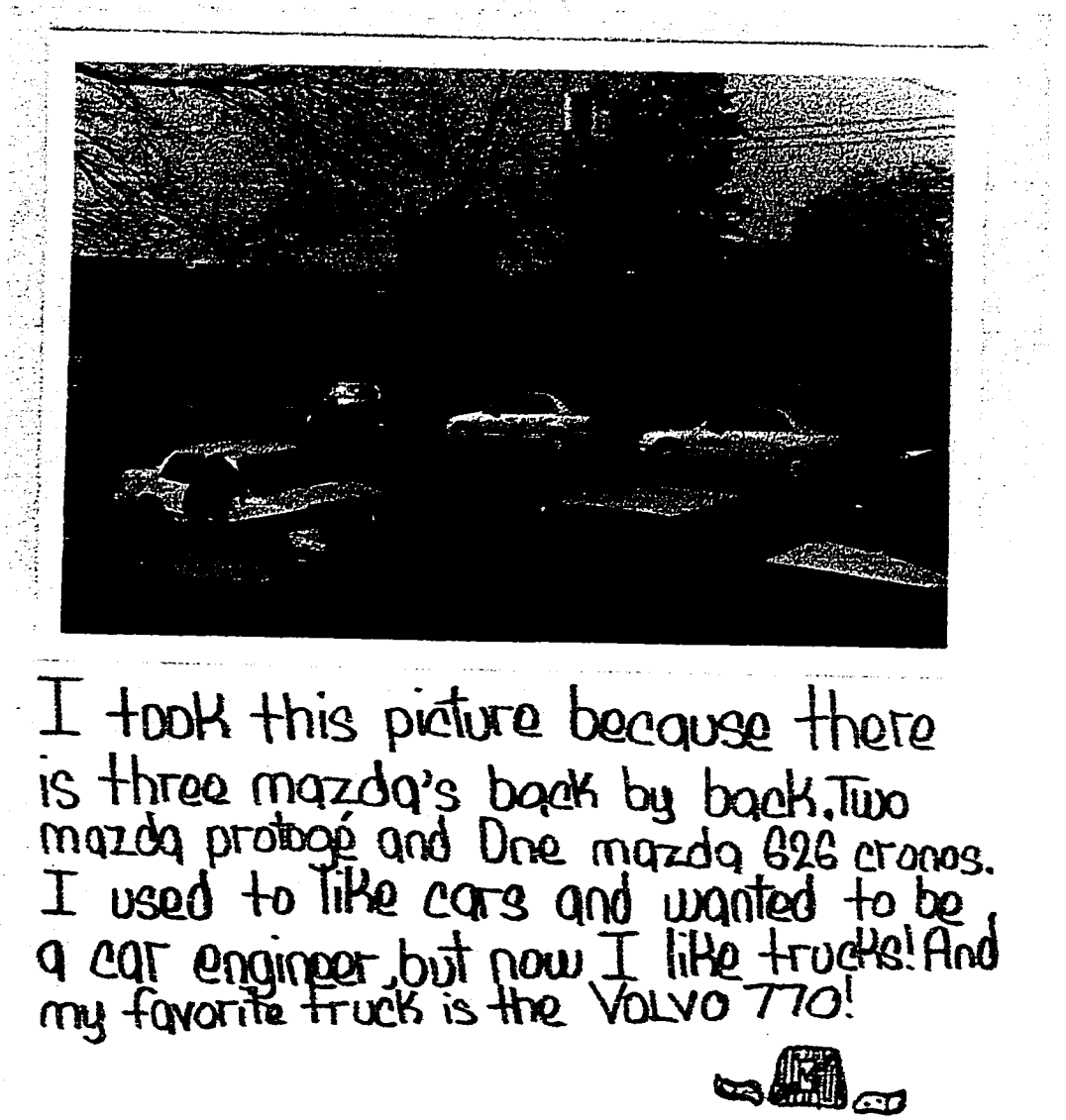



**Figure 48. Image taken from Meshan's balcony at home.**

coaster ride, as he is curious about the mechanics of this devise.

On several occasions Meshan told me that he wanted to "tell everyone about my really scary ride on the roller coaster". To do so he took tremendous

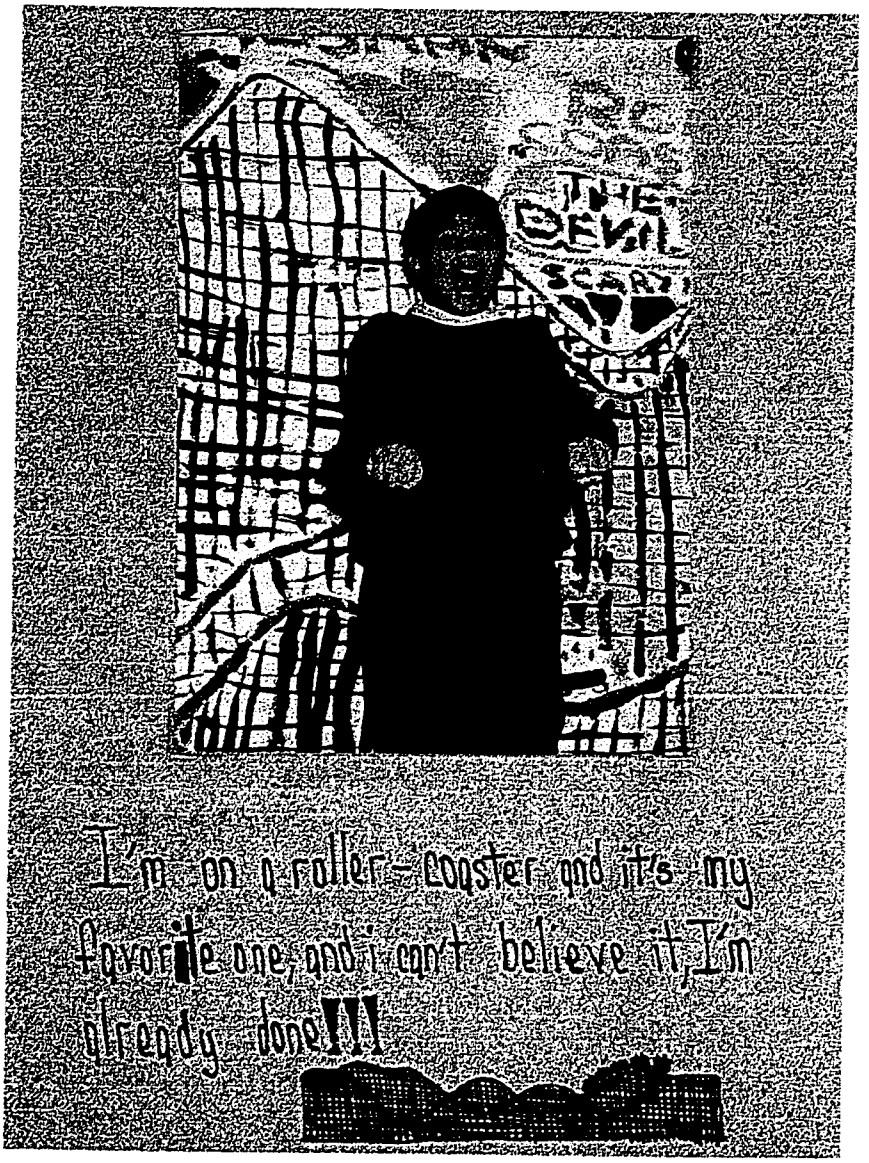



**Figure 49. Meshan's really scary ride on the roller coaster at La Ronde.**

care to render a very accurate representation of the roller coaster on his backdrop mural. This was a challenging endeavor, as he had to use tempera

paint that was difficult to control. Still, Meshan persevered and managed to draw all the parallel lines that support the riders on their daring jaunt to the top and back down the steep hills of this rather old-fashioned thrill ride.

In the text that he wrote to enrich this self-portrait (see Figure 49 on the previous page), he composed a short rhyme. He recalls and recreates his expression and physical gesture as he raced down the steep slopes of the roller coaster. "I'm on a roller-coaster and it's my favorite one, and I can't believe it I'm already done!!!" I find this short verse to be reminiscent of an advertising jingle. Meshan is a great spokesperson for La Ronde and for this ride in particular. Through his carefully executed backdrop and his dramatic pose, Meshan puts forth a great effort to recreate and share his experience on the "The Devil".


**Figure 50.. Meshan with his favorite ride, "The Devil".**

It is interesting to note the elaborate drawing (see Figure 39 below), of the "The Devil" that Meshan added to his self-portrait when he prepared it for the exhibition.

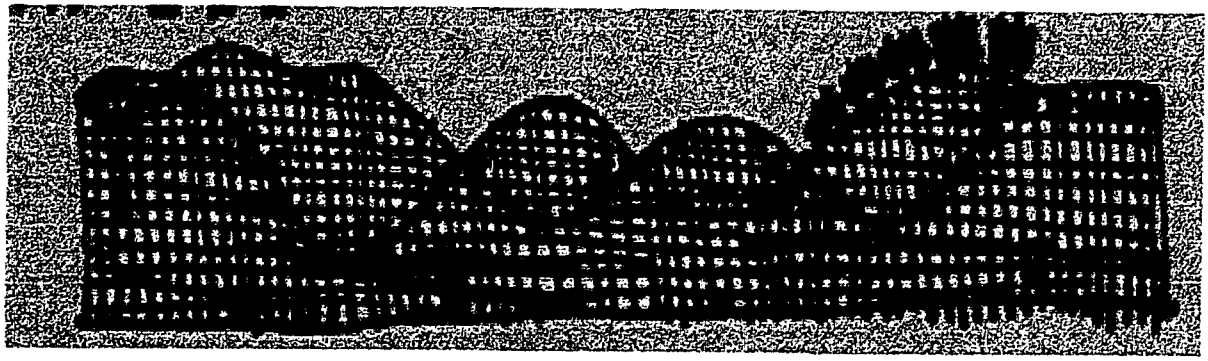


**Figure 51. Meshan's intricate drawing of a roller coaster. This image accompanies his signature on his self -portrait.**

All of Meshan's images indicate that he is a young person who enjoys drawing things in as much detail as possible, and that he is quite adept and well practiced at it. He especially enjoys drafting mechanical objects and he has a genuine interest in how things are put together. I asked Meshan if he still wanted to be a car engineer. He told me, "well maybe, but I think I want to build roller coasters, but maybe not for my job, just for fun I guess". Meshan's texts are a response to a memorable experience he had in a specific location. This urban environment, designed for fun and amusement, left a lasting impression on Meshan.

There were several children who responded to the urban environment around them by imagining something different. Although Montréal is a very "green" city, the area in which Coronation is situated is quite densely populated and there are few public gardens or parks. Low-rise apartment buildings and commercial businesses fill most of the spaces around the school. Even the schoolyards tend to be made of cement rather than grass. In response many of

the children in both groups pictured themselves in parks and gardens. At times their desire for these "green spaces" is explicitly stated. In these backdrops of pastoral scenes the children also include representations that keep them connected to the urban landscape in which they live and play. In Jessica's self-portrait below she has buildings rising up out of the top of the blue sky she painted. These building sit on the edge of the flower and butterfly garden she places herself in.

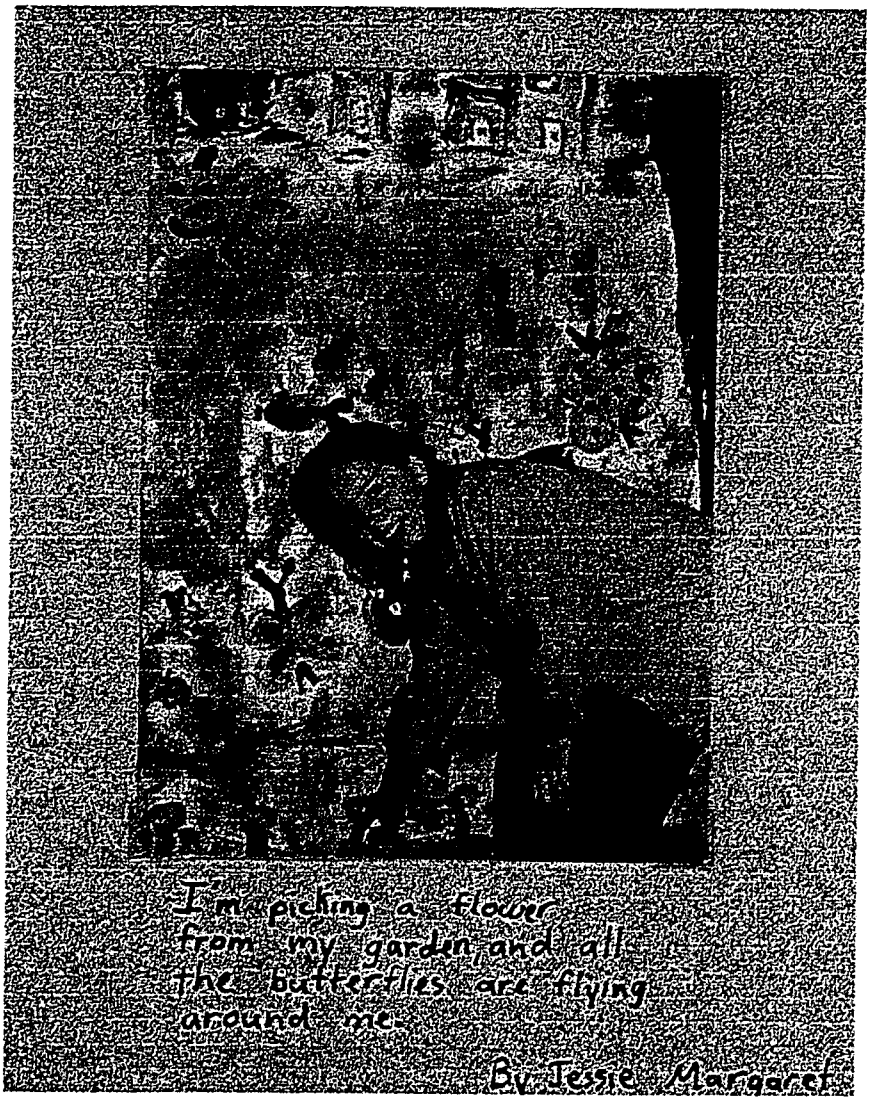



**Figure 52. In Jessie's garden.**

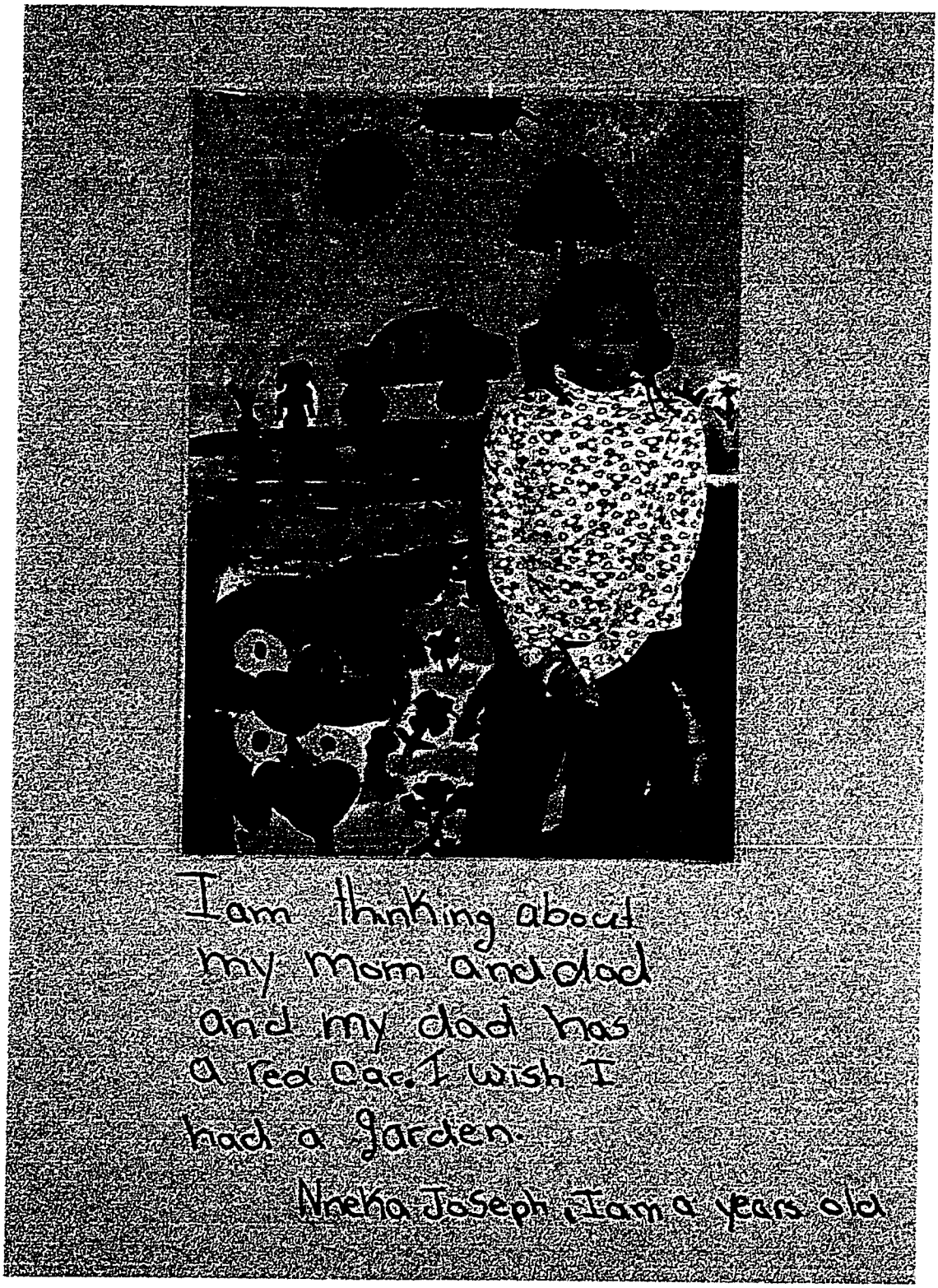



**Figure 53. "I wish I had a garden" by Nneka.**

In Nneka's self-portrait on the previous page (see Figure 53), she makes her desire to have a garden explicit with the statement "I wish I had a garden". Nneka incorporates images from her real world, depicting her mom and dad as they travel along in their red car. To the left of their car is a very small figure wearing a blue dress. The figure is Nneka's sister "waiting for a ride from our parents". Road signs and asphalt border the flower garden she paints and carefully places herself in. Here her dream is contained and surrounded by the familiar urban environment that she negotiates each day.

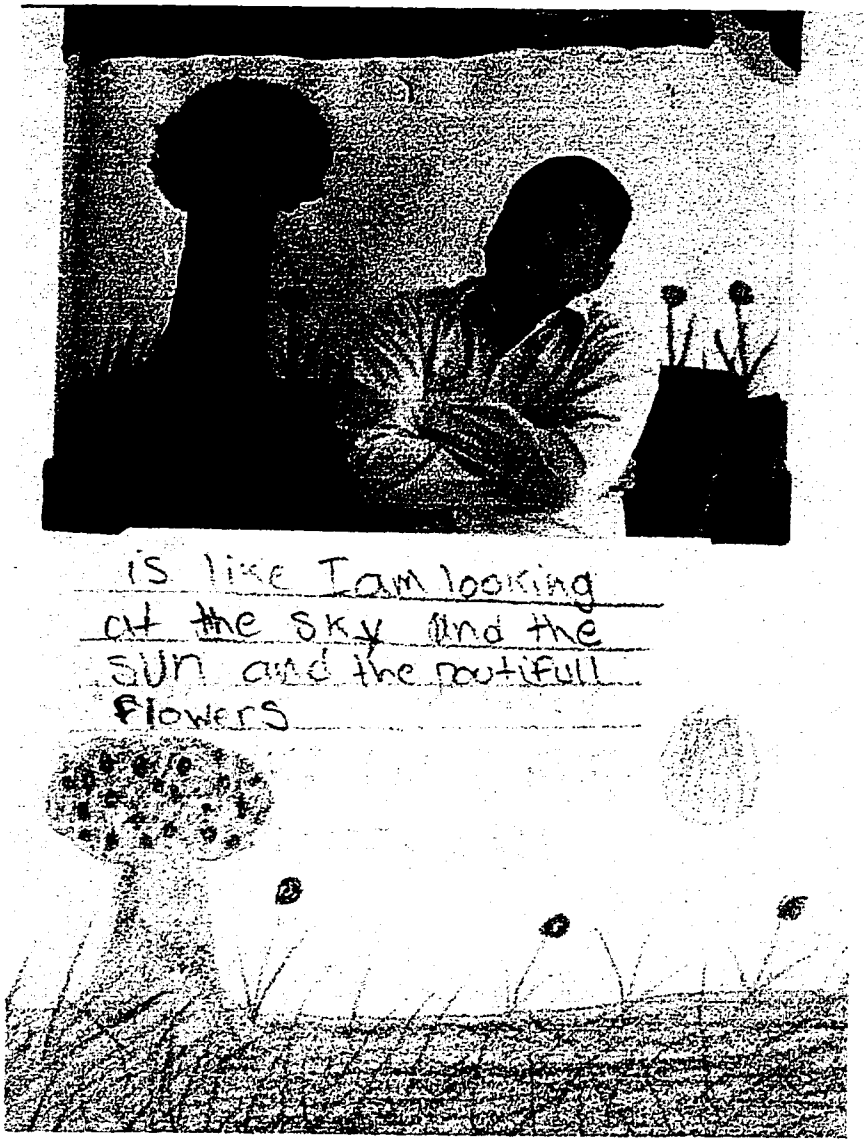



**Figure 54. Jason in his garden.**

In Jason's self-portrait (left) he places himself within an image of "the sky, the sun and the beautiful flowers". Jason liked this image so much that when he placed his

self-portrait into his journal, he carefully copied his original backdrop, thereby creating a garden frame for his writing. Jason pictures himself dreaming of this garden, a place where he is comfortable and serene.

Their playthings

In addition to the representations of play spaces, the children created a number of texts that record the objects that help to shape the environment in which they live and play. Through these material artifacts that express the children's personal tastes, they invite us to share their prized possessions. For the most part the children very simply and directly recorded the material artifacts that they value and want to share with the larger community. Rather than creating aesthetically pleasing compositions, reminiscent of still-life paintings and photographs, these images are much more like those we would find in a catalogue - where the objective is to clearly and simply show the "product". In this case the objects are not for sale; the children organized these shots as if they are taking stock or producing an inventory of the material possessions that they feel best reflect their tastes and interests. Thus their compositions are extremely simple and straightforward. In most cases, they place their objects on some sort of surface, they stand back, fill the frame with the object and snap the picture. Some of the objects that the children recorded have practical uses, like the pair of Fila running shoes O'Brian shows us - while others are purely playthings.

For many children this cataloging activity provided an opportunity for a sort of visual "show and tell". We all have items that we cherish. As children in

kindergarten and primary grades we are regularly invited to bring those objects into our classrooms to share with our classmates and teachers - the "show'". Like the narratives drawn from popular media that children carry with them into their schools each day, these material objects are invested with stories, and they are often a wonderful starting place to encourage children to recount their own narratives in the classroom - the "tell". The material artifacts that our students' collect, display and play with, can enliven our classroom practice through an analysis and discussion of the role these objects play in our students lives and in the surrounding culture.

In the section that follows I present a number of these texts in an effort to reveal the range of objects that the children took the time to document and write about. I should mention that each child that I worked with used a portion of their film to record their "stuff. I have selected images that are representative of the different categories of objects and playthings that the children wanted us to see, and to perhaps appreciate as much as they do.

Action figures, fish tanks, and Fila running shoes

Several boys organized and displayed their favorite toy cars or action figures for documentation. When I saw Jeff's image of his superhero action figures set on top of the television set (see Figure 55 on the following page), I was curious to find out more about this photograph. Jeff began by explaining that "it took a long time to collect all five of these guys. I keep them in my room, in my drawer so that my brother and sister won't get into them, and break them. I sometimes hide them under some other stuff, cause I know they like them".

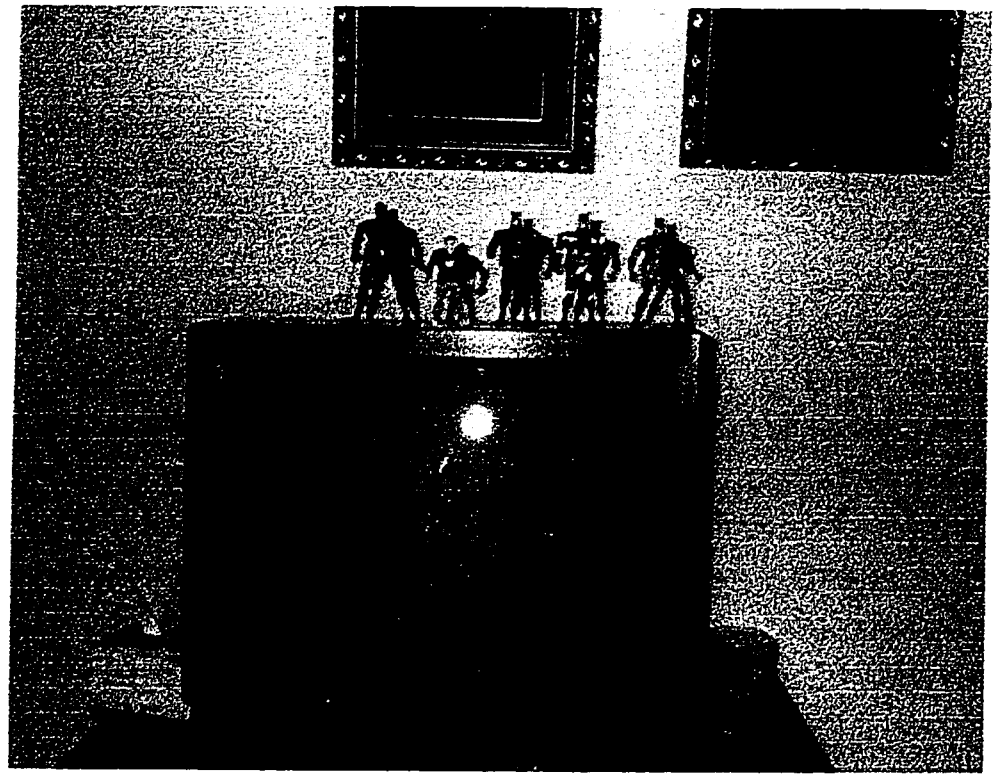


**Figure 55. "My Toys" by Jeff.**

Like a rare collection of art or historic artifacts, Jeff carefully exhibits his invaluable action figures, setting them up to be admired and recorded. His brief caption, "My Toys" echo his sentiments about keeping these toys in a safe place, where only he can access them. It is interesting that the action figures encompass a relatively small portion of the frame. Through this image Jeff tells us more about his home environment than he had intended, but in his caption he edits out everything but his action figures. For Jeff, the tissue box, the drinking glass, the framed pictures on the wall and even the television set are inconsequential. In the context of this image they exist merely to support and surround his toys. The television set provides a pedestal on which his action figures are neatly lined up and ready to do battle. With the screen blank,

perhaps Jeff is provided with the imaginative space he requires to create the plot in which his action figures can do battle.

In this picture you see my fish tank.

It holds a goldfish.

**Figure 56. "My fish tank" by Boris**

Boris explained to me that he was "in charge of the gold fish in this tank - it is my fish". Boris was given this fish tank as a birthday gift and he was proud of the fact that he cares for his fish and the tank on his own. The tank is shown surrounded by other objects that Boris does not identify or care about. Boris

never talked about the calendar on the wall beside the tank or the family photos that we can see nearby. For Boris the only object that matters in this photograph is the fish tank, and that is what he goes on to tell us about through his very neatly caption.

There is one more category of representation that I would like to share in this section. These are the texts in which the children record and write about commercial, popular or luxury items. O'Brian often expressed his interest in cars.

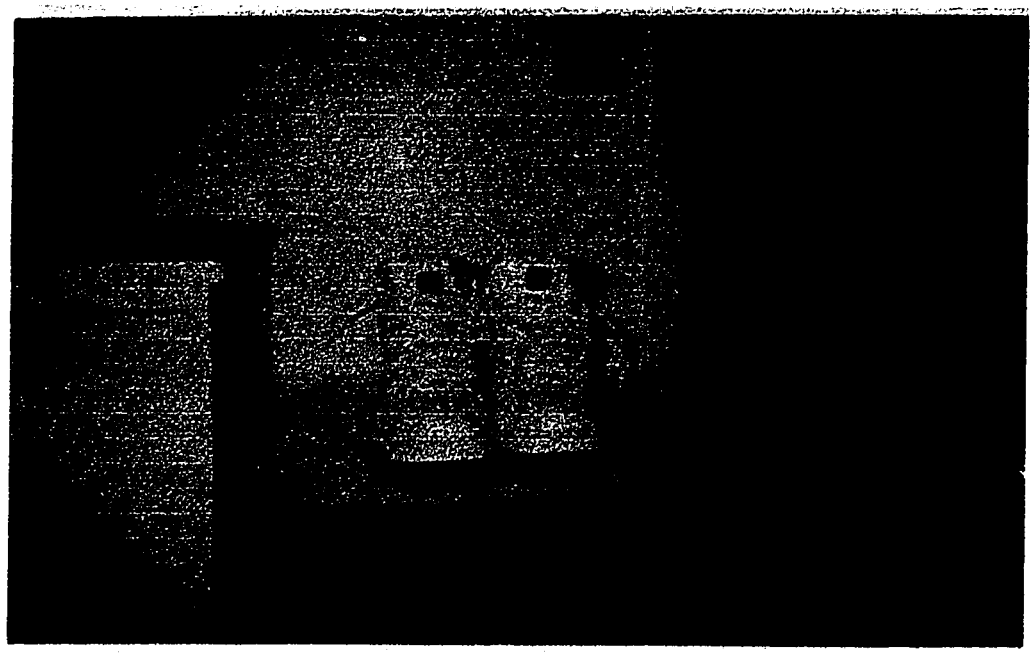
I Love Convertibles, Red cars.

We The best. They're hot!

**Figure 57. O'Brian's red car.**

O'Brian had requested that I provide the group with color film on several occasions, when I finally did so, he took many wonderful, rather slick images of cars that he saw and admired. It was these photographs that got O'Brian interested in his writing within the context of our work together. O'Brian was very excited when his color images were returned to him. He was pleased and proud of his work and as a result, this very reluctant writer finally became eager to talk, and then to write about his pictures. When I talked with O'Brian about this photograph it was clear that he would love to own a car like this some day. For O'Brian, like many other young men and women, flashy cars represent success and status. O'Brian longed for this kind of recognition and he was very conscious of what he had, and did not have, at this point in his life.

In Figure 58 on the following page, O'Brian created a very interesting image of another store-bought item that meant a great deal to him. In this photograph he places his highly prized pair of Fila running shoes carefully on top of a white cabinet. Like Jason's action figures set atop the television set, O'Brian places his shoes on a pedestal of sorts in order to display and admire them. In this image there are no objects to distract us from the beauty of these shoes. O'Brian told me, "I wanted the shoes to be the only stuff in the picture, I made sure I cleaned them off too - before I did it [took the photograph]". The image alone tells the viewer that these are shoes that are held in great esteem by their owner, and the written narrative that accompanies them tells us even more about their significance.



When my mom cam back fom new

York She brought me these fila.

**Figure 58. "She brought me these fila" by O'Brian**

O'Brian writes, "When my mom came back from New York she brought me these Fila." With these words O'Brian reveals that these shoes were a special and important gift. As importantly, these shoes originated in New York, a place that O'Brian and many of the other children in his group identify as a location where important fashion and popular cultural trends are set, especially for Black youth. By possessing these shoes, directly from New York, O'Brian's status in the group

is raised, and he is proud to show off this very important and exotic footwear to his peers and teachers.

The play spaces and playthings that the children chose to record and write about contribute to our understanding of the character and structure of the material world they learn to navigate and interact with daily. Although they may not yet be able to articulate why they value or cherish these items, these images illustrate that the children have begun to select objects that they value and want to have in their immediate surroundings. Thus these texts both embody and reveal essential elements in the production and transmission of culture and social relationships, which have a great impact on shaping the individual and collective identities of our students.

Summary

In this chapter I examined the material outcomes of my work with the children of Coronation in both phases of the study. I did so with an eye toward exploring how the children used drawing, painting, and most importantly photography, in conjunction with writing and dialogue, to explore and express aspects of their collective and individual identities. Through a "qualitative content analysis" (Altheide, 1987; Holsti, 1969) of the results of their efforts, I determined that there were three areas of concentration or themes that could be identified. These are 1. Self and Family 2. Popular Culture and the Media 3. Play Spaces and Playthings. Via their self-portraits, their books, their images, their writing and their talk, the children represented and responded to these dynamic forces in their lives. These explorations functioned alongside a pedagogy of "connection",

to bring them toward deeper engagement in their learning. Through a process of "transmediation", the children moved fluidly and naturally between various modes of signification. This afforded all the children with many opportunities "to psychologically and sociologically gain alternate and new looks on their knowing" (Harste, Siegel and Stephens, 1985, p. 40). Through these activities all of their communicative powers were employed, and they were provided with the means to bring their experiences outside the school into the classroom in ways that are meaningful and enriching for their peers, their teachers, and most importantly, for themselves.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion

> Children have two visions, the inner and the outer. Of the two the inner vision is brighter.
>
> I hear that in the infant rooms widespread illustration is used to introduce the reading vocabulary to a five-year-old, a vocabulary chosen by adult educationists. I use pictures, too, to introduce the reading vocabulary, but they are pictures of the inner vision and the captions are chosen by the children themselves. True, ...the outer, adult-chosen pictures can be meaningful and delightful to children; but it is the captions of the mind pictures that have the power and the light. For whereas the illustrations perceived by the outer eye cannot be other than interesting, the illustrations seen by the inner eye are organic...(Ashton-Warner, 1963, p.32)

I conclude this endeavor to learn more about the art of teaching, and how children might be encouraged to engage more fully in their activities at school, with a quote from Sylvia Ashton-Warner's book, Teacher. To explain my connection to Ashton-Warner, and her teaching philosophy, I would like to close this dissertation as I began it, with a brief story.

It was a warm summer day and I had just headed out to peruse the many bookstores that lined Bloor Street near my home in Toronto. This outing was a welcome break from packing up my sweltering apartment in preparation for my move to Montréal where I was to begin a Masters Degree in Art Education at McGill University. After much painful soul-searching, I had decided to take a leave of absence from my teaching position at a wonderful inner-city secondary school in downtown Toronto. I thought that I would spend a couple of years

doing graduate study in order to enhance and invigorate my teaching practice, but as it turned out I was never to return to my classroom.

On this July afternoon, I scanned the remaindered book tables searching for titles that looked interesting and inexpensive. One book in particular caught my eye; its title read simply Teacher. As I picked up this book I felt that it was a meaningful sign, as I was about to set out to rediscover what teaching meant to me. Teacher, written by Sylvia Ashton-Warner and published in 1963, poetically describes her experience of working with Maori children in the 1930's and 1940's in New Zealand. My teaching practice is very important to me and I bought this book almost as a talisman that would ensure that what I would learn about educational theory, aesthetics and philosophy in graduate school would not diminish my connection to my own students or to the art room. Although it took me two years to open Teacher, I discovered that Sylvia Aston-Warner would come to have great impact on my own beliefs about teaching and learning.

It was another humid July day when I began the journey that would lead me back to Teacher. My final course at McGill University was called Feminist Pedagogy and Sylvia Ashton-Warner, which was taught by an extraordinary teacher, a visiting professor, Dr. Anne-Louise Brooks. This course impelled me to begin to explore ways that teachers might keep the spirit of inquiry and thirst for learning alive in our students. I found that Ashton-Warners' words to have intense meaning for me. They set me about discovering how her teaching methods could enrich and enhance my own art teaching practice. Both Ashton-Warner and Dr. Brooks became my guides, as I worked to develop pedagogical practices that help children to bring the experiences they have in their homes and

communities into their classroom in valuable and meaningful ways. Dr. Brooks encouraged us to take part in our learning through storytelling and personal narrative. In her class, I learned much about how to be a teacher who listens to and learns from her students. I carried these lessons with me into the classrooms of Coronation Elementary School.

Through my experience at Coronation over the two years I worked with the children, teachers, and staff there, I observed first-hand the powerful force of children's "inner visions". I saw how these "captions of the mind", as Ashton-Warner describes them, have the potential to open up the students' worlds to their teachers and to themselves. In the first phase of my work at Coronation, I watched and listened carefully to the children of Room 24 as they awoke from their "sleepy silence". As they took possession of the media that were offered to them, they made their inner visions visible for others to share. "Out pelt these captions, these one-word accounts of pictures within. Is it art? Is it creation? Is it reading? I know that it's integral. It is organic" (Ashton-Warner, 1963, p.41). These organic experiences worked for the children of Room 24 and subsequently for the children in Lynette's Thomas' Grade Four/Five class.

The activities that I organized for the children from Coronation were successful because they were presented through a framework of *care* that allowed for real *dialogue* and helped the children to take great *pleasure in their learning*. Ultimately this led them to connect deeply to their teachers and to the activities at hand. Through this pedagogy of *care* , the children were respected and loved. It might seem fairly obvious to acknowledge that if we love our children enough, "we widen the creative channel"(Aston-Warner, 1963,p.33) in

them. However, I do think that it needs to be said, for there are still many educators and administrators who believe that our role as teachers is to fill children up with information and administer tests to see if they have absorbed that content. Unfortunately, I have observed too many classrooms where this just does not work and results in students' extreme disengagement from school life and sadly, from learning in general.

When I talk of loving our students, I am not envisioning a love that makes no demands or has no expectations, for I do not believe that is real love. Love does require time, attention to detail, respect, careful listening, expectation, moral and spiritual guidance and boundary setting. When we practice these things in our classrooms, we announce to our students that they are worthy of our efforts and that they can, and will succeed. I am an ardent believer in this caring approach to education, as I have seen it work at Coronation and in other settings in which I have worked over my twenty years in the classroom. But pedagogy of care, in and of itself, is not enough to move children to engage in their learning. In addition to this nurturing stance, teachers need to invite their students to record, share, and reflect on their knowledge and their experience of the world -- in Bruner's (1996) terms students need to be encouraged and allowed to become "metacognitive".

As an art teacher and a photographer, I worked toward achieving metacognition in the children from Coronation by asking them to use their cameras, in conjunction with writing and dialogue. These communicative tools provided them with the means to enter into multiple conversations that are a response to the world in which they live, and to the individuals with whom they

have relationships. By doing so, they were empowered to explore and express parts of their individual and collective identities, and more importantly they were encouraged to hold those explorations up for self-reflection and for response from a community of interested peers, teachers and family members. These investigations led to discussions on topics such as politics, education, memory, art, personal relationships, trust and respect.

The steps that I took to accomplish these goals worked for me - with my teaching experience and my skills as an artist. However I am certain that teachers adept at science, music, math, or skilled in other artistic media like, ceramics, sculpture or printmaking, could use their particular expertise and passionate interest to invite their students to engage in their learning in similarly active ways. Whatever approach one takes to making it possible for children to become active researchers of their own experience, it is imperative that we work to bridge the gap between our students' lives outside the classroom and their lives at school. By bringing these two powerful forces into closer proximity, we offer our students a far less fragmented or fractured vision of the world. While we listen carefully, we validate their ideas and their concerns. As well, we ask them to relate their intrinsic knowledge to new information and themes that we share with them in our role as teacher. Thus the classroom becomes an organic environment, a place where learning is multi-dimensional, holistic, and related to our students' interests and experiences in the "real" world. What I have increasingly come to recognize, is this sort of encouragement of "discovery and invention" alongside "offering and sharing" (Bruner, 1986, p. 127,) is fundamentally different than most of the schooling that young people receive in

our educational institutions. In most schools today, the emphasis is still much more on teaching, rather than learning.

In contrast, the approach outlined in this thesis explores one way that students can be encouraged to participate in and direct their own learning, to inject their points of view, ideas, questions, observations and concerns. Through pedagogy of *connection,* along with multiple opportunities to explore and reflect on their individual and collective *identities*, the children from Coronation took greater ownership over their learning. As a result, they valued it and invested themselves in it, thereby engaging more deeply and more meaningfully in their lives at school.

In the 1930's, Sylvia Ashton-Warner already understood the fundamental relationship between children's experiences outside the classroom and their ability and desire to learn with confidence and pleasure in school. Further research into how identity and understanding are shaped through experiences in the family, the community, and through exposure to an array of popular media, will help us to develop classroom practices that create pathways to engagement in all our classrooms.

**Implications for future research**

I envision this study as a beginning of a longer journey. Now that I have reached my first destination, I can look back and contemplate the road taken and plan the explorations to come. There are several ways that I might broaden my gaze by organizing and analyzing the data with a different focus. In addition, I realize the need to collect new data, in an effort to illuminate additional questions

that have emerged out of this first study. In the following closing section, I outline some of the possible directions for future research.

Teacher training in the visual arts

In the second phase of this study, my work with the children from Lynette Thomas' class was carried out with the assistance of a class of Art Education students from Concordia University. Although these student teachers played an integral role in the study, in this document that role has remained on the periphery. However, their involvement did yield a rich source of data that is yet untapped. I can foresee this material providing relevant insights into various aspects of teacher education, for example, outreach programs, collaborative learning, and "lab school" models of field experience. In an effort to rethink classroom practice and the role of the teacher, there will be a need for innovations in our teacher education programs. Many new teachers fall back on their experience of school as the model for building their teaching philosophy and pedagogy, and who can blame them? I believe strongly that we must begin with our student teachers' "lived experience" of their own schooling, however, we must also provide them with multiple opportunities to engage with other models of teaching and learning in the university, schools and in the community. With these goals in mind, questions about apprenticeship models of learning, outreach programs, field experiences and the foundational needs of all teachers require further study.

Gender and ethnicity

Although I considered issues of gender and ethnicity in a small way in this document, for example, the impact of media on the construction of children's gendered identities, the sorts of media that boys and girls prefer to engage with, the impact of media on minority children, I believe that further research into this subject could yield a far more in-depth understanding of the ways these issues play out and affect children's engagement at school. In addition, my work at Coronation could be extended and enriched by doing similar studies in classrooms in a range of cultural and socio-economic communities.

Youth culture, values, and practices

I am writing this conclusion at the end of a year of unprecedented incidences of school violence across North America. These violent crimes shock parents, teachers, and community members. They are particularly disturbing to the young people who survive them directly and to the millions of other students, who, by way of "the theater of grief" presented in the media, are frightened and disturbed. In the psychological, educational, and popular literature, there is no agreement on the root cause of this sort of violence, nor is their any agreement on the solution. No one knows why these events have escalated in the past few years, and everyone is looking to point a finger of blame. The easiest party to condemn is, of course, the media because of its overtly violent, sexist, and racist content. Some have suggested that the solution is to turn off our television sets and video games or boycott violent films and music. As well, in an effort to make

some sense of these senseless crimes, parents and teachers have pointed fingers at each other.

I do not propose to be able to solve these dilemmas, but I do believe that all of us need to listen and look much more closely to our children and our students. By doing so, we might be able to stem the tide of these incidences of violence, and perhaps more importantly we might begin to discover the roots of sadness, isolation, alienation and despair that many young people feel. School shootings are dramatic events and seem to be occurring more and more often-at least the media presents it this way; however, there are many young people whose pain and disconnection from family, community and school life go undetected or are dismissed as laziness or inability. As teachers we need to reach out and support these young people through innovations in our classroom practice, as well as in what we value and want in our schools.

This might best be accomplished by building ongoing and meaningful relationships between teacher education programs, local schools and community-based organizations of all kinds (i.e. museums, hospitals, galleries, concert halls, retail businesses, recreation centers, parks, etc.). By working to diminish gaps between schools and other educational, community-based, and cultural institutions, we will bring our students' lives at school into closer proximity with the larger world in which they live. Ultimately this will be help to prepare them for active, responsible, and productive lives in their families and their communities.

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