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From Journals to Production: A Journey of Self-Discovery

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in

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of

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ABSTRACT

From Journals to Production: A Journey of Self-Discovery

Stephanie L. Stone

The method of teacher-as-researcher, or action research, was adopted to explore issues related to journal work with adolescents. A teaching project was created and taught to three grade nine English language arts classes. The first class was a pilot project and had specific goals of subject integration. Observations were made during the course of the pilot project that promoted further investigation. The journal project was then repeated with two other grade nine classes with a new set of goals. Specifically, how could the act of keeping a journal become more personally relevant to teenagers? Could they transform the self-exploration done in their journals into personal, visual imagery? In what ways would they do so? Would these high school students be able to make the connection between what they had expressed on the pages of their journals and their creative production? Would their journals become a tool of self-discovery?

A description of the teaching project and examples of the students' work, which are included in this study, respond to the questions posed above. For example, details of the project's first lesson reveal the students' negative response toward journals and my attempts to redefine journal work for them in order to make it more personally relevant. During this discussion, students' and the teacher's preconceived notions regarding past classroom experiences with journals are revealed. Of particular interest are concerns related to student motivation, freedom of expression, censorship and teacher evaluation. These issues are reflected upon and conclusions are made using concrete examples from this teaching project.

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1. Introduction

My initial research interests

My interest in looking at the relationship between teenagers and journal keeping grew, quite unexpectedly, from a teaching project I initiated last year. At that time, I was interested in integrating visual arts with other subjects in a school curriculum. To define the term 'integration' I relied on the explanation given by Kathleen M. Thompson (1995) in her article, "Maintaining Artistic Integrity In An Interdisciplinary Setting". According to Thompson, in an integrative model of art instruction, art is not taught as a separate discipline; there is no specific art classroom or time. She writes, "art is carried out in the content classroom, with or without the guidance of professional art educators" (p. 43). My question when planning last year's pilot project was: Does art, as a discipline, maintain its integrity when integrating it with other subject matter? (Stone, Nov. 1998 and April 1998). In order to find an answer, I began by defining artistic integrity in the context of the project. As with the term 'integration', I found Thompson's notion of 'integrity' in an art lesson the most satisfactory for me. She outlines six criteria for a quality art lesson within an interdisciplinary setting:

1. Art products must reflect the individuality of the creator [. . .].
2. Art skills must be taught as part of the lesson [. . .]. This would include instruction in media [. . .].
3. During the lesson, instruction should be directed at the aesthetic development of the art work [. . .].
4. Art educators should design and/or direct those art components used as part of interdisciplinary instruction.
5. Information drawn from art history, art criticism techniques and aesthetic issues should be incorporated into interdisciplinary teaching units.

6. Interdisciplinary instruction should supplement, not supplant specific art instruction for all pupils.

(Thompson, 1995, p. 39)

Having defined the terms of my inquiry, 'integration' and 'integrity', I then created a teaching project I believed would offer some insight into my question.

I proposed my idea of arts integration to an English language arts teacher (referred to in this thesis as Ms. Bradley) in an English language high school at the west-end of Montreal. (Further description of the school is provided in the chapter entitled "Description of the project . . . ") Ms. Bradley agreed to let me work with one of her grade nine English classes (approximately 25 students), every day for over a month. The aim of the pilot project, from my perspective, was to integrate the visual arts with English language arts, and to determine whether or not art had maintained its integrity in the process. In order for my project to be as completely integrative as possible, I asked Ms. Bradley what she was working on with her grade nines. She mentioned a unit in the government's curriculum guide: Unit 1: Diary/Journal (Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1982, pp. 3-18). Ms. Bradley added that she never liked introducing her students to journal writing. I jumped at the idea of working with journals. I knew from my own experience as a journal keeper this could be the ideal integrative vehicle; a balance between the realms of the artist's sketchbook and that of the writer's journal (Stone, November 1997, p. 3).

Rather than use the suggested lesson plans in the English Language Arts Curriculum Guide (Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1982), I proceeded to build my own. The resulting project consisted of a series of lessons, each encouraging a continuous dialogue between the language arts and the visual arts for the entire length of the project. The plan of the project was as follows (Stone, November 1997, pp. 3, 4):

Lesson 1: Students chose a journal and brought it to the first class.

- Lesson 2:
- a) I introduced journals, diaries, sketchbooks kept by writers and artists (including my own).
 - b) The class discussed a variety of possibilities of journals. Discussion of how journals are defined.

Lesson 3: a) I invited students to modify or change their choice of journal, subsequent to being exposed to all the possibilities in the previous lesson.

- b) They were invited to contribute to their journal, each day, for one week -- must date and record time of entry.

Note: students were required to continue regular journal entries for the duration of the project: one month.

Lesson 4: Students read their own journal entries in class (silently), and jotted down notes of themes that re-occurred. They then put these notes away and began a visual collage; spontaneously choosing and gluing papers.
(Lesson plan detailed in Appendix 1)

Lesson 5: Students re-read the notes taken from their journals and examined their collages and discussed whether or not there was a relationship between the two.

- Lesson 6:
- a) Students were then invited to create a project, using any medium, including language, that synthesized the personal research done in their journals.
 - b) Students were required to write a one page explanation of how their project related to their exploration in their journal.

Lesson 7: The class began the critiques of their projects: each student presented orally their completed project to the rest of the class. The following format was followed (Feldman, 1973, p. 51):

	[Describe: What do you see?
Viewers	[
(rest of the class)	[Interpret: What do you think it means?
	[
Viewed	[Analyze: What were you trying to say?
(presenter)	[
	[Judge: Did you say what you wanted to say?
		(To be done by maker and teachers only).

Final Lesson: Students completed a survey in response to the project.

At the end of the pilot inquiry, I felt this journal project had satisfied my investigation into arts integration. I was able to link elements of an art lesson, such as the use of visual language as a tool for individual expression, exploration of media, and art criticism with the following language arts objectives outlined for the journal unit in the government's curriculum guide (Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec, 1982, p. 15):

1. To create a writing habit.
2. To encourage students to record their responses to matters of interest.
3. To encourage students to practice shaping their own experiences in their own words: to develop a writing style.

As well, the responses that I received from the students on their final surveys, when asked "Did you consider the project that we worked on together as being an art lesson or an English lesson or both?" (Stone, November 1997), indicated a majority felt that it had been both. One student wrote: "It was an incorporation of Art into English. Writing in our journal was an exercise in English while our project was in some ways a conversion of text into images, sounds, or text or even any combination [sic] of the above "(Stone, November 1997). This project also proved to be a useful tool for examining the question of maintaining the integrity of the arts within subject integration. One of the most important conclusions I made was that it is absolutely necessary to have the collaboration of the art specialist with the other subject teacher. Without this cooperation the artistic integrity of the integrated lesson is almost sure to be lost, thus confirming Thompson's fourth criteria for a quality art lesson, "Art educators should design and/or direct those art components used as part of interdisciplinary instruction" (p. 39).

My present research interests

While facilitating my study of subject integration, this journal project also yielded some unexpected results. These discoveries were so personally provocative, they have since developed into the basis for my present research. Of particular interest to me was the way in which I began to see the journal as a vessel for personal research. This perception evolved naturally through the course of the pilot project. I began to relate the students' work to my own art making process. I realized that the work strategies I had developed for myself, namely the use of a journal/sketchbook, were mirrored, to some degree, in the process of the students' journal project. In my attempt to weave art making into my everyday routine and enhance my visual vocabulary I had turned, and continue to turn, to my journal. On the pages of daily entries lie the seeds of unending possible works of art. I understand, now, this is true for these grade nine students as well.

Through the observations of two art educators, Christine Marmé Thompson (1995) and Steve Thunder McGuire (Zurmuehlen, 1990), I was able to clarify the notion of personal research for myself (Stone, November 1997, p. 5). Thompson writes,

[s]ketchbooks provide a bounded area available for exploration of images and ideas, a format for the pursuit of personal projects and an occasion for sharing theories about the world and its representation through symbols.
(p.11)

The notion of the journal/sketchbook as a reference tool of self or a basis for personal research is explored further in Marilyn Zurmuehlen's comments about a project initiated by Thunder McGuire: His students made what he calls a "memory book" and then reflected on them in written or visual forms. Zurmuehlen observed,

Clearly, he, [McGuire], intends these [memory books] to be source books for their ideas. At times the relationship between a written passage and its embodiment in a student's sculpture is evident. But in many instances one image evokes another image in a student's book, perhaps awaiting intentional symbolization in some sculpture to be realized later. (Zurmuehlen, 1990, p.56)

The above descriptions struck a chord of recognition within me because of my own personal evolution in my art making.

At the same time as the pilot project was evolving, I was struggling with my own art production. During this period, I was trying to uncover a personal artistic process that allowed me to incorporate my art making into the activities of my everyday life. I wanted to make the fusion of these elements seamless. In this way, I hoped that my art work would become part of my life, not something for which I had to set aside special time. The need for this incorporation became more pressing as I realized that I would be leaving art school soon and the external motivation of deadlines and critiques would be gone. I had left my art studies to teach once before and had abandoned my art to the mundane details of life. I was desperate for this not to happen again. As I was determined to find a way in which to make my art an integral component of each day, I turned to my journal/sketchbook (Stone, November 1998, p. 4).

A year has passed since my pilot project, and I remain pre-occupied with the notion of a journal as a personal research tool that emerged while doing the project. Mainly, because I am still persevering with the struggle to integrate my creative process with such daily activities as brushing my teeth, my morning walk, preparing breakfast, lunch and supper As always, when driven to madness by the anxiety caused by my neglect of my creative impulse, I reach for my journal. Day after day on its pages, my voice sings, screams, rants and raves.

Between my journal's covers, thoughts become ideas; ideas become projects; projects become physical manifestations of what is intrinsically me. Over time, I have come to know myself more deeply and, therefore express myself more clearly and comfortably. This is due to the cycle generated through my journal work: thought -- idea -- product -- thought. The activity of working in my journal regularly has become invaluable to my personal, professional, intellectual, academic, emotional and psychological development. It has carved paths of self-discovery.

My private experience with continued journal work led me to reconsider the project that I did last year with the grade nine English class. I repeated this project with other students, however, the primary focus of my investigation shifted from subject integration to that of the journal itself. The intention of the project was to enhance the student's involvement with their journals, by introducing them as a vital component of their personal research. I hoped that by exposing the students to this aspect of journals, keeping a journal would have more personal relevance to them. I wanted to examine the value of my teaching project as a process of self-exploration which, in turn, leads to expression. I was interested in whether or not doing regular journal entries led these teenagers to discover ideas for individual projects, as it does for me. I was also curious to explore how they related their final art products with the thought process revealed in their journals. It was my hope that this journal project would simply make the students aware that the personal research done in their journals is a valuable resource for individual, creative production and invention. I have come to these conclusions, as an artist, throughout my own voyage. As an educator, I am now interested in how this journey of self-discovery can be shared with students.

2. Discussion of Relevant Literature

In my search for literature that contributes to my research into this journey toward self-discovery for teenagers through their journals, I found myself focusing on two distinct areas. First, I investigated journal articles written by educators about their teaching experiences with journals. I included articles by both art and English teachers. It was important to me to have both perspectives, as I am doing an art project with English language arts classes. Since my teaching project was created in response to the difficulty Ms. Bradley was having with the Journal/Diary unit in her grade nine, English curriculum, I read other English teachers' accounts of how they introduced journals to their classes. In addition, given that this assignment was a blending of both English and art work, I included articles by art educators on their use of journals/sketchbooks.

My second area of focus in my search for resources to inform my inquiry is artists. In most cases, the artists do not analyze their use of journals in their artistic process in the same manner as educators. The literature I found deals mainly with the process itself, i.e. examples of artists' journals, sketchbooks, and exhibition catalogues. It is with these sources that I begin a more detailed discussion of the literature related to my investigation.

Artists' work

Through my research into artists who use journals in their artistic process and, as I discovered art production, I uncovered a community within which to share my voyage of self-discovery. The work of these artists, along with my own artistic process, served as an invitation for the students to join in the creative process. I was able to show them physical examples of the myriad of possibilities for journal work. I brought reproductions of the journal/sketchbook work of these artists to class and used them as an introduction to the project. These

examples demonstrated to the students not only what a journal could be but, also, where it could take them.

The most thought provoking example is that of the diary of Frida Kahlo: The Diary of Frida Kahlo -- An Intimate Self-Portrait (1995). This faithful reproduction of Kahlo's journal provides pages and pages of her drawings, poetry, musings, anxiety, and philosophy. Sarah Lowe's essay which prefaces the reproduction of Kahlo's diary elaborates on the place of the journal in Kahlo's work. Lowe writes,

nearly every drawing in Kahlo's diary is spontaneous and unplanned. Kahlo's automatic drawings were springboards to images that lurked in her unconscious, visions she teased out and then elaborated. After allowing herself the freedom to doodle, Kahlo put (at least part of) her rational mind to work, and from her vast lexicon of images, real and imagined, her biomorphic forms developed into faces, body parts, animals and landscapes. (p. 27)

Kahlo's journal demonstrates the artist's journey of self-discovery -- or, in this case, self-creation. Each page is filled with drawings, collages and writing, all of which are used as a means of expression of her inner self. I am able to relate my own journal work and the work that I encouraged the students to do to that of Frida Kahlo. The Diary of Frida Kahlo: an Intimate Self-Portrait (1995) serves to expand the definition of the journal. This expansion of definition is crucial to my attempt to enhance the students' experience with their journals. They see that they are not confined by "how-to-rules". This realization allows them to explore a means of expression, in their journals, that is personally relevant. This notion is further elaborated upon later in this paper.

While Kahlo's passions and emotions are recorded in her journal, Andy Warhol's diary is comprised of records of daily, mundane details such as the cost

of a taxi cab ride, who was with whom and what each was wearing. The Andy Warhol Diaries (1989) contain no drawing, no poetry, no dreams. Day after day, he called his assistant in the morning and dictated his journal entry to her over the telephone. She then typed it up! These diaries are excellent examples of journal work. Although they contain no visual language, they contain the artist's highly personal research which he then translated into creation and invention. His portraits of the rich and famous are a direct extension of his obsessive recording of parties, club life, superstars and popular culture in his journal. Knowing Warhol's Pop Art images -- documents of our culture during a certain era -- I was fascinated to see that his diaries were much the same. Trading visual language for the English language (or vice versa) did not alter his content. Warhol's diaries and his work seem melded as one. His detachment from his diary -- the fact that his thoughts are recorded by someone other than himself -- reflects the machine-made element to his art work. Again, as with Frida Kahlo's diary, Warhol's also serve to inform my investigation of journals as a rich source of personal research which can nurture individual invention.

Both direct and indirect links (as seen in the examples of Kahlo and Warhol) can be made between artists' journals and their final art production. For example, my art work includes pieces that have been done in a journal format, as well as pieces that communicate, indirectly, themes that have been explored in my journal. It was important to me to find examples of other artists that have used the journal format as a foundation for their art products. I wanted to be able to share them with the students, as well as use them to inform my own art practice. Finding these artists allowed us to see what is being done with journals in the art world. For example, the exhibition catalogue for The Diary Exhibition, held by the Art Gallery of Memorial University (1987), reveals the work of sixteen artists. As the exhibition curator, Marlene Creates, writes, this show of

their work "[attempted] to provide a way of thinking about art and everyday life -- the relationship between the creative process and lived experience -- by offering some of the ways in which artists speak about their first-hand experience" (Art Gallery of Memorial University, 1987, p. 5). The work included installation, photography, drawing, collection sculpture . . . each piece entirely individual and autobiographical. Of interest to me, as they reflected some of my own artistic pursuits, were the pieces by Marcel Gosselin and Janine Carreau. I was intrigued by Gosselin's collection of apple cores for his work Une Histoire de pommes (1985). I, too, kept a collection/diary of objects that crossed my path each day, for eight months last year. Mine was an accumulation of plastic. When going through my hoard of bags, wrappers, packing material, milk tops etc., I had a similar reaction as Gosselin. He writes that "[seeing] them together produced in me a nostalgia similar to that felt when going through the family photo album. It began to read like an archeological study of our recent past" (Art Gallery of Memorial University, 1987, p. 30). Similar feelings toward my collection/journal, incited me to turn this process into a plastic quilt. As a concrete example, I showed my plastic quilt to the grade nine students and explained the link that it had with my journal keeping at that time.

Another example of an artist directly linking her final product to her journal process is Janine Carreau's series of drawings in a quilt-like arrangement, shown in the Diary Exhibition (1987). In The Year of the Rat (02/02/1984 - 19/02/1985), she has joined her drawings together in order to make a whole. The individual drawings were done nightly for a year. Carreau describes her process in this way: "[. . .] I keep the papers [drawings] in boxes and I don't see them as I am making the diary day to day" (Art Gallery of Memorial University, 1987, p. 18). Having read about Carreau's artistic practice, I am now doing a collage/journal. Each day, I collage on a piece of cardboard (the same size, each time). I chose

collage so as to be able to incorporate my collection/journal into the process. Again, I shared my newest journal work with the students. Seeing it in progress emphasized the process of journal keeping. It also invited them to see what these daily collages could become.

The works of these artists informed my own journey of self-discovery as an artist. With respect to my teaching project, they, also, provided contemporary examples for the students, of artists, apart from myself, that are creating meaningful work from their everyday life experience, as recorded in their journals. Examining publications of journal work done by artists significantly enriched my inquiry.

Experiences of educators

My research has been further informed by my second area of focus in this discussion of relevant literature: journal articles written by both English language and art educators. As mentioned, these articles pertain specifically to my teaching experience during the journal project (both the pilot project in 1997 and the project done this year). Gabriele Lusser Rico's article, "Daedalus and Icarus Within: The Literature/ Art/Writing Connection", affirms that in order for our students to reach their individual, creative potential it is useful and necessary to encourage connections in their learning, such as between language and art. Rico writes,

[students] learn contextually, the way the mind is meant to learn: multi-leveled! Accordingly, they learn better, faster, more willingly because they themselves -- through writing and the arts -- become the integrators of their own learning, and their teacher, their facilitator. (Rico, 1989, p. 16)

Rico's comments speak to the focus of my pilot project -- integration of the visual arts with the language arts. However, Rico also touches on the primary focus of

this research: facilitating the journey of adolescents toward self-discovery through personal research done in their journals. To encourage students to "become the integrators of their own learning, and their teacher, their facilitator", Rico developed lessons dealing with "thought-logs" (p. 16). "Thought-logs" were generated through the students "patterning" their learning. This process, which includes journal work, "involves students with the arts intellectually, emotionally, improvisationally, and actively rather than passively [. . .] students become participants as creators of meaning" (Rico, 1989, p. 16). Rico's observations speak directly to my desire to encourage the students to find personal meaning in their work.

Art educator Christine Marmé Thompson deals with similar research being done with the sketchbooks of five year old students. Thompson's article, " 'What should I draw today? ' Sketchbooks in Early Childhood", is relevant to my inquiry because of the author's discussion of the benefits and purpose of journals for students, as discussed in this paper's introduction. Her observations support my conviction that the journal is an individual's vessel of research and of personal resources that can be used as the basis for unique creation. Thompson echoes my belief in the relevance of journal/sketchbooks for students, when she writes that upon the pages of their books "[evidence] of each child's distinctive ways of thinking, of drawing, and of attending to the world accumulates, as drawings [entries] preserved in roughly chronological order [which] become available for review and reflection" (Thompson, 1995, p. 8).

In "Having Art Students Use A Journal" (1996), art educator Charlene Hubans Root raises questions and makes observations related to my research. Her belief that "writing over a period of time helps the artist identify and develop themes in his or her own work" (Root, 1996, p. 336), and her desire that the "students experience the 'AH-HAH!' of the verbal/visual process and begin

to explore and integrate their lives and their art" (Root, 1996, p. 336), address areas of my inquiry. Root's article also provides an example of the "teacher-as-researcher" methodology that I adopted for this project. (My methodological approach is discussed in the following chapter.)

Another example of such is the work by Anne McCrary Sullivan: "Liberating the Urge to Write From Classroom Journals to Lifelong Writing" (1989). Here Sullivan describes a journal project that she initiated with the students in her English classes. She guides the reader through each of the four steps of her project, describing the work and explaining the reasons for her choice of tasks. Sullivan introduces the discussion of her journal project by listing three premises that form the foundation for her journal work with her students. The article ends with these same premises transformed into the following conclusions:

- Writing satisfies a basic human need for self-expression and self-exploration.
- Freedom of expression is crucial to full development of the writing urge.
- Repeated, prolonged translation of experience into language nourishes the power of a growing writer. (Sullivan, 1989, p. 55)

A couple of these statements can be related to my interest in journals. The first one addresses my belief that students can use their journals as a forum for personal research. The third, speaks to my conviction that the self-discovery achieved through journal work can lead to individual invention and creation.

Sullivan and I share many similar beliefs, teaching approaches and ideas. For example, she describes bringing her own journals to share with her students. The reason for this was, as with me, to open up the students' perception of journals and to encourage them to consider all the possibilities when choosing a journal for themselves. In addition, the assignments that we gave our students

based on their journals also share some similarities. Sullivan described her writing assignment to the students in the following way: " 'Write based on something you've written in your journal' " (Sullivan, 1989, p. 58). I told the grade nine students that I worked with that their creative product was to be an extension of what had emerged from their journals, i.e. recurring obsessions, pre-occupations or images. I went on to describe the process of discovering the source of this project much in the same way that Sullivan explained it to her students. She told them to " '[pick] and sort through that box of stuff [their journal] you've collected. Find something that shines. Take it out and polish it up a little. See what happens.' " She adds that "what usually happens in the short run is a piece of writing that speaks with genuine voice [. . .]" (Sullivan, 1989, p. 58).

Having discovered this resource a full year after completing my pilot project, my procedure was not enhanced by this shared outlook. However, Sullivan's article does inform my research in other ways. For example, it is interesting for me to see how she has written about this project. Particularly with regards to her inclusion of her students' journal entries and their comments made during the process of evaluation. There is an emphasis on the process of self-discovery achieved through their journal writing. Sullivan uses many examples of her students' journal entries to support her conclusion that,

[for] some students, according to their own reports, journal writing becomes the heart of their communication -- that most important of all communications, without which one may wonder if anything worthwhile exists for communication with others. (Sullivan, 1989, p. 61)

I, too, had intended to include examples from the grade nine's work. However, after reading Sullivan's work, I feel that excerpts from their journals and their evaluation of journal work is not enough. They tell only part of the

story: whether or not the project served to enhance their participation with their journals and whether the journals contain a body of personal research or not. However, to demonstrate that the content of students' journals can become a valuable resource for their creative work, I feel that it is important to include examples of some of their creations. In my opinion, Sullivan's article is missing the evidence of her conviction "that writing one's thoughts is a beneficial way to get them, to analyze them, to push those thoughts into something new" (Sullivan, 1989, p. 352). She does not include examples of the "something new" -- the final writing assignment that was based on something they had written about in their journal. As a reader, an educator and an artist, I would have enjoyed seeing this connection. Realizing this, I have included in this paper, examples from the personal research done in the grade nine students' journals, photographs of their final art projects and excerpts from the students' descriptions of how they expanded on the self-exploration done in their journals so as to create the final work of art. In this way I will be able to highlight the journey of self-discovery, as well as the relevance of this journey for individual invention.

3. Outline of Procedures and Methodology

In order to investigate further how journals can be a valuable resource for high school students in their creative production, I have repeated the teaching project described in the introduction of this paper. To maintain a certain level of consistency in my research, I retained many elements from the pilot project. I, again, benefited from my personal connection with Ms. Bradley and the school board (for which I also taught). Ms. Bradley consented to work with me a second time and was receptive to the project, based on our last experience together. She gave me permission to work with two of her grade nine English classes. (I worked with English language arts classes again, in order to be consistent.) I asked Ms. Bradley if this would be possible because I was interested in a large enough sampling of students' work from which to make my observations. It was also important to me to work with the same grade level as last year. I examine and refer to both groups worked with this year, during the description of my findings from the project.

Ms. Bradley and the principal of the high school, signed consent forms allowing me to work with the two grade nine classes for a period of one month. Consistent with the number of students in the 'pilot' group, there is an average of twenty-five students in each class. Each student signed a consent form, as well. In addition, the first day we met, we verbally reviewed what they were consenting to. I informed the students, with Ms. Bradley present, their identities would remain confidential. I then confirmed they understood that they had consented to my use of their work only, in my written thesis. We then read through their signed consent forms together. I verbally reiterated that the documentation from our work together was for educational purposes and would never be used for financial gain. We examined the equipment with which I

would be documenting the project: two 35mm cameras (one for slides, the other for prints), a tape recorder and a microphone. A few students expressed relief when I informed them that I would not be recording our work on videotape -- a choice I had made to protect the students' and Ms. Bradley's anonymity. A second reason for not bringing a video recorder into the classroom was to eliminate the possibility of it creating an atmosphere of inhibition or the reverse, performance, amongst the students. My instincts were sound, judging by their relief when I told them there would be no video camera. I concluded by telling the students they were in no way obligated to participate in the project and I would work only with the students that had given me a signed consent form. As previously mentioned, each of the approximately fifty students agreed to work with me for the duration of the project.

I worked with both grade nine classes every day for one month, except for the week they constructed their art projects at home. The schedule was:

Week 1: Introductory activities
(as outlined in Lessons 1 - 5 of this paper's introduction).

At the end of the week the art project was introduced to them and assigned for the beginning of week 3.

Please note: students had begun their journal entries the week before and continued for the entire month.

Week 2: Students completed their projects at home.

Weeks 3 & 4: In class presentation and critique of each students' project (Lessons 6 & 7).

Please note: students did not complete the survey from the pilot project, as its focus was the integration of the arts with English curriculum. These two groups reflected on their personal definitions of a journal and whether or not it has changed since the beginning of the project. This was done in writing.

I did not grade the students' performances or projects. The classroom teacher, Ms. Bradley, marked their work. A discussion of student evaluation can be found in this paper's "Description of the project [. . .]." The observations I make are of a descriptive and reflective nature. This is in keeping with the method of research I adopted for this inquiry; that of action research. In truth, I initiated my teaching project and delved into my subsequent investigation without consciously applying any known methodology. It is 'after the fact' -- post-project -- that I discovered an established 'method to my madness'!

In order for me to place my methodology within the framework of critical, educational research, I needed to familiarize myself with the different types of approaches. Originally, I identified my method as being that of participant-observation. However, I became aware that my work on this project went far beyond observing the students -- I was actively engaged in all aspects -- I myself was participating by teaching and guiding the students through each stage of the project. As well, I created and initiated the work based on my desire to research a particular aspect of high school curriculum: the integration of art into other subject matter (Stone, November 1997, pilot project). I discovered that my approach was that of a 'teacher-as-researcher', otherwise referred to as action research (May 1993, p. 115). This realization incited me to uncover definitions of this methodological term. Thus, I turned to literature written about educational research.

Wanda T. May defines the action research method as being "the study and enhancement of one's own practice" (May, 1993, p. 114). She also offers terms that can be used interchangeably with action research such as " 'reflective teaching', 'teacher-as-researcher', 'teaching as inquiry' and 'critical praxis' " (May, 1993, p. 115). May synthesizes the meaning of this research methodology in her article entitled " 'Teachers-as-Researchers' or Action Research: What is it

and What Good Is It for Art Education." This article does more than simply answer the question "What is action research?" In addition to examining 'teachers-as-researchers' within a variety of contexts, such as professional, sociopolitical and historical to name a few, May examines six "common assumptions underlying action research or 'teacher-as-researcher'." They are:

1. Teachers Theorize.
2. Action Research is Not Always Aimed at Problem Solving.
3. You Don't Have to be an Art Teacher to Engage in Action Research.
4. The Methods Matter.
5. Action Research Can Be Collaborative.
6. Changes Toward Social Equity Are Possible and Desirable.

(May, 1993, pp. 116 - 120)

Some of these assumptions resonate with me more than others because they are more relevant to my research. For example, assumption #1: Teachers Theorize includes the revelation that, as well as developing personal theories-in-practice based on their everyday experience as teachers, action research of teaching professionals is "[...] also grounded in their histories or biographies [...]" (May, 1993, p. 116). This confirms my desire to include my artistic process in my inquiry into the use of journals with high school students. My creative journey is a strong base of research for the journal project that I did with the students. May goes on to write "teachers may be more apt to uncover significant connections between their students' learning and their own experiences as learners in biographical and social contexts" (May, 1993, p. 117). This clarifies my desire to work with journals in the classroom.

Beyond the school experience, I see journals as a personal resource -- a document of self-discovery -- and that they are a rich source for individual invention and creation. I ask the same question that May poses: "What other forms of discourse might provoke or clarify [my] questions, observations, theories-in-action, and conversations"? (May, 1993, p. 122). It is for this reason that I turned to the journals/sketchbooks of professional artists in my quest for literature relevant to my inquiry.

In addition to May's article, Wilfred Carr and Stephen Kemmis' book entitled Becoming Critical: Education, Knowledge and Action Research (1986) provides several working definitions of action research. They write, "action research is simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out" (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 162). The authors describe this research method by listing the components of the cycle of action research. They write that "[in] terms of method, a self-reflective spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting is central to the action research approach" (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 162). I oriented myself along these lines of inquiry when I examined the use of journals with high school students.

This research is based on my response to several issues that arose from my teaching experience during the pilot project. First, I am responding to the negative attitude toward journals shared by the subject teacher (Ms. Bradley) and the students. My response was in the form of a teaching project that helped alter these negative perceptions of keeping a journal. I also intended to expose the students to the idea of personal research of which their journal is a vital component. The journal project was planned in such a way as to underline the notion of a journal as a valuable resource for individual creation and invention. I

then acted on this plan (the second step in action research as described by Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 162) by teaching this project to two classes of grade nine students.

The third and fourth steps of my adoption of the 'teacher-as-researcher' methodology were observation and reflection. These steps will be discussed in the following chapter.

4. Description of the Project and its Findings

The beginnings

The high school in which I initiated my journal project is at the heart of, what local residents call, 'the village'. Located in the west-end of Montreal, the school forms a central triangle with city hall and the train station. The village has a charming, small town quality: one pharmacy, one bank, a hardware store, and a couple of small shops. Most of the students at the high school live in other parts of the city and commute by train or city bus. However, they are a familiar sight in the village: morning, noon and after school, five days a week, ten months of the year, clusters of students are scattered in and around the village's central triangle.

The school is an English language, public high school. However, unlike most public schools in Montreal, its student population is selected through an interview process. Ms. Bradley informed me that academic achievement is not the sole criteria for acceptance, partly because the school is labeled as 'alternative': the school's curriculum stresses the sciences and the arts (music and drama programs, particularly). The interviewers (made up of members of the teaching staff and school administration) look for qualities that will contribute to the overall life of the school. Ms. Bradley estimates the school receives five times the number of applicants as there are available places. The total population of the school is seven hundred pupils, divided equally between boys and girls.

Although this is a public high school, each student is required to wear a school uniform. It is this standardized dress that first struck me, as I introduced myself to Ms. Bradley's grade nine English classes. Row upon row of white tops and gray bottoms were seated behind the desks in front of me. Their backs were to the windows and the white sunlight of the season cast an aura behind their heads, dusting their hair and causing me to blink and crouch forward slightly so

as to be able to see their faces. My furrowed brow was met with their equally quizzical expressions. There was complete silence. I greeted them, introduced myself and tried to engage them in a discussion about journals. Both groups of students reacted the same way at the beginning of their respective classes: no one responded.

In the end, I was no more successful at stimulating discussion within the second group than I was with the first. In fact, a couple of days after this introductory lesson (Lesson 1 as outlined in this paper's introduction), Ms. Bradley revealed to me that she found her grade nines (both groups) to be "young, naïve, reluctant to speak, . . ." She felt that they had yet to exhibit "any spark." During my first meeting with the students I sensed this reluctance and timidity shared by the young teenagers in both classes. And so, I decided to try and break the ice by asking them to take out their journals. With the exception of a few, the desks were suddenly adorned by lined exercise books. When I asked the students to explain their choice in journal, I was met, again, with silence. Only a handful of students from both grade nine classes expressed having actively chosen their books. In my journal entry from that first day of the project I noted that Ricky said, "I chose [my journal] because of the bright colors and all the images of nature [on the cover]." Gabrielle smiled shyly and said, "I have always wanted one of these books", caressing the shiny blue cover of her pocketbook journal. However, most of her classmates were unable to muster up any enthusiasm over their choices -- some courageously admitted that they had not actually put much thought into their selection. They knew that the journal was for a school assignment and so they bought the same exercise book that they buy for all their school work. It must be noted that Ms. Bradley had asked the students to begin their journal work without consulting with me. As a result, I

introduced the notion of journals to both grade nine classes after they had already begun their entries.

Feeling the students' lack of enthusiasm and slight resentment toward these notebooks, I asked if they would take out their agendas and lie them alongside their journals on top of their desks. Without hesitating, each student pulled out the same spiral-bound school calendar, its cover adorned with the school crest. At first glance, it was as if the books were an extension of their school uniform: each white-sleeved arm placed a maroon, pocket calendar above their gray flannel knees. And yet, as I reached for individual agendas, and was eagerly granted permission to share them with the rest of the class, I saw that they were swollen, altered, transformed. In fact, these groups of students that were so disinterested in their journals were now, themselves, transformed. They came alive: With pride they showed their collages of superstars glued on the back covers of their agendas. They laughed when they flipped through page after page of homework, tattooed with stars, hearts, and racing cars. They slammed their agendas shut when they came to certain pages, exclaiming, "Oh, you can't see that!", only to open them up again to show us other pages.

Slowly, the classroom collective of white shirts and gray pants and skirts began to break up into distinguishable people. I began to learn who they are: their likes, their dislikes, who had a crush on whom . . . The silence and trepidation that had initially blanketed the room had now been kicked off and many of the students were talking more freely. Riding this spirit of enthusiasm, I gently guided the students back to their, by now, abandoned journals. I suggested that they use their agendas as models for what their journals could become. I encouraged them to personalize their books in the way they had done with their agendas. I proposed if they were unhappy with the journal that they had chosen they should consider modifying it or replacing it so that it could

become a beloved book -- a best friend. Again, I used their agendas to demonstrate what they could contribute to their journals: collages, drawings, paintings, doodles, love notes, photographs, hockey cards, found objects . . . anything that is an extension of their thoughts, feelings, ideas, experiences.

I then informed them of the requirements for their month-long journal activity. First, they must participate daily with their journal (the student may choose the way in which they participate in their journal keeping each day: writing, reading previous entries, drawing etc.). Second, each entry must be dated. I also encouraged the students to record the time that their entry was done. Apart from these two requirements the students were given the license to keep their journal in any way that they chose. It is, in part, this freedom to create their own personal journal experience that got these grade nine students to reconsider the lined exercise books that lay pristinely next to their bulging school agendas.

Making journals relevant to teenagers

I asked Ms. Bradley why the students are so unenthusiastic toward the idea of keeping a journal. There are many contributing factors and, Ms. Bradley was able to offer insight into the students' school experience with journals. She candidly described her own biases toward journals. She admitted that she thinks "journal writing's a drag" and is inclined to consider it a "waste of time" and "useless". As an English language arts specialist she sees the demands of teaching her grade nine students how to analyze poetry, novels, plays and short stories as being her primary focus. She is also concerned with teaching them how to write. These objectives coupled with the time constraints of the school year leave little time for Ms. Bradley to consider journal work a priority. She also mentioned that she "never did journals with the kids for the simple reason that they didn't really like doing [them]": "they're supposed to write and kids like the

liberty to do anything they want with [the journals]," Ms. Bradley explained. I decided to ask the students if this was how they felt and to describe their previous experiences with journals.

For the most part, the students revealed that they had kept journals only as a school assignment; for either English or French class. Only a few girls admitted to having diaries at home. They went on to describe a specific journal experience that they had shared in another class. Every day the students were asked to write in an exercise book with lined paper. Each entry was to be the same length -- no more, no less than half a page -- and written in a specified colour of ink. The date was to appear in the same spot above each entry. These journals were collected periodically by the teacher and returned to the students with corrected grammar and spelling mistakes. The students objected strongly to this exercise. Their complaints echoed Ms. Bradley's conclusions about the students' experience with journals: "[The students] seem to think of writing as boring. [. . .]. Journals are done whether they [the students] want to or not. Half the time they're not in the mood." She adds, "Kids don't like to have their stuff read." Ms. Bradley concludes, "[They don't like journals] because they're not going anywhere with it. All they're doing is keeping journals. That's all. The teacher reads it and that's it. Period. Nothing happens with it." Hearing both Ms. Bradley's and the students' previous journal experiences I was able to understand why my proposal to work on a journal project together had been met with stony silence. In truth, I was unaware of how deeply ingrained the preconceptions shared by Ms. Bradley and her students were when I initiated the journal project with them.

To help break down any inhibitions the students may have had, I focused on a couple of areas. As mentioned previously, I encouraged the students to contribute to their journals in any way that they chose. By doing this, students

who dislike writing were still encouraged to participate with their journals. I also stipulated that I would not be reading the content of their journals. Ms. Bradley, however, reserved the right to read their entries. She, initially, intended to use the students' entries as part of her evaluation: in her words, "to check the way in which they'd done [them]." Ms. Bradley had read the pilot project group's journals and foresaw reading those from these groups, as well. Interestingly, as this project progressed Ms. Bradley read through only a selected few of the journals -- ones that she randomly picked up and glanced through. She told me that, having done this once or twice, students approached her and asked why she needed to check their journals if I was already doing it. Like her students, Ms. Bradley knew that I was monitoring their involvement with their journals. She came to the conclusion that it was unnecessary to read the contents of the journals in order to grade her students' journal activity. Ms. Bradley realized that the production outcome of the students' journal entries provided ample work to evaluate. However, although I was not grading the students' work, it was important for me to see that the students were finding a personal direction in their journals and, as a result, were able to implicate themselves in the project. Therefore, I collected their books and leafed through them to ensure that the students were actively involved with their journal. I determined this simply by looking at whether or not there were regular entries. No written comments were made anywhere in their journal. In Ms. Bradley's mark book, I simply made a check mark next to the names of those students who were working with their journals regularly.

Uncensored involvement with their journal allowed students to explore freely. They were motivated to do this exploration on a regular basis because I had informed them from the beginning that their journal entries were going to be the basis for their final project -- the journals were their research. This

knowledge that their journal work was leading somewhere gave the students a purpose to the activity of keeping a journal. These grade nine students are very concerned with their marks and asked repeatedly about whether or not the journal-related work that we were doing together was going to be graded. It became apparent to me that evaluation of their work was a strong motivating factor for them. I informed both groups of students that they would be given a grade by Ms. Bradley at the end of the project. It would include journal participation and class-related activities, as well as an oral presentation of the final art project and the written description from each student of how their final art product relates to the contents of their journal.

I believe the fact that the entire journal project was contributing to their term mark gave the project credibility in the students' eyes, however, the grade did not make the project more relevant to them. The students became attached to their journals because they knew they could do so on their own terms, free of correction and criticism. At the end of the journal project, Billy wrote,

[a] journal is like writing to a friend. [. . .]. I wrote in it every day. I enjoyed writing in the journal. It wasn't like an assignment, we didn't have any limits. I made collages, glued pictures on [my journal] and wrote. When I couldn't write, I glued pictures [. . .].

Katie echoed Billy's comments in the following description of her feelings toward her journal:

I love to write and that's why I enjoyed [. . .] my journal. In school, every single written assignment we are asked to do has a deadline and specific rules and qualifications that we have to follow. My journal is very different from that, I don't have to write anything specific, it doesn't have to be any certain length, I can use whatever color and format I want . . . absolute freedom.

In the end, these students transformed their exercise books into volumes of their spirit. Jenny remarked, "[a]t the beginning [my journal] just looked like a note book from the dollar store, but now my journal almost resembles me, it practically is me [. . .]." In addition, the familiar student lament: "What do I need a journal for?" was addressed and the students became actively involved in their journal work because they knew that they were forming the foundation for another project -- their entries were going to lead them to something else. These grade nine students began to see their journals as useful. I believe, considering all of the above-mentioned factors, the activity of keeping a journal became personally relevant to each of them.

From journals to creative production

With the exception of one or two, all the students in both grade nine classes began to personalize their journals as our month together progressed. Early in the project, I had brought in several examples of artists' journals -- including my own -- to show them the wide spectrum of possibilities. They appeared relieved to see that doodles and poetry like those found in Frida Kahlo's diary were allowed. They were enchanted to learn that their agendas could be models for their journal work. And they were surprised to see how many different kinds of journals I have kept in my life and that I still had them! This exposure to these examples made the students feel less constrained and allowed them to experiment within their journal experience. Anna added a clasp to her journal. Mimi bound hers in elastic bands (Figure 1). Kathy and Stella collaged the covers of their journals with favourite film and television stars, etc. Stella also did a ball-point pen drawing on the back cover of her journal which was originally a simple, spiral-bound work book (Figure 2). Inside the students' journals, words, photographs, drawings, collected mementos flow across page after page (Figure 3). Questions are asked, solutions are found. Emotions leap off the paper, while

the events of each day are recorded (Figure 4). For me, opening these books was like opening the students' hearts. Even though, I kept my promise and did not read their entries, I felt the energy that each journal emitted. Each student's book was alive with their individual spirit. These adolescents explored their personal worlds on the pages of their journals.

The next step was for them to review this self-exploration: read their journals and become conscious of what preoccupies them, what their obsessions are, what themes reoccur in their entries. This personal research completed, the students then needed to investigate in what ways they could synthesize and communicate their personal message.

A week later, we were back to day one. The same dead silence greeted my proposal to do an art project off their journal work. Again, I used examples to help guide the students past the ever-burning question: "What am I going to do?" I showed both grade nine classes the art work that I have done using a process of investigation through my journals. I demonstrated how each piece was an extension from themes that I had uncovered in my journal work. The examples of my work ranged from printmaking to assemblage and demonstrated how my choice of medium was often dictated by the project. I encouraged the students to explore a variety of media, telling them they were free to use any artistic medium (music, drama, painting, sculpture, poetry, prose . . .) to express themselves. "Anything goes", I told them, "as long as you choose the most effective way to express what you want to say."

As indicated earlier in my discussion of this project's procedures, 'Week 2' was allocated for the completion of the students' creative production at home. The projects were not worked on in school because we were working together during their English periods. During class time I focused on lessons and experiences that were more closely related to the language arts' activities (oral

and written production, for example). Although, a couple of students chose to express themselves through the language arts, specifically poetry, the majority of projects were based in the visual arts. In addition, both grade nine classes used a wide variety of media, such as found objects, collage materials, paint, pencil crayons, Play Doh, pipe cleaners and video tape. I believe that working at home, free from the constraints of classroom supplies and constant comparison with their classmates' projects, allowed some of the students to experiment with different modes of expression. Many of the students kept the nature of their project a secret, saying, "It's a surprise!"

The first day of the students' presentations arrived and the classroom was electric. There was a palpable excitement in the air. A stark contrast to the strained atmosphere that had silenced the class when we first began the project two weeks ago. Now, in 'Week 3', the grade nine students were eager to share what they had discovered and, most of all, what they had created from these discoveries made in their journals. In fact, out of fifty students, only two came to class unprepared. It was important to me not to dampen their enthusiasm and to reward their active participation in the project. After getting the projects organized and explaining the process of the critique and their responsibilities during this process (see Lesson 7 outlined in this paper's introduction), we began the presentations.

I asked one of the students to pull a name out of the envelope -- Dell was the first to present. He stood shyly before his classmates. On the desk beside him he had placed a small, ten inches high, featureless figure made of plaster bandages. The figure appeared to be staggering under the weight of a set of barbells, which were firmly grasped at either end by the figure's hands and were held barely above his head. "The Achiever", as Dell called the figure, is balanced by two nails planted on both sides of one of his legs. The platform on which this

figure supports himself is painted blue-green. The base is labeled with the artist's name and that of the figure. "The Achiever" is entirely white as are the weights at either end of the piece of stiff wire held above his head (Figure 9).

During the critique of Dell's work, the students had a difficult time describing what they saw, as required in the first step of the process (outlined in Lesson 7 of this paper's introduction). They had no qualms however, about leaping into an interpretation of Dell's piece -- the second step in the critique. To guide the students back to the description of the work I asked them what they saw -- what physical clues were there in the piece that led them to decide what it meant. The students struggled with this process until it was time for Dell to explain his sculpture. As the project required, he described the link between his journal work and his final product during the third step of the critique. Dell read his explanation to the class. He began,

I came up with this sculpture by noticing something in my journal, I always seemed to write about sports, school and everyday events [. . .]. This sculpture represents the things that happen to me along the way of my adventure to reach my goal in sports, education, and everyday events. Sometimes there will be obstacles that I will have to face and beat, but some of them are really challenging. And that is why I have chosen to use this sculpture that I made to represent what I write in my journal. It is a man trying to lift up weights, he is having difficulties, but gradually he is slowly lifting it up.

Laurie, a classmate of Dell's, chose to transform the self-exploration done in her journal into a small, round, black box filled with rocks. Under these rocks she placed a golden angel -- a representation of herself (Figure 10). Although Laurie's ultimate message is similar to Dell's; being weighed down by obstacles yet finding the strength to overcome them, Laurie's physical representation of

this theme is very particular to her personal imagery. She explained in her written description of her work:

As I was reading through my journal, I found that I was always writing down my problems [. . .]. The objects I chose to represent my problems were rocks. I chose them because rocks are usually heavy and I feel buried under all my uncertainties. [. . .]. In my project, I'm represented by a little golden angel pendant, which is much smaller than the rocks and is buried under them as well. Rocks are also a good representation of problems because I know they will eventually go away, just like rocks erode and become sand again.

The above-mentioned objects are all in a small black box that has a lid. They're in there because I feel trapped with my problems and under lots of pressure.

Many students chose to represent what they uncovered in their journal entries through the use of containers: boxes, bottles, jars (Figure 11). The interior or exterior, or, in some projects, both, of these vessels were treated often with collage or assembled objects, as seen in Anna's work (Figure 12). Jane reflects on her choice of container:

I noticed that I had written [in my journal] about many different emotions that I had been feeling. I also noticed that I hadn't talked to anyone about them and that I was keeping them bottled up inside of me. That's why I chose to put the different emotions in a jar.

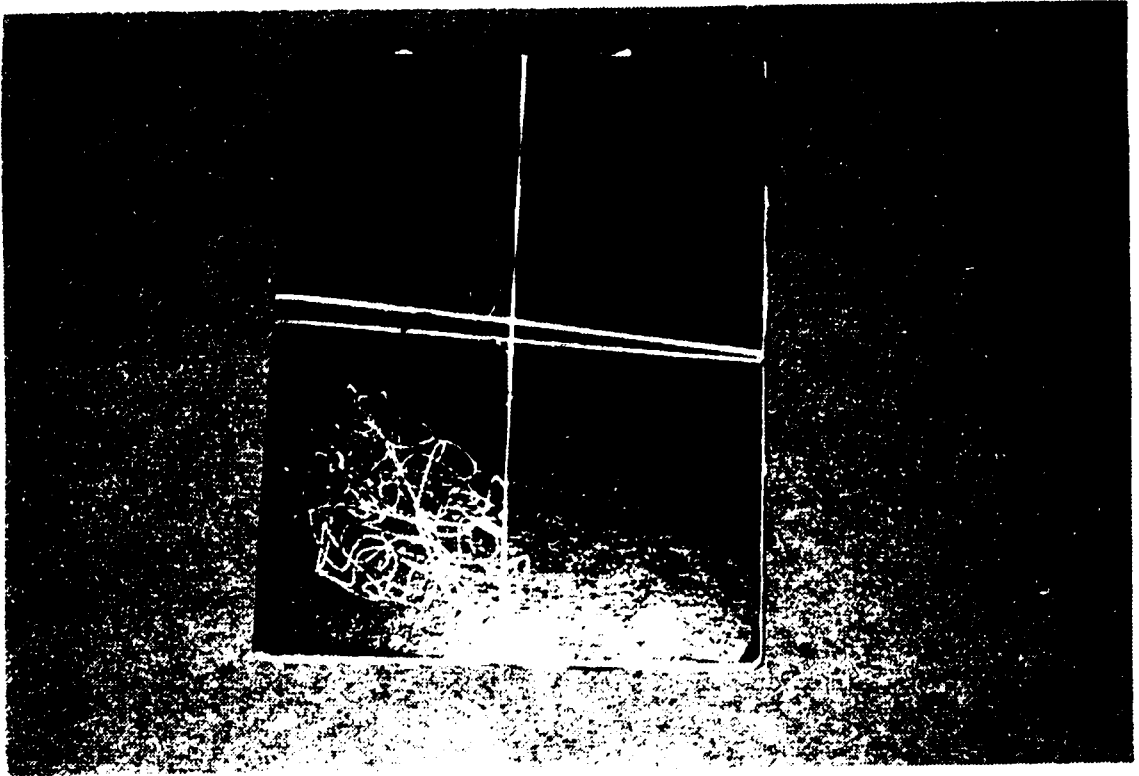
Another intriguing example of a container project is Dave's C.D. case. Using collage and pen and ink he created a cover and inside booklet for a compact disc case (Figure 13). The case is without a compact disc (Figure 14). Dave's project is to be looked at – his visual imagery is to be read. By contrast, Neil's project is to be heard. In fact, Neil read a poem to the class that he wrote in

celebration of sound. He described how he discovered, through reading his journal entries, that what he hears is very important to him. Neil's representation of sound had several components, one of which was his poetry reading. The following is an excerpt from what the class and I heard:

The wonders of sound
Can you describe it to me?
In so many ways
Fountains of glee.
[. . .]

The truth is you can't
You find it from within
The wonders of sound
Ssshh. Just listen . . .

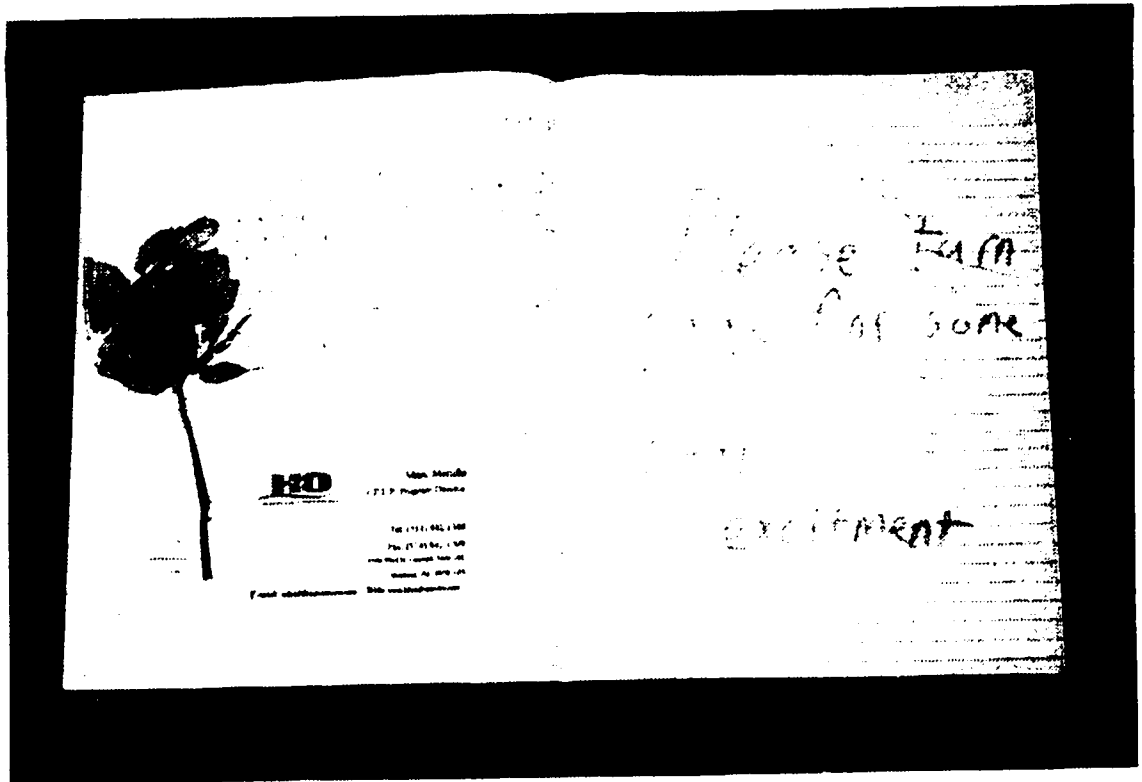
For a few moments after he read, a warm silence cradled Neil's poem and then his classmates erupted into spontaneous applause. Neil beamed at the successful communication of his message. He experienced the exhilaration that any creator or inventor feels when they connect with their audience. Neil, like many of the grade nine students, had discovered a previously undetected pre-occupation of his by examining his regular journal entries and focusing on their content. He then created a work of art from this exploration in his journal and was able to articulate the connection between the personal research in his journal and his final product.



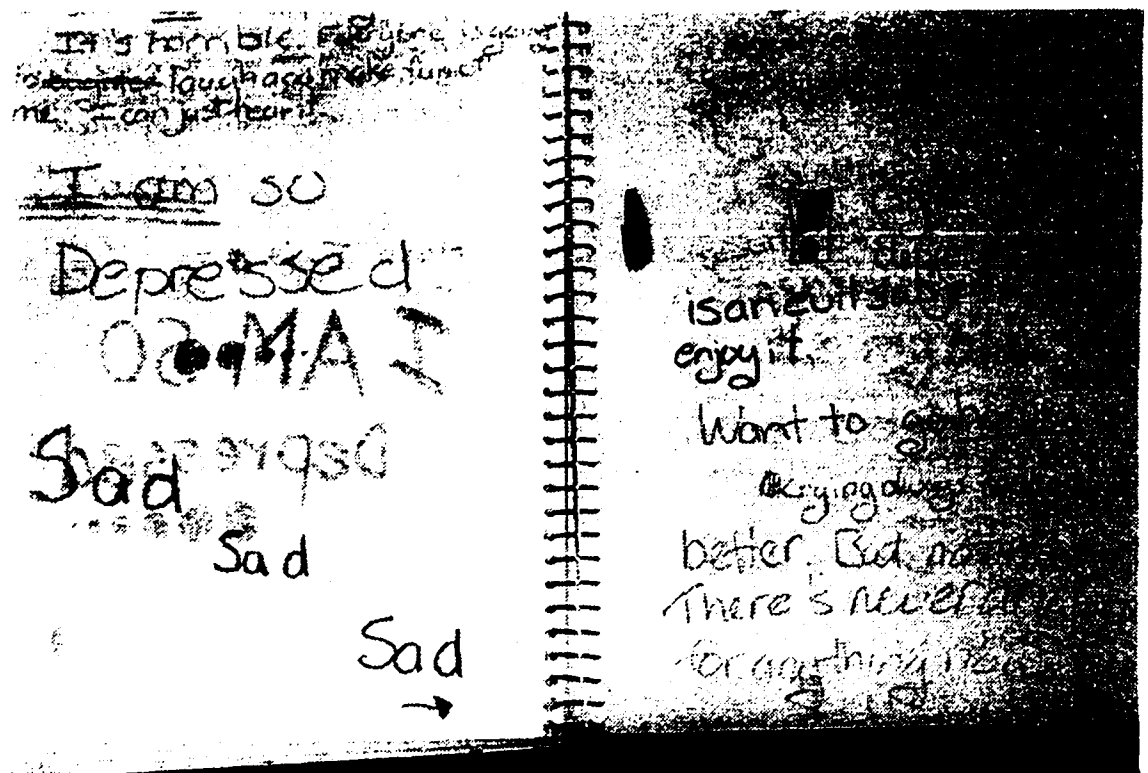
Mimi's journal (Figure 1)



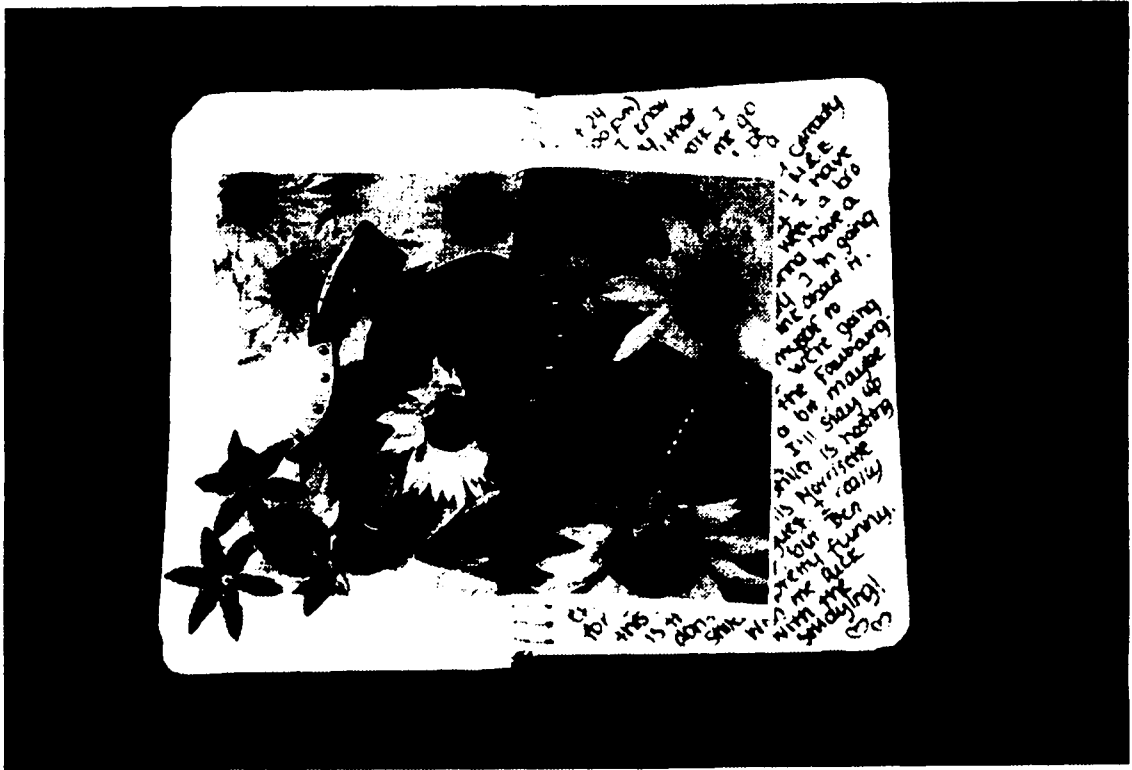
Stella's journal (Figure 2)



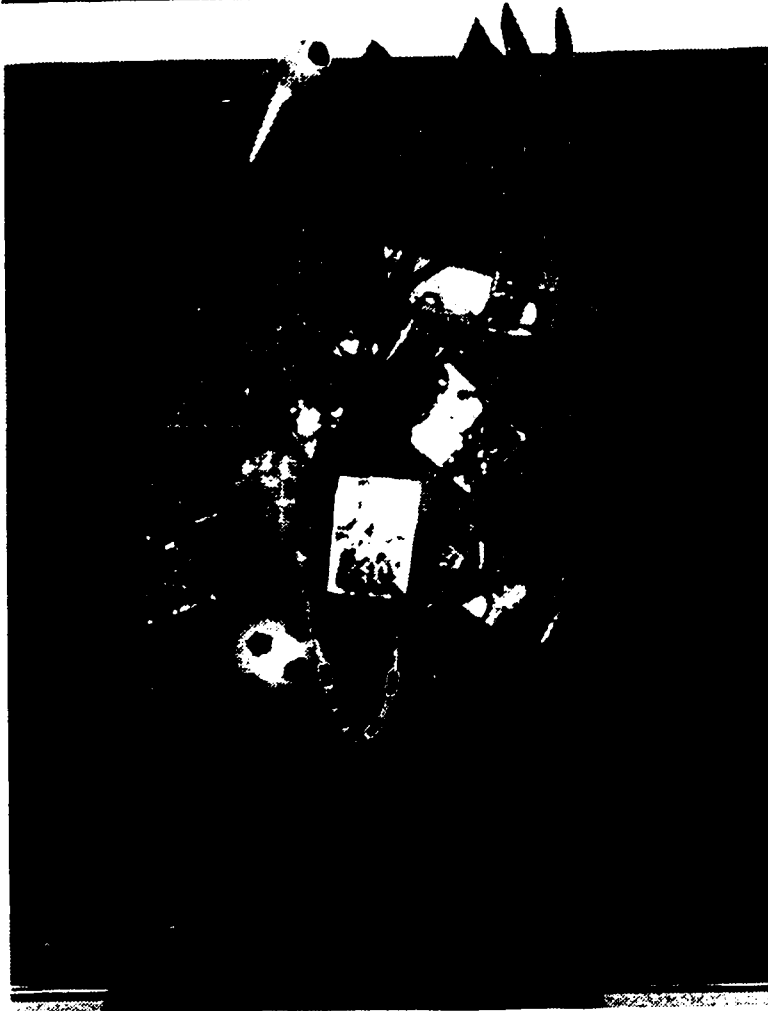
Charles' journal (Figure 3)



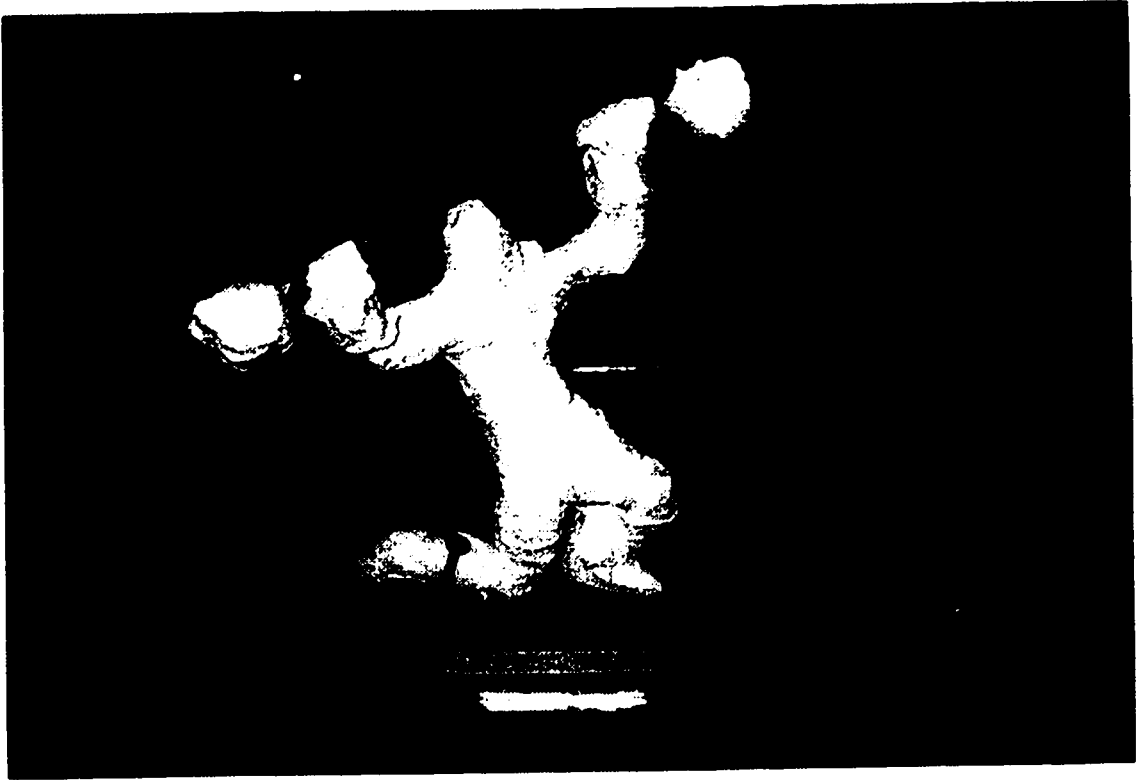
Laurie's journal (Figure 4)



Asako's work: from journal to production (Figures 5 and 6)



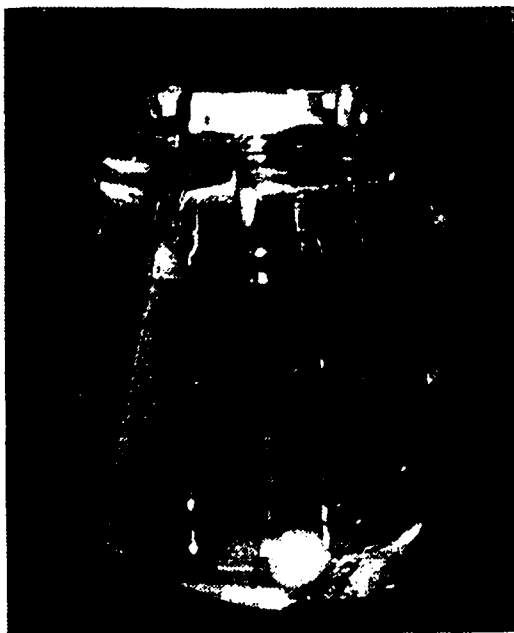
Cassandra's work: from journal to production (Figures 7 and 8)



Dell's project (Figure 9)



Laurie's project (Figure 10)



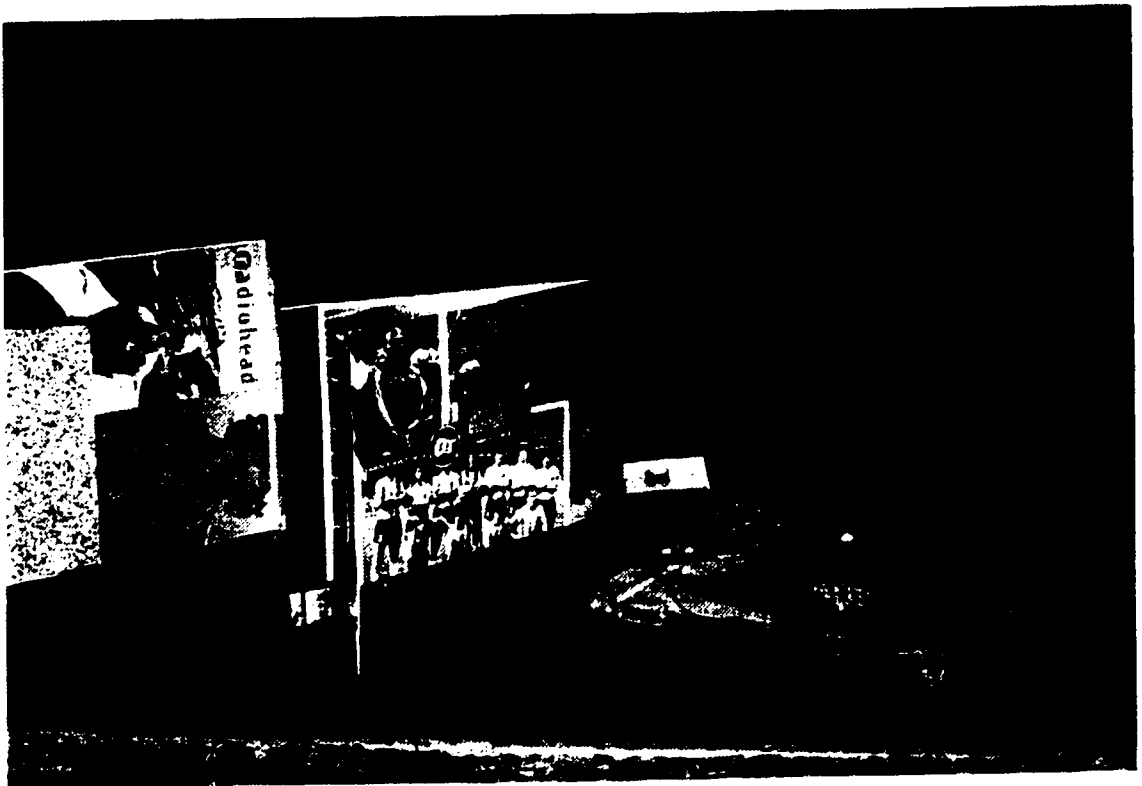
Kallie's project (Figure 11)



Anna's project (Figure 12)



Dave's project (Figure 13)



Interior of Dave's project (Figure 14)

Some unexpected, added benefits

Like most teachers and researchers, I created and taught my journal project with the conviction that, once I analyzed the experience, I would find what I was looking for. And, as discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, my findings from my work with the grade nines did respond to the questions that I asked at the end of my introduction. However, there were also two notable, positive aspects to the journal project that I had not foreseen in my planning stages.

First, the activity of critiquing during the final phase of the project, proved to be a valuable teaching aid for Ms. Bradley. She had initially identified this benefit during the pilot project, and then reiterated it, this year, during our work with the two groups of grade nines. In conversation together, Ms. Bradley revealed to me that she feels "the critique was very important for [her students]." She believes that their capacity to analyze texts -- novels, short stories, poetry, etc. -- has improved as a result of repeating the critique process, outlined in the introduction of this paper, over and over. Of particular benefit were the first two steps in the process: describe and interpret. Ms. Bradley explains that the students "learned how to look at something that is symbolic of something else [. . .]." She goes on to describe that,

in grade nine, [the students] have to learn concrete subject and abstract subject. And that's something they can't do. And this project really teaches that: they say 'what do I see?' on a concrete level and [then] 'what do I think it means?' And that's very tough for kids that age. They really can't do that. But [during the journal project critiques] they were doing it every day. [. . .]. They've had a daily experience of: here, I see this thing and now, what could be the meaning of this [. . .].

Ms. Bradley says that she finds the students from my pilot project, some of whom are now in her grade ten classes, have a much easier time analyzing texts. She simply reminds them of the critique exercise that we did together and asks: "What do you see? Now, what do you think it means?" Ms. Bradley repeated her appreciation of this aspect of my journal project often. This led me to conclude that the relationship, identified by Ms. Bradley, between the critiques and analysis of literature made the journal project relevant to her. She, like her students, needed a reason behind working with journals in the classroom. The criticism component of this journal project responds to her need to prioritize the study of literature and teaching her students to write above creativity, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Although Ms. Bradley's perceived benefit of the critiques does not respond to my focus on creative production, it does refer to a vital component of the creative process: criticism. Ms. Bradley saw that the process of the critique helped her students in their analysis, their critical thinking and, by extension, their critical writing. Ms. Bradley has indicated to me that she intends to repeat this journal project with her future grade nine students.

The second, unexpected benefit of this journal project is for the students and their teacher. While in conversation with Ms. Bradley, I learned that a major obstacle to students' enjoyment of journal work is that they know that their teacher is going to see their entries and, in some cases, correct them. Quite practically, the teacher cannot spend a significant amount of class time working on a project, such as journals, without having a grade for the students' report cards. This conflict has, perhaps, contributed to the bad feelings toward classroom journal work. Regardless, I discovered that my journal project addresses both the students' and the teacher's concerns: The students create work that must be based on recurring themes from their diary entries. They are also

asked to produce a written analysis of the connection between what surfaced in their journal exploration and their final product. The students are then asked to present this research and work orally to the class. In doing so, the students are, in a way that is less revealing and threatening, having the contents of their journal read. In addition, the teacher has enough work to evaluate, written and oral production for example, without having to invade the privacy of the students' journals. In this way, the journal can retain its value to the student as an uncensored vehicle for self-exploration and personal discovery.

Post-project: What journals now mean to the students

One of the questions that I wanted to explore in this research was whether or not their journals became tools of self-discovery for the teenagers. By 'self-discovery', I mean "the process of acquiring insight into oneself, one's character, desires, etc." (Canadian Oxford Dictionary, 1998). I realized that the students' journals had become instruments in this process, when I asked them to define their journals. The last day we worked together, the students each wrote out their personal definitions of a journal. Many of them metaphorically referred to their books as treasure boxes or best friends – a place where precious secrets could be kept and with whom private dreams could be shared. Some expressed that their journal helped them become aware of what was inside of them. For example, Chris defined his journal as "a place to explore your inner feelings, creativity and ideas." Laurie described a place where she decides the boundaries, "a world where you say what is and what isn't. This is a journal." Some of the grade nine girls described being able to solve problems by writing their complaints in their journals. Reading what they had written allowed them to sort through what is important to them and what is not. Some students defined their journal as being an extension of themselves. Ricky wrote, "a journal is a part of who writes in it.

[. . .]. It is a part of one's soul, family, religion, job or anything else the holder loves and does." Another student summed her journal up this way: "It's a personal book that reflects everything and anything that is inside." Julia writes, "When I write in my journal I drift to a far away place where my imagination is the creator. Only I hold the key to my journal, my box, my life." For me, the students' descriptions of what keeping a journal has come to mean for them, their explanations of how their art projects connected to the self-exploration done in their journals and the projects themselves are all evidence that their journals became tools of self-discovery for these grade nine students.

5. Conclusion

On our last day together, once the students had written down their personal definitions of journals, I read them some that I had found. Among this variety of explanations offered by dictionaries, artists, authors, myself . . . was a description of the nature of a sketchbook by Françoise Gilot, Pablo Picasso's former companion. I believe it also synthesizes the essence of a personal journal. Gilot writes, [a] sketchbook is a companion, a mirror of dreams, utterly sincere since it is utterly private and personal (Glimcher, 1986, p. 212).

I discovered, in conversation with Ms. Bradley and by reading the teenagers' meanings of journals, that the students appreciated the fact that their journal contents remained "utterly private and personal" during our project together. In fact, the majority of the students comments included some reference to the issue of privacy and how it allowed them to participate with their journal without fear of criticism. As a result, many students wrote that they could connect with their journal work freely and "utterly sincere[ly]." Stella emphatically underlined the notion of privacy in her definition of a journal. She wrote,

a journal is somewhere where [sic] only you can let off your joy, happiness, angriness [sic] and steam and no one else can see. It's very private. [. . .]. Because it's very private, you can write whatever you like, even swear cause [sic] this is your thought. Even if someone else reads it you should not feel guilty for any good or bad thing you have written. PRIVACY!

Apart from the overwhelming confirmation from the students, Ms. Bradley also concluded that the students' enjoyment of journal activity, and her own, was enhanced by the fact that she did not read their journals. For her part, Ms. Bradley expressed feeling uncomfortable reading her students' journals. She

always felt unsure how to respond: she did not want to correct the structure of their entries, nor did Ms. Bradley want to comment on the journals' content. The elimination of the need for Ms. Bradley to read the students' journals contributed to changing all of their negative attitudes toward journal keeping.

Ensuring the students' participation with their journals was "utterly private" also resulted in the experience being "utterly personal." As seen in the previous chapter, each student was able to explore interests, themes and images unique to them. Ms. Bradley explains the benefit of this self-exploration for the students:

[. . .] they're writing about feelings and they're writing about things that they see and there's no judgment made on that and they get into the habit of doing that [daily in their journals]. [. . .]. [The students] said that the act of writing made them feel more connected to their journal and more connected to themselves.

In addition, to their journal activity (writing or otherwise) being private, the process of making their final project was done in the privacy of their homes. As discussed in the previous chapter, this was, I believe, a contributing factor to the uniqueness of each project.

It is the emergence of each student's individuality during the process of this journal activity that incited me to re-examine my pilot project. The project allowed me to investigate ways in which to engage teenagers in a creative process – one that I was exploring in my own artistic practice. This journal project required the students to look within and to explore their inner worlds, free of judgment and constraint. This self-exploration led them to discover the seeds of potential creation and invention that lie within each of them. The students allowed some of these seeds to flower into individual works of art which they proudly shared with one another. In the end, perhaps, the students not only celebrated their own fertile soil but, also, recognized that together, they

have not only celebrated their own fertile soil but, also, recognized that together, they have the potential to produce a bountiful crop.

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Appendix 1

Sample lesson plan: "Lesson 4"

Please note that this lesson has been chosen as an example due to the pivotal role it played in introducing the students to the connection between their written and visual language. This lesson also offered the students additional ways in which to participate with their journals: collage, drawing and reviewing past entries, as well as writing.

Duration: 50 minutes

Objectives:

1. Introduce students to the relationship between written language and visual language.
2. Introduce students to a way in which to discover the personal themes, pre-occupations, interests . . . emergent from their journal entries.
3. Introduce students to a process of thinking about their personal imagery.
4. Initiate a process of self-discovery within each student.

Procedure:

N.B. Instructions for the entire workshop are given at the beginning of the lesson so as not to interrupt the flow of the students' work.

Inform the students that the activity is done in complete silence. Establish a signal for change in activity so as to respect the "no talking" rule -- play tape of music.

1. Instruct students to clear their desktops of all materials EXCEPT:
 - their journal
 - 1 piece of paper (students write their name and the date on this paper)
 - 1 pen or pencil
 - glue
 - scissors

Appendix 1 (cont'd)

2. a) Students are given five minutes to read their own journal in silence. They must look through their journal the entire time: they read, re-read, contemplate . . .

b) Students jot down notes on the separate piece of paper. These notes consist of recurring words, images, themes . . . from their journal entries -- anything that jumps off the pages at them.
3. Signal sounds at end of five minutes (music played to indicate shift in activity).
4. Sheets of notes are collected.
Students begin to collage in their journals immediately.
Music continues to play softly while they work.
Duration: 30 minutes.

N.B. Students choose papers, images, etc. from their collage materials that speak to them -- much in the same way that themes were noted from their journals. They allow themselves to work instinctively with as little planning and conscious thought as possible.

More than one collage can be created: when one feels complete, they move on to another.

They work in complete silence. The students must be inside themselves -- they are searching for their inner voice.

5. Clean up: Five minutes before the end of class, stop the music and instruct students to collect their materials. This time allows students to contemplate their images and/or share their work with one another, if desired.